Australians at War Film Archive

Stanley Powell - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:39 **Okay, so we'll start off with the overview that we talked about, so can I get you to take me through where you were born, where you grew up and where joined up for the army?**

Well, I was born in Morpeth, New South Wales on the 14th of December 1917, and

01:00 we lived in Morpeth until I was four and a half. I started at school at the Morpeth School and then the family moved to Tenambit. It was a one teacher school at Tenambit. I went to school there for a few months and then we moved to Largs. I went to school there

01:30 for a few months and when I was eight year old we moved onto a share dairy farm at Vacy in New South Wales. My father had been working for the Hunter River Steam Ship Company, among other things, in Morpeth and

02:00 while we were at Vacy, and at Larges we went onto a small farm, lucerne growing; and Vacy was a mixed dairy farm and we grew crops for the cattle to eat. When I was eleven years old

02:30 we moved from there to another share dairy at Fosterton, outside Dungog. It was dry farming there, there was no irrigation as there had been at Vacy. We stayed there until in 1933, the

03:00 Depression, the owner of the farm said the daughter was getting married and he wanted her and her husband to take over the farm on a share basis, and jobs were hard to get, and there was a man that went by the name of Hook who owned the property. He had just bought a second property at Gayndah,

03:30 just below Tiaro in Queensland, and her father knew his parents, who had the property down at Dungog, and he went down there and had an interview and decided that we would come to Queensland and take on a property on a share basis,

04:00 on the agreement that if after six months, if either side was dissatisfied, either one could give notice. We were there for the six months, my father gave him notice. He was a hard man to get on with, and he purchased a small property at Cooroy where the dam now is.

04:30 It was called Six Mile Creek, they now call that dam Lake McDonald.

Just take me through briefly when you decided to join the CMF [Citizens' Military Force] and went overseas with the AIF [Australian Imperial Force]?

Early in 1939, Blind Freddie ['anyone'] could see that there was a war

05:00 inevitable, the way things were progressing in Europe, and the CMF decided to expand and they formed a platoon of the 49th Battalion at Cooroy and I immediately joined it in January 1939. We

05:30 just had the normal training and a couple of camps where I got the training. I took to the army like a duck to water you might say because I'd been used to discipline, I'd been used to hard conditions or you might say 'tough living'.

06:00 And in September we could see that war was inevitable and the platoon in Cooroy, we manned the telephones day and night for about a fortnight, in August, and

06:30 we were mobilised and we were standing on the wharf in Brisbane waiting to be taken over to Moreton Island, to Cowan Cowan, on full time duty when we heard Menzies [Prime Minister of Australia] declare Australia was at war. We were one of the first mobilised troops in Queensland. After a period at Cowan Cowan

07:00 there was talk of them forming an AIF unit and I put my name down to join it because I believed then, and I believe still, that if anybody thinks anything of their country, that it should be the single men with no ties that go first.

07:30 I went into camp with the CMF at Enoggera. We went into a full time camp there and I put my name down again for enlistment in the AIF, the 2nd AIF as it was being called then.

08:00 My home address, although it was Cooroy, my enlistment papers show my home address as Enoggera Army Camp at that time. I entered the Redbank Camp in November 1939

08:30 on the understanding that I would go to the then being formed 2/9th Infantry Battalion, the first infantry battalion formed in Queensland, because they were short of NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] and I was a corporal. At Redbank they decided that they would keep me there as an instructor. Therefore I didn't immediately join the 2/9th Battalion. I was

09:00 there until in April, March or April, I'm not quite sure at the moment when it was, that the 2/9th Battalion, which had previously moved to New South Wales at Rutherford Camp and then to Ingleburn Camp, were preparing to sail for overseas and there

09:30 was a consignment of men whom they called the first reinforcements in Redbank, were being sent down to join the 2/9th Battalion prior to their sailing, and I paraded before the camp commandant and requested permission to be transferred to go with the first reinforcements to join the 2/9th Battalion before they sailed.

10:00 It was granted, even though they told me that I was ear-marked for a commission if I stayed there. I said I wanted to prove myself in action before I led men, and I went down and joined the 2/9th Battalion at Ingleburn just prior to them sailing on the 5th of May 1940.

10:30 I stayed with the 2/9th Battalion through. We were destined for the Middle East, but in the meantime the battle in Europe went against the Allied troops, or mainly the British troops then and the 18th Brigade, of which the 2/9th was part, was diverted via South Africa

11:00 to England. We landed in Greenock in Scotland, just too late to go to Dunkirk. We transferred down to Lobcombe Corner at Salisbury, where we were reputed to be the best equipped troops in England, and we stood by while the British Army reformed and

11:30 we used to lie down in battle order, in battle dress, at night waiting to receive orders to be transported to anywhere that the Germans attempted an invasion. That was our understanding there. We trained there at Lobcombe Corner and

12:00 in the training, during the main air battle for Britain we saw a lot of damage. Those that of us that went on leave or even during manoeuvres we could see the 'dogfights' taking place in the air over us, and in the main Battle for Britain and the bombing, we were there, and when it subsided and they could see that they couldn't take England by air or bombing,

12:30 they transferred us down to the barracks at Colchester, in the south of England. We were only there a few weeks, we then trained and we went back up to Greenock in Scotland and were transported back via South Africa and up through the Suez [Canal] into the Middle East to join the rest of the

13:00 divisions there. We were trained in Egypt. We were camped at Ikingi Mariut and from there the battalion was just too late for the first push up the desert, and although we were originally formed as

13:30 the 6th Division, part of the 6th Division, we were an independent brigade while we were in England. We were an independent brigade then because they had to put the 19th Brigade in with the 6th Division. The battalion took part in the last battle to take Jaghbub [Al Jaghbub], down in the desert. From there the battalion went into

14:00 Tobruk as an independent brigade and they fought there until being relieved by the Polish regiments, and then they came back and went up to Syria for a few months.

14:30 Then they were shipped home. We didn't know where we were going to go, but for all intents and purposes we were bound for Java, but the Japs [Japanese] got there first. So we were transported home. The battalion then trained. We landed first in Gawler, South Australia and then in Tenterfield, New South Wales and then at Kilcoy in Queensland,

15:00 and then, in August 1942 we were suddenly moved to Milne Bay. We got there about a fortnight before the Japanese invaded. Even though there were CMF units there, it was the 18th Brigade that bore the brunt of the fighting when the Japanese had been stopped

15:30 in their invasion attempt. The militia met them first where they landed, the CMF, but the 18th Brigade, we had to go in and drive them back when they were withdrawing, and they were in defensive positions and we had to find them and drive them out, so we suffered the heaviest casualties. From there the battalion,

16:00 I myself was wounded again there. I'd previously been wounded in Tobruk, but I was wounded there in the last little action. The battalion went on and suffered terrific casualties at Buna, Sanananda and in fact they were almost wiped out there. They suffered the heaviest casualties of any unit, and they came

home.

16:30 I didn't rejoin them until after they were back here in Australia, and then I joined them up on the [Atherton] Tablelands and I was with them again when they sailed to New Guinea the second time and they went into action over the Finisterres. I was left behind and left out of battle at Port Moresby. I understood

17:00 that I was to come home to get a commission because there were no more commissions in the field. They told me each time they wanted to give me a commission I got wounded or something happened, that was their excuse. I came back to Australia. I thought I was going to the officers' training school. Instead of that, after having a short leave, I reported into Brisbane and found that

17:30 I had been shanghaied to Canungra as an instructor in jungle warfare. I was there for six months before they could relieve me. I went back to the battalion, rejoined the battalion which had returned to Australia again for a short period and I sailed with them for Morotai and from there we did

18:00 the invasion of Borneo through Balikpapan. I was with the battalion there until the peace was declared. I applied to go to Japan in the army of occupation [BCOF – British Commonwealth Occupation Force]. There was so much red tape and um-ing and er-ing that went on,

18:30 that I got sick of it and I asked to be discharged. Came back to Australian and discharged from the army at the end of November 1945.

Tell me a little bit about what you did in your life after the army?

Well for a while, like many others, I was unsettled. I had intended to come back

19:00 and take over the farm, the small dairy farm, cane farm, at Cooroy where the dam is now, or Lake McDonald as they call it, but I couldn't agree with my father, his ideas, the old ideas of farming. It's only horses and plough that we had, and I moved around a little bit. I went for a holiday. My sister then was living in

19:30 Victoria and I went down there for a while. I came back and I had been studying a little bit on animal husbandry and the later methods, and doing a bit of part time work. I moved around getting experience. I worked on a dairy farm in Gayndah where they were introducing non-stripping of dairy cattle, to get experience in that. I hadn't had experience

20:00 in sheep and I attended a refresher course in farming, six weeks at Gatton College. I met an ex-army man there who had a sheep property out at Meandarra near Tara and he was looking for somebody to work and we became friends

20:30 at the school and he asked me if I'd like to go out there and work for him for a few weeks during the shearing to get some experience in sheep, which I did. At the end of that period, while I was there I sat for the entrance exam to the department in the Tara school room. I had a horse fall with me and I had my arm in a sling and the

21:00 carpenters were working in the room at the school and they were holding school underneath it, and I passed the exam. Incidentally I left him for a while before that. He asked me to go back, if I would go back, I had to come back to Cooroy to help with the cane harvesting and he asked me

21:30 if I would go back and look after the property for him while he took his family for a holiday. I did that and it was then I sat for the exam. When his family came back from holidays I left there and came back to the farm at Cooroy. I lived there but I

22:00 went cane cutting. In those days it was cut by hand and cut green. I cut cane there and in October of 1946, it would have been

22:30 October 1947 I was called up for the [UNCLEAR] exam in Brisbane. I passed that and I was appointed as a stock inspector on probation in what was known then as the Department

23:00 of Agriculture and Stock. I had a couple of weeks training in Brisbane, mainly picking up ticks and counting them for the research out at Yeerongpilly and getting some equipment together. I was stationed at Helidon in 1948. In the December of 1948

23:30 I was there, and in June 1949 they transferred me to Helidon with my own sub-district. It was there that I met the girl who was to become my future wife. I stayed with the Department of Primary Industries as it later became known, they

24:00 changed the name from the Department of Agriculture and Stock. I stayed there for years and then was promoted and transferred to Maryborough in the beginning of 1957. By that time we had two children. I was inspector of stock division one and slaughtering inspector

24:30 here. I passed the exam for district inspector of stock and I stayed here in Maryborough until the early 1960s when we were transferred to Cloncurry. I had the district inspector of stock for the whole of the Gulf Country, the biggest stock district in Queensland it was then. It was a big district. There was one

inspector,

25:00 and additional inspector at Cloncurry and one inspector at Normanton and one at Julia Creek, but I had overall administration over the whole area and the inspectors. Also at that stage police were acting inspectors and the district inspector had the jurisdiction over all police regarding them issuing permits for stock movements and those things.

25:30 At the end of 1966 they decided to transfer me back to Maryborough ostensibly because of my knowledge of ticks and the work I'd had among them, to take over the Maryborough stock district which then covered the slaughtering and it covered from

26:00 Miriam Vale in the north to Cooroy in the south. Also included Gayndah, Mundubbera, Monto areas and I was in charge of the district administrator, district inspector. I was in charge of all those districts. By then they'd broke the department up into various areas. There was

26:30 the dairy branch were on their own, the slaughtering branch were on their own and they formed what they called the Veterinary Services Branch and I stayed with Veterinary Services Branch, which meant that I didn't have the supervision over the slaughtering inspectors, and dairy branch, they supervised

27:00 themselves. Later on they decided to split the Maryborough stock district and they made Gayndah, Mundubbera, Monto area into a separate district, so I only had a smaller district to administer. I stayed with the Department of Veterinary Services. I was unhappy with the way they were going as

27:30 regarding shooting cattle that proved positive for brucellosis [bacterial disease], among other things, including the fact that they hadn't promoted me to the division one job that I was doing. even though for the last twelve months of my career, the divisional veterinary officer here

28:00 took twelve months off to attend a school and they made me administrative inspector over the whole of the Maryborough division, which included Kingaroy area as well, and for administrative purposes I was over the head of the veterinary officers, without a diploma or without a degree. Finally I'd have enough of them and at the end of 1978,

28:30 I told them what they could do with their job and walked out.

And since then?

Since then I've more or less retired. Even to this day there's people come and ask me for advice on stock diseases and things like that. Even though I hadn't been associated with it for all those years I've still kept an interest in it.

29:00 I've mainly just concentrated on the family. I made sure that our two sons got an education. They both have degrees and I've looked after and helped them with their properties. I've done most of my own work, my own painting, my own carpentry, I've done my own gardening, bricklaying. You name it, I've done it.

29:30 I joined the bowling club, but until recently I belonged to three bowling clubs. I rarely play bowls, especially when my fingers got twisted. I gave it away. I did belong to the RSL [Returned and Services League] for many years and I became dissatisfied with them when they started the club system, especially in Maryborough,

30:00 even though I'm a life subscriber of it and I've been a member of the RSL since early 1946, I've been a permanent member, and for many years now I've been a life subscriber of the RSL, but I don't attend meetings any more because I don't believe in the club system. It's just developed more or less into a social club in the towns. Anybody and everybody

30:30 can join as a member. The RSL has more or lest lost its way. There's been breakaway groups with the ex-Vietnam Association and Malayan Vietnam Associations and things like that, but I still believe in the RSL. I believe that they do a good job, but I couldn't agree with the ones in the city area as you

31:00 might call it. So the best thing to do is keep away. But I still belong to it. I've an interest in the other people, but towards the end of my working life I joined the masonic fraternity. I've been a member of that and through the chairs in many orders of masonry. I'm still active in it.

31:30 My elder son has a home, a holiday home as he calls it, at Tin Can Bay, which he's owned for twenty years. He married a Gympie girl while he was teaching in Gympie and he bought the low maintenance property there,

32:00 for somewhere to call home, because if anything happened to him she would have had to get out of the school house in about a fortnight with nowhere to go. So they bought that because her parents lived in Gympie, we lived here, and I became his caretaker and I look after it. I go down there regularly, I know the yard, look after the place and I've made many friends down there.

What we

32:30 **might do now is take you right back to the beginning and we'll talk in a little more detail about your childhood and schooling years. So tell me what your dad's job was?**

He grew up on a property at what they call the bend of the river, the Paterson River at Woodville. One member of our family, a distant member of our family,

33:00 has traced our ancestry back as far as they could in Australia, and I have in my possession a copy of the wedding certificate of our oldest known ancestor in Australia, and he was a master mariner born in the colony in the date that was two years after [Governor Arthur] Phillip settled it. That's when he was born here.

33:30 There's no record of his parents because any of the historians in the genealogy branch, they said they were not convicts otherwise their records would be here in Australia. You'd have to go back to England where they originated from, and I believe they originated from Wales. That's as far back as we know, his parents. And he was born

34:00 in the colony and when he was married he was twenty-nine and he was a master mariner. That means he was ship's captain. When he retired he was given a grant of land on the bend of the Paterson River at Woodville. They had twelve children. So the family is Welsh Catholic. We were never a close-knit family, and later on when he died

34:30 somewhere along the line the place was known as Orange Grove Woodville, was split in halves and there were two brothers that inherited a piece each. My grandfather, my father's father, John Powell, he inherited one piece. He had three boys. He married

35:00 and they had three boys from that family and they were farmers. They had an orange orchard and dairy farm and grew lucerne and things like that, and they were horse breakers. They used to break in horses for the yearling sales. My father left, he went to school in Woodville. Apparently from what I can find out he left home when he was fourteen and they didn't know where he was for a few years.

35:30 He was on different properties working in New South Wales. He came back and my mother had migrated from England from Yorkshire in 1914, and she was working on the property, Tocal, across the river from there and they met up and

36:00 they were married in 1916. My eldest sister was born in, no, they were married in 1915. No, in January 1916 they were married. My eldest sister was born in the end of October 1916, and he moved to

36:30 Woodville and from what I can understand he worked in the Newcastle Steel Works and he worked as a labourer at different places prior to working for the Hunter River Steam Ship Company on the harbour, working boats up and down the Hunter River and the tributaries, the

37:00 Allen, the Williams and the Paterson Rivers. I've lived on all of those rivers, more or less, until the Hunter River Steam Ship Company folded up. The rivers became silted up. The old paddle-wheel steamers couldn't get up there any more and they used to go around of course to Port Stephens. He obtained his harbours and rivers skipper's ticket, but then

37:30 it was Depression years and they were putting men off, and he elected to leave the company and leave another man who was married with a bigger family have the job for staying on, and he started taking labouring jobs around farms. That's when we moved first to Tenambit where I went to school there, and then to

38:00 Largs where we were on a little property there that belonged to one of his cousins, and from there we got the job on the share dairy property at Vacy.

What memories do you have of those river steamboats?

I can just remember it, being on it, and I can remember being on the banks of the river and waving to them as they went past up and down there. Everything,

38:30 well I don't say everything, because in those days it was only horses and horse transport more or less, and people living near the river, they were little wharves and all their produce was transported in or out by boat. Hay was baled by the hay presser, big bales of hay, big heavy bales of hay and all the heavy stuff was transported and used to be

39:00 loaded and unloaded by hand. I can remember seeing them do it. I can remember being down on the wharves at Morpeth. I have been on and sailed for a short period, I just can't think where it was, on the Allen River boat. I think it was one of the last ones to be used down there. I can remember having a trip on that. I can remember starting

39:30 school and going to school, and the house we lived in had a little paddock behind it, and the school across the road from there. My sister had started school and I apparently pestered them enough that they let me start school at four and a half years of age.

We'll just pause there for a minute because we're going to reach the end of this tape.

Tape 2

00:38 **Okay Stan, you just told us that you got to school at four and a half. Tell us about your school days?**

I can remember a little bit at the Morpeth School. I must have been there for about two years, I'm not sure because

01:00 as I said it was only just through a little paddock and across the road, so I didn't have far to go. From there we moved to Vacy. That was a one teacher school. To Tenambit, that was a one teacher school and I must have been only going to school there for about six months because I know we weren't long living at Tenambit.

01:30 From there of course we went to another one teacher school, the Largs School. I went there. I can remember being there, I can remember one incident there because I was the new boy there, and the headmaster was a Mr James and he had an obnoxious son about my age who used to belt all the kids around because his father was the school teacher, until

02:00 he struck me, and I belted him. His father dragged me up the steps of the school to punish me for fighting, which he did. As soon as we got out of school I went home and my father went up and dealt with him. Told him just what he thought and never to touch me again. I can remember that. We must've been there about six months because,

02:30 around about six months because I was eight when we went to Vacy. I attended the Vacy School there until I was at Vacy on the share dairy there, irrigation farm, for three years. I went to the Vacy School for three years. All of those schools were only one teacher schools. The

03:00 same at the Fosterton School, was a one teacher school. Vacy School was three miles away. We had to go three miles backwards and forwards each day. I had to help with the milking and the farm work before I went to school and I had to help with it when I came home, the same at Fosterton, and to do that I had to run. At Fosterton, over a country road,

03:30 I measured the distance as just over three mile from where we lived to where the school was, and I could run that in under four minutes. It was a matter of necessity, because I had to work before I went to school which means I had a limited time to get there and I had to work when I got home on the farm, so I had to run to get home.

04:00 I was supposed to be an apt pupil at school. In fact, at the Fosterton School I've got a certificate up there to show that I passed the examination as they called it, the permit to enrol in a secondary school when I was eleven. But of course

04:30 in those days we had no relatives living in, the nearest high school was Dungog or West Maitland, I think was the nearest high school, and with no relatives that could have boarded me, there was no transport to get there. So I had to continue at the Fosterton one teacher school with correspondence lessons until I was at school leaving age. I didn't get any further

05:00 education. They used to send out what they called correspondence lessons. They were on paper, you had to supply the answers, write out the answers to them all and hand them to the teacher and he'd send them away to the school there. They used to send out enough to last, I'm not sure whether it was a month at a time and I used to complete it all in a few days, and the rest of my time I

05:30 spent helping the school teacher in teaching the younger classes. When my youngest brother was born in November, the year I turned fourteen, I had to leave school and help because my mother was indisposed with the new baby. I left school about a month before I was fourteen.

06:00 I had no further schooling from then on.

So what did you do from then?

I had to work on the farm. That's what sons did, worked on the farm. Like even from the time I was eight year old I was chipping crops with a 'chip hoe' as we called it, a hoe,

06:30 and I used to plant the corn by hand, drop the corn, maize, as you call it. And sorghum, I used to help with the harvesting of it. We used to grow, we used to supply seed for Dransfield Seed Company, so I had to cut the heads off all the sorghum and thrash that out, the seed. The same, we grew

07:00 maize, I had to shell that and send that to Dransfields as well as keeping some to feed the animals on, pigs on it, at Vacy and helping move irrigation pipes. As a matter of fact when we went there

07:30 my mother of course had never been on a dairy farm. We went there in the January and the school days, at Easter that year my father got a poisoned hand and couldn't milk. We'd only just learned to milk, my mother and myself, and I think we were milking about twenty cows on that small dairy at that time by hand, and we had to milk them between us. It was

08:00 all the time over that Easter while my father had his poisoned hand and couldn't use it, and we had to do that between us, feed the pigs, feed the calves. The only thing father could do was turn the hand separator with one hand. We had to do the rest. From then my school days and

08:30 afterwards at Fosterton I used to help on the farm. But by that time when I left school I could use a scarifier, a horse and scarifier. I'd learnt to use that, and a roller. I'd drive the horses in a roller, a wooden roller that they used in those days or what they called the diamond harrow, a heavy wooden thing with spikes in it and once the grass

09:00 accumulated underneath you lift it and let the grass fall out and drop it down again. It was terrifically hard work, heavy work. Rabbits were a problem of course. We had to get rid of rabbits and apart from occasionally setting out poison trails and putting poison in burrows we had to set traps, and I used to get up of a morning and before we got the cows in

09:30 and go around the traps, and do them again before I got to school, skin the rabbits that were in there, peg the skins out. The same in the afternoon and again at night; go around with a lantern and take out the rabbits that had been caught. And we used to, of course, shoot rabbits. I became a good rifle shot, and cut them out of hollow logs or dig the

10:00 burrows out. I had two dogs that used to work with me and they'd indicate by scratching on the ground or sniffing along the log just about where the rabbit was sitting in it, so you knew where to cut a hole in the log or where to dig without digging the whole burrow full length. Although I was a good shot with a .22 rifle and we had the training

10:30 there in the use of firearms, my father would never let me go out shooting on my own until after I was fourteen, without he was with me, even though he knew I could shoot and I knew how to handle a gun. That's what stood me in good stead when I joined the army. I knew how to handle firearms. I knew all about them.

Tell us about joining the CMF?

11:00 I could see the fact that there was a war coming, as I said before. I always believed that the first to go, if anybody feels anything for their country, the first to go should be the single men with no ties, and I was in that category, so as soon as they formed a unit in Cooroy I joined it.

11:30 After a couple of camps I was promoted to corporal. I had the advantage that I knew how to use a firearm, even though it was only a 22 or a shot gun and not the army rifle. But the man that had the little property alongside of us in Cooroy, Norm Hill, had been a corporal in the First World War and he

12:00 gave me his text books that he had on firearms and how to strip them, how to look after them and duties of NCOs and things like that. So I had that to study and in those days there was no TV [television], we had an old wireless, but nothing else,

12:30 and no telephones or anything like that, and all you did at night was more or less read books. So I read those and when I went into the army, as I said previously, I took to it like a duck to water. I was hard trained, so the training didn't worry me at all, and I could just lie down on the ground and sleep as we did in those days and had no trouble, so I soon adapted to it.

13:00 **What about the discipline, how did you deal with that?**

We'll, I'd always been disciplined at home. We were used to it in those days because children were disciplined, and you were taught to respect others. You were taught anything and unlike today, in our home at least there was no drink, even though my father smoked a pipe and black tobacco, he endlessly smoked,

13:30 I never took to it. Even if you visited a neighbour or anywhere there, it was an insult to take liquor into their home, the same with them, if they visited you, you'd regard it as an insult for them to bring liquor into your home. It's sort of the discipline we were brought up in, well, my family anyway.

14:00 Now of course if you don't turn up with a six pack [beer] they reckon you're lousy.

And how did you feel about being made a corporal so early on?

Well, I just took it in my stride because even in school I just took the lead. Even in fighting and anything else I seemed to be always the lead. At sport

14:30 I was good at cricket and tennis. They were the main two things we played in those days at country schools. There was no football when I went to school. I couldn't, we were so poor that I couldn't go away with teams because I didn't have any shoes to wear, played bare-footed. This discipline in the army didn't

15:00 worry me at all. Although I rebelled occasionally because of things I reckoned were wrong and I'd say so. Some of the ones in charge there I stood up to. When I joined the AIF

15:30 and I went into Redbank I was wearing the two stripes. I was a corporal in the CMF, and even though we had the stripes we had to go in as privates, but immediately we were there, even for the ones that

were in the reinforcements or were just coming in, if we had stripes

16:00 we were put in charge of men, and then the AIC [Australian Instructional Corps] instructors that were there, I did a course under them at the Australian Instructional Corps as an instructor and apparently I was fairly good at instructing. I went through the process of course being made a lance corporal, then a

16:30 corporal, which rank I retained at Redbank and I retained it when I went to the battalion and instead of dropping back to a private again I had my rank confirmed when I joined the battalion, 2/9th Battalion.

Stan, you said that you could see war coming. How were you able to see this

17:00 **and other people maybe not?**

By reading. Reading, that was all we had to do in the early days, and the wireless. You listen to the talk around, people talking and you get the news over the wireless and in the newspapers what was happening over there and you could more or less,

17:30 or in my case you'd say it was inevitable. And I think Australia could too because that's when they started to enlarge the CMF units and put them into more permanent camps, do more training. Actually if I had stayed with the CMF for much longer than I did instead of enlisting straight away,

18:00 I would have probably got a lot more promotion because the chap that had been my lance corporal got a commission. They wanted more men, more men and the ones that had done a little bit of training got the promotions. I've always said then that no man knows how he'll go under fire, and I did not want to lead men unduly until I proved myself under

18:30 fire. As a corporal you've only got a few under you, but once you get to a commissioned rank with a platoon and beyond that you've got a big responsibility. Even though I found out afterwards, and I still maintain, that the main man in a platoon is the platoon sergeant, that's where I finished. But because of my being an instructor I was used by the battalion

19:00 for a lot of instructing. Instructing, you know, reinforcements. Actually in Tobruk we got reinforcements come in there that got no training or very little training. They were just put into the army here in Australia, sent overseas, said they would receive training in Palestine, which they didn't get. They were sent either straight to Greece some of them, and then when Tobruk happened, they were sent

19:30 up into Tobruk and they had little or no training. When we were up right in the front line, at the salient as we called it, or up the front, for these men, there were some of us used to be sent back behind the actual front line to train these fellows

20:00 in the use of the different firearms, and I was one that was sent back from Don Company that I belonged to as an instructor. In fact that's mentioned in Frank Rollison's book that he wrote, "Not a" – what did he call it up there? Anyway, he mentioned me in that and he also

20:30 mentioned the fact he reckoned I would have been a fine company commander. But that's just his opinion. The army training didn't worry me at all. The fact that I'd more or less grown up in the bush and knew bushcraft, and I knew different ways of going around if you were stalking an animal and you read the land,

21:00 and you'd read the wind and you'd know where the cover was and how you could get around to get closer. Things like that. It's more or less instinct.

Did they take you on any of these training exercises out in the bush?

There were none, just the normal exercises. We'd go through the countryside and things like that.

21:30 Sometimes they'd take a little bit of notice. It was all right if you were on your own but a lot of officers that came from the towns, in fact in the early days of the war, school teachers, bank employees, fellows that had been in employment, a lot of the firms made up their wages. We only got five bob [shillings] a day when we joined. They made up

22:00 their wages. So they got promoted so that their firms didn't have to make up their wages, and there were a lot of men that got commissioned, well in my book there were a lot of men that got commissions and things that should never have got them because they didn't know how to handle men. They didn't know bushcraft, they didn't know firearms even though they got a bit of training in it.

22:30 But they weren't qualified as leaders in my opinion. Some were, some turned out really good officers. But some of them they would just stand over. They had the authority and if you spoke back or did anything against the regulations it was on pack drill, even the NCOs. They didn't know how to handle men.

23:00 **Was this a bit of a class based thing?**

Well, you hear that, 'an officer and a gentleman'. A lot of them were not gentlemen, but they had the education. I've always said that the lack of education was a bugbear with me. In fact it was thrown at me in Department,

23:30 that one exercise I was in, there was five of us in a car travelling in it, and the fellow driving the car said, “There’s five of us in this car and there’s only one of us that hasn’t got a diploma or a degree, and he’s the boss.” That was me. They all had diplomas from Gatton,

24:00 from the agricultural colleges or they had degrees, and I was just, all I’d had was public school education. In our day that was all a lot of people could get. But you had the experience, especially in the country.

Tell us about, you talked about the building up to war. Tell us about hearing that war had been declared?

24:30 **Where were you and what were you thinking?**

Well as I said previously, the platoon at Cooroy, we were on duty and took it in turns for about a fortnight before war was declared in the end of August it would have been, we were,

25:00 we used to go into the hall, which they used as a drill hall, the public hall in Cooroy, they had sent up a, I don’t know whether he’d been called up or not, he had been a First World War digger and had the rank of warrant officer

25:30 and he had to put up a bed and that in one end of Cooroy hall and that was used as the drill hall part of it. They had a telephone set up in there and we used to go in and man the telephones and listen into what was happening in Europe and that there. Then they decided that they’d

26:00 send us over to Moreton Island, to Cowan Cowan, which was a bit of a fort there, to watch for submarines and things coming up along the coast, and we were on the wharf in Brisbane waiting to get on the boat to take us across to Cowan Cowan listening into a wireless there that they had, when we heard Menzies declare that Australia was now at war.

26:30 **What was your first reaction to that?**

Well, what we’d been expecting, what we’d been training for and what we were expecting. We knew then that eventually Australia would be sending troops overseas.

Did you want to go?

We’d be in it.

Did you want to go overseas?

Yeah, that’s what I enlisted for.

27:00 As I said, all single men with no ties should be the first to go.

What was Cowan Cowan like?

It wasn’t much. We just dug a few trenches and had a tent and we used to just go and take our turn up on the high point looking to see if we could see any submarines travelling

27:30 along the other side. That was all we were doing from where I was. There was artillery there, but us an infantry, we were out further away from that. We were only there a couple of weeks or so before they left us. There was one incident I can recall. I was with my

28:00 section, we were on look out on the high point looking with binoculars, looking to see anything suspicious going down the other side of Moreton Island, and we saw this black object going past, move and disappear, and then it would come up and be in a different direction, and we looked at it for quite a while and they reckoned that

28:30 it wasn’t a whale, it wasn’t spouting. We sent word back down that it was suspicious, that it looked like it could be a submarine travelling along the surface there. There were one or two officers, I’m not sure now, came up and they looked at it and so forth and they decided it was only a whale,

29:00 just whales migrating past and so forth. The next day one of our own subs [submarine] surfaced in the Brisbane River. They won’t, officers sometimes won’t, take notice of what the other ranks tell them.

Tell us

29:30 **about why you changed from militia to the AIF?**

To go overseas. In those days the militia was only for service in Australia. It wasn’t until Japan came into the war that the militia served overseas, and at that stage New Guinea was under Australia.

30:00 They were actually still fighting on Australian soil. Australia had the mandate for New Guinea and they were responsible for its defence?

Where were you expecting to go when you were posted?

We didn't know, we didn't know. At that stage, the early stage, the war of course was all in Europe. It wasn't until Mussolini brought Italy into

30:30 the war that troops went to the Middle East. Well they went there then, but the general idea was that we'd be fighting in Europe. Of course they got defeated there and they had to, the French gave way and the Germans came in behind them and the British troops had to retreat and they were evacuated from Dunkirk.

31:00 **Tell us about your preparations in those stages to go away. What were you doing in the lead up?**

Just mainly manoeuvres and it was more or less training on open warfare and

31:30 defending towns and things like that and invading a civilised country. There was no, you might say the training was on open timbered country, no jungle country or anything like that because the war was being fought in European countries.

32:00 **What news were you hearing coming back from Europe before you left? Were you hearing about German success and how were you feeling about that?**

Yes, we heard about it and we were expecting to go there. Then Mussolini came into the war and the 6th Division, the first of them, went to the Middle East and there was nobody. That's where we expected to go. We were in the convoy

32:30 heading for there, and then for some reason they decided to divert the 18th Brigade to go to England to assist the British Army who were retreating. By the time we got there Dunkirk was over. They'd just all got out, we were just too late.

33:00 I can still see the expressions on the British people's faces when they saw us, we landed in Greenock in Scotland and we went by train right down through England through the Salisbury Plain, and the expression on the faces of the people and their joy and them singing out, "The Australians are here, the Australians are here," as though they thought they'd been delivered, that they weren't on

33:30 their own any more. Even though there were Canadians there before us, it was the fact that Australia was there.

How did this make you feel hearing this?

It made us feel as if we were walking on air. The reception, the relief that they thought everything was all right, that the Australians were there.

34:00 **Nice to be appreciated?**

We were appreciated. They knew the reputations of the Australians in the First World War. Even though the First World War, the first enlistments, I think the figures were only about one Australian born, the rest were England or something like that that went in the First World War, or the first enlistments. The reputation Australia had,

34:30 the fighting units, even from the Boer War.

So you mentioned the boat trip. Tell us about getting on the boat, which boat was it and what was it like?

Well we went on the Mauritania which had only just been withdrawn from passenger service and it was still equipped with all its civilian crew, all its cabins

35:00 and all the facilities that they had for passengers. We were on bunks or beds as you called them. We had full facilities. The only things they disconnected was the bells from the cabins to the stewards on board, but we had all the facilities and the comforts of it. We did a bit of training up on deck, just mainly physically

35:30 training during the voyage, that sort of thing. Of course we had to have post out, pick out, looking for submarines and things like that. But we had a really good voyage, even though we went right down, we called in at Perth. Then we went down and we called in at Durban and we

36:00 went ashore there, not Durban, Capetown going over, and we had leave there and had a look around. We had a route march through the town and that sort of thing, and we went around and pulled in at Sierra Leone, but didn't go, it's a white man's grave as they call it, we didn't go ashore there. They just refuelled or got the supplies

36:30 on. It was only the sailors that went ashore there. We were on the boats. We had a couple of incidents. I was with the reinforcements. One lad died and we buried him at sea on the way over. We saw a few burning ships and the destroyer escort racing up and down dropping depth charges for submarines that had been sighted in the area.

37:00 We had a more or less uneventful voyage through.

How did the man die on board?

It was put down as pneumonia, but as we heard at the time he had been a miner and he had minersitis, which was a type of pneumonia, and on official records he died of pneumonia. With that on his lungs he shouldn't have been passed in the first place.

37:30 **Did any of the men get up to anything in Capetown on leave?**

Yes. The usual style got there. They got drinking and they fraternised with the natives, only a certain element of course. Some of them stopped a brewery, a horse-drawn brewery cart and handed out all the beer and that sort of

38:00 thing to the natives. Some like myself who didn't drink or smoke, we just had a look around and looked after some of the others that drank too much. I was talking to one of the police there and he said what we'd done and so forth, he said, "It will take us

38:30 seven years to undo the damage you've done in a few hours," because he said, "We're outnumbered, the white population is outnumbered by at least twenty to one. The damage you've done by fraternising with the natives will take us about seven years to undo." They weren't very happy about it.

How did you feel about it?

Pardon?

How did you feel?

Well I was disgusted the way some of them behaved.

39:00 A lot of younger ones, some of them was their first time away from home too. They were bush, a lot of country boys there too and hadn't, like myself, they hadn't had experience of overseas towns and that sort of thing. Of course if any of the ones that drank, they drank too much. They

39:30 suffered for it when we had to go on a route march through the town.

How did you feel about the idea of fraternising with the natives there?

I didn't.

I mean how did you feel about the men doing it?

I didn't like it because I had a bit of an idea, by talking to the different ones, that they were having a hard time disciplining them and keeping the law and order over there.

40:00 I found out afterwards, and I still find out, even the trouble over there now with all those Middle East countries and those dark races, they'll never control them. They've got their own, they live by thieving and graft and corruption. They'll never change.

I've just got the tap, Stan, which

40:30 **means the tape has come to an end.**

Tape 3

00:36 **So Stan, you were just telling us about the people's reaction to you when you arrived in the UK [United Kingdom], and I'm wondering if you can tell me where you went from Scotland?**

We went down to Lobcombe Corner on the Salisbury Plain. That's where the Australians

01:00 were camped. We were there for, we landed in June 1940 and we were there until, it must have been in about September 1940 we were camped at Lobcombe Corner in tents and things. In fact, when we set up there

01:30 there was very little camp at all. Our showers were just along there and it was cold water, which we weren't used to. The British Army had set up a NAAFI [Navy Army Air Force Institute] canteen there close handy, but there was no sort of big towns around

02:00 near where we were. There was what they called 'the Wallops', Nether Wallop, Middle Wallop and Ainsbury and places like that, and the nearest big town I think was Salisbury itself. We used to get a little bit of leave and could go to some of these places, but the people's reaction was the fact that because the Australians were there,

02:30 because duly to the Australian record of the Australians in war and the fact that they were, apart from a few Canadians who were there, they were on their own. The Yanks [Americans] of course hadn't come into the war at all and it was a relief that they were getting assistance, and the fact that they had nothing after Dunkirk and they were so relieved to see us

03:00 and they welcomed us, really welcomed us there.

What was your impression of the effects the war was having on England as a country?

Well, they were just taking it. It was just a matter of routine that they'd go in the air raid shelters. A siren would go and they'd go into the shelters and they'd go in there to sleep at night, the rationing and things, they'd been used to it.

03:30 There have been wars over there for generations. Not consistently, but generations had grown up to it, wars and the threat of war, and Britain was always fighting someone in the Commonwealth in between the two main wars. There were always little bits of skirmishes going on. There were always troops on the Indian frontier and they sort of

04:00 grew up, I would say, to a nation that expected at any time to be at war and they adapted to it. They adapted to the shortages and the inconvenience, and even the bombing. It was terrific, some of the bombing. It was indiscriminate bombing, women and children and anything. They just dropped the bombs and they

04:30 didn't care where they dropped, wiping out civilian populations. But they spared the main cathedrals and Buckingham Palace, although they had near misses, it was the same, the main cathedrals and that in Germany, they weren't bombed.

Did you experience any bombing raids yourself?

Yes, we were there in

05:00 the bombing raids, but nothing, there were some landed close to our camp but we weren't a main bombing target. First time we came under fire was on the 13th of July 1940. There was a German Messerschmitt, he was returning from a bombing raid and he came in low over our camp and

05:30 he machined gunned as he came in. I happened to be out on the parade ground and I flattened on the ground, and he machined gunned as he went back and the only casualty I understood was, there was a private in the 2/10th Battalion. They were just cleaning the mess tables after breakfast and he was leaning over and he got a bullet in the buttocks. But as the bomber,

06:00 as he picked up, lifted up, he went straight over a little kopjes where our headquarters unit had a Vickers gun mounted for ack-ack [anti-aircraft fire] pointing up in the air. As he came up they were right under him and they put a belt of ammunition into him and he crashed over

06:30 near Ainsbury somewhere. The British air force credited the 2/9th Battalion with bringing him down. That was the first time we actually came under fire.

What's it like to actually come under machine gun fire from an aeroplane?

Not very pleasant, but there are surprisingly a number of bullets that are fired in war whether it's from the air or where it is, that don't hit anything.

07:00 It's surprising, they don't all hit the target. We put a burst in each way there, through there, as far as I know there was only the one casualty and that was only minor.

When you were in the UK did you have any interaction with the British Army?

No, not that I was aware of, well, we saw them, we'd see them there.

07:30 We did have on manoeuvre with them on manoeuvres that I can recall, and they acted as the enemy and near the end of one day they were withdrawing and they were falling back from their position where we'd attacked them. They were falling back and the

08:00 idea, the report came back that they were withdrawing and the order came to march at the double, and the whole unit went forward, at what we call 'the double', running, the whole unit in battle formation running forward at the British Army. They couldn't

08:30 credit that at the end of an exercise when the men were tired and that sort of thing, when the order came through to go forward at the double, they picked up and went.

Did you have any sort of impressions of any differences that existed in the British Army to the Australian Army?

Not really, except that the British Army were disciplined.

09:00 If they got orders to do a thing they did it. They just went forward even though they knew it was against the odds.

Did you notice much of a class difference in the British Army or the hierarchy?

Not that I can remember about it, because at one time there were officers and gentlemen. They were the elite. The educated were officers and

09:30 they went in because of their class, that they were the officers. That might still go on. I had cousins there of course, my mother came from Yorkshire, and one of my cousins was in the landing at Arnhem. I believe he was a sergeant and he was only just an ordinary, I never met them. The only relative I met over there was a Methodist minister at Ainsbury

10:00 church. I promised my mother that I would if possible, if I got to England I would go and see him. I had his address because he was the one that she kept contact with after she came out to Australia. I went to see him and I stayed a few days with him and he introduced me around and one of the

10:30 gentry there, he went with me on a horse and we toured around the countryside. I was there on the Sunday and he a church service. His church was over 400 years old and I was the first Australian soldier in uniform that had ever been in it as far as he knew. He based

11:00 his sermon around the Australian Army.

What did he say in his sermon?

I can't recall now what he said, but I know he was basing it on the Australians coming to help England.

Did you get to go anywhere else on leave in England?

Yes, London. We went through London in the bombing. There were places that we'd

11:30 go and stay and places that we went to. We visited the Tower of London and places like that and we had a morning tea with the Lord Mayor of London he put on for Australian soldiers. I saw the present Queen [Elizabeth II] and her sister [Princess Margaret], they were only children of course at that stage. We met them, and

12:00 of course we paraded before the King, King George [VI]. He visited the camp. The Duke of Kent visited the camp and I gave a display of grenade throwing for him because I won the AIF championship grenade throwing at Redbank.

How do you throw a grenade well?

12:30 Hey?

How do you throw a grenade well?

Well, in trench warfare of course you are down and you jump up and have a look and see where the point is, then you jump back and throw it and lob it into their pit, into their place, and the grenade throwing, you do a circle on the ground and you had to be behind cover and jump up and see where it was and then throw it so that it would land in that circle. In fact I've got a cigarette case up there, a silver cigarette case engraved

13:00 that I won at sports. I don't smoke, but I've still got it, a souvenir.

Was the Duke impressed?

Yes, oh yes, he was impressed by the whole camp, the whole of the Australians. The 2/9th, we marched past the King while we were there and we went down

13:30 a long hill and up the next hill. Once we passed the saluting base we marched in full uniform with bayonets fixed, and the photos of it that they took of it at the time in fact there, we were all in formation, all the bayonets were in line.

14:00 Everything was in line and there wasn't a man looked back after they passed the saluting base. There wasn't a man looked back, there was no singing out to people on the sides of the roads or anything like that. They got the salute and the eyes left or right, I forget which it was at the moment now. That sort of thing, and eyes front and just went straight ahead and nobody looked sideways or looked back. It impressed the British press, the discipline.

14:30 **And what sort of uniform had you been issued with at this stage?**

A heavy serge uniform with no collar on it. It was tied to the neck. We were in those, and of course the only other uniform we had was the light khaki, what we used to call the 'giggle suit'. There were only two sizes, either too small or too big.

What sort of hats did you have?

The ordinary slouch

15:00 hat. The slouch hat turned up at the side.

Were the British impressed with slouch hats?

Yes, because they used them in the tropics too, the broad brimmed hats, or they used to have pith hats or helmets of course in those days which we, they weren't uniform, but some fellow who had them bought them, souvenired them that used to wear them. No, we either, it was the slouch hat

15:30 or the tin hat that we wore. Of course over there at that time too and right up until Milne Bay we wore gas masks, carried a gas mask. There was gas warfare in the First World War and they were expecting it in the Second.

Did you ever use it?

All the civilian population had to carry a gas mask. We were trained in gas warfare. We had to go through the gas tents with

16:00 the gas on and be trained on it, how to get the gas mask on in a hurry and wear it and breathe through it.

Being in the UK, and also I guess having a British mother, what was your feeling and allegiance to the British Empire?

Well, I've always felt and still feel that it's part of our history.

16:30 It was the British that settled Australia. A lot of migrants came from other countries too here, but our main, basic ancestry is British. They settled the country and they developed it. It was mainly British. A lot of them that they brought out here to settle it, it was forced labour you might say, they were convicts for minor offences, but that's the way they settled and established their

17:00 colonies in those days, the early days. They were sentenced to transportation to, as they called it then, Van Diemen's Land and there was even little children for minor offences sent out here and educated. Tasmania, you go down there at Port Arthur where they had the schools and where they educated them, where they taught them trades

17:30 and all that sort of thing. There were a terrific lot of people who were brought out here as convicts and were not criminals. It was just their system and in those days, maybe we've got to it now, but they had a lot that were, judges were mainly drunk and corrupt and so forth and they'd just sentence them to transportation for minor offences.

18:00 **Tell me about when you left the UK, where did you head then?**

We headed for the Middle East. We knew we were going back out to the Middle East.

Tell me where you headed initially, how you got there on the ship?

From the United Kingdom? Well, we didn't have the same ships as we had going over. We came out on

18:30 the Strathaird, which was another one that had been an ocean liner, but by that time they had transformed that into a troop ship. It was all just basics downstairs, down below the decks, on the different decks. There were hammocks, I'm not sure if there were hammocks on the Strathaird now or whether it was just bunks on the floor.

19:00 I've got an idea it was hammocks on the Strathaird. We came out down around there and we pulled in at Durban and then straight up to the Suez, through the Suez Canal, through there.

Did you stop in at Durban?

Yes, I went ashore for leave at Durban. I think it was about two days at Durban. I've got it all in my diary up

19:30 there. I kept a diary right up until I went into action in Tobruk, and of course it was against regulations that you did not keep a diary, so it was left behind with my equipment and I did not keep a diary from then on. Quite a few did but it was illegal. It was against the regulations and I stuck with regulations.

What was Durban like?

It was a nice place, Durban.

20:00 I think we had a route march through Durban too if I remember rightly. I'd have to get my diary and have a look at it. I'm not sure if it's upstairs or downstairs at the moment because I'm revising a book that's being written on the 2/9th Battalion. They've sent me the proofreading sort of bits of it to see what I can recall against what the fellow is writing because

20:30 the history of the 2/9th Battalion has never been written. There are different book have been written by different people, but the main history has never been written. They paid a couple of people to do it and then they got all the records and then dipped out and didn't do it, and haven't returned the records that were given to them, the battalion, but the chap that's doing it now, he retired, he's an army

21:00 officer in Canberra and his father was with us, with the 2/9th Battalion. He came over as a reinforcement and his uncle was with the 2/12th Battalion and he's written a book, two brothers at war, as much as he could find out about what his uncle

21:30 told him about his life in the 2/9th and what his father told him, who is now deceased, has told him about his life in the 2/9th, and that has induced him to try and write up the history of the 2/9th Battalion

and put it in book form himself. He's

22:00 trying to piece everything together from what he can find out from records in the war office and from talking to different men, different people who were there. But the trouble is now after sixty odd years there's not many of us originals left and we've all only got our own story of what happened to us individually, not the overall picture of the battalion. I myself,

22:30 of course, I was wounded in Tobruk. The first night, I wasn't there in the initial thing. When they went to Jaghbub I had trouble with my nose that had been broken and I had trouble, like a lot of us did, breathing. The morning or so before they were to go to Jaghbub I went on sick parade

23:00 because I was having difficulty breathing and then the doctor sent me back to the line, but then the company commander was at the RAP [Regimental Aid Post] afterwards and then I got called back and said, the doctor said he was sending me to the British General Hospital for an operation on my nose, which they did. Took the nasal septums out of it and they told me that I died under the operation, I swallowed

23:30 all the blood. All I can recall when I came out of it I was back in the ward with all the nice polished floors and gas cylinders all around me and all the Red Caps [British military police], the senior officers, medical, with their uniforms on and nurses looking at me, and my memory is coming around from the operation, leaning over the side of the bed

24:00 and up came all the blood, and I can still see it spreading out across the polished floor. Of course the gauze was all stuck up my nose. Part of the treatment was a bottle of stout a day and I didn't drink, so I was popular in the ward, all the different ones coming around to get the bottle of stout.

What was that hospital like?

It was a good hospital, an army hospital that had been established for years.

24:30 The British, they'd been stationed in the east there for generations, the British Army, those areas.

Whereabouts was it?

Alexandria, the British General Hospital.

Did you get to see much of Alexandria while you were there?

Yes. I got over it too. Then I was in Moascar, the

25:00 New Zealand con [convalescent] camp at Moascar for a while too and I got a good look around the Suez Canal and through there.

When were you at the New Zealand camp?

I think after I came out of the hospital. I was there at the convalescent area. But when I went up into Tobruk I went up on the Waterhen at night and we got there

25:30 in a day, and back behind, and later in the day the battalion went up in the most dangerous part of the perimeter where the Germans had broken through, and I went up to a section and they were going out on a patrol that night and there was a patrol to go out, and I

26:00 volunteered. The first and only time I've ever volunteered for anything like that in my life, because you don't do it. They all looked at me and I said to them, "I'm no hero, but I've got two stripes on my arm and I will be asked to lead a patrol eventually and I want to find out what goes on under somebody else." There was an officer leading it and he did what he shouldn't have done. He took a 'sticky bomb', as we called it, out through the wire.

26:30 We hadn't gone all that far out and we ran into a German patrol and got shot up and we carried back two men. One died the next day and the other fellow lost his foot. We came back and got back in and the next day the sergeant looked at me, I had marks down my face and

27:00 blood, and he just said, "What happened to you?" I said, "I fell over. I was carrying a Tommy gun [Thompson submachine gun] and I fell over and bumped my face on the Tommy gun." I didn't want to tell them. I'd go down as 'wounded in action, remaining on duty', and worry the people back home. So I didn't report it.

What did happen to you?

I don't know. I got hit with either shrapnel or bits of stray bullet or something or other got across my face and across my nose.

27:30 It was just one of those things. You don't know really whether it was a bit of stone thrown up from a bullet or what it was. That's what it would have gone down as, as 'wounded in action, remaining on duty'. If word gets back to home it worries people, so that never went down on my record, wounded in action.

You said the officer did what he shouldn't have done on that first patrol.

28:00 **Why do you say that?**

Because he shouldn't have taken that sticky bomb outside the wire, and they had to send men out the next night to locate it because it was something the Germans didn't know we had. It was what we called a sticky bomb, you used to get it and stick it on the side of a tank and it would stick there and blow them up.

So why did he take it?

I don't know.

Why wasn't it used?

There was nothing

28:30 **to use it on. We didn't come across any tanks. They had been used before when the Germans broke through on the 3rd and 4th of May they had them, and one officer and a sergeant, they jumped on top of a couple of tanks and dropped them down inside the tanks and jumped off again, blew the tanks up. They both**

29:00 **got decorated for it. They would not work in the tropics because they depended on sticking to something.**

Tell me about this first patrol. Can you take me through from the beginning, what you had to do and where you went?

We just went out through the wire, through the barbed wire out into no man's land. Just patrolling to see whether we could locate

29:30 any of the enemy or find out what they were doing, just a patrol out to keep them there, it wasn't a fighting patrol, what they call a fighting patrol although you're prepared to fight, you're armed. It was more or less reconnaissing to listen to see if they were moving about and things like that. Anyway, I wasn't in charge of it. I was only

30:00 just one of the numbers and we got shot up and then eventually we had to withdraw. We got our wounded with us. In fact I helped the fellow that lost his foot, Mack Ross. I helped him back and he afterwards credited me with saving his life, but he lost his foot. He couldn't walk and he had to be helped. They carried

30:30 the other fellow out. He'd been shot, half his leg shot away. He died next day, but we got them back.

You say that you got shot up. Can you tell me how this happened, when the Germans appeared, when you first saw them?

We didn't see them. I was back more or less at the tail end of the line and they must've heard us coming and went to ground and waited for us. All

31:00 I knew is when they started firing. There was no word, nothing from up front. The others started coming back and we saw the fellow calling for help. He wanted us to help him and I went and helped him hobble back. It was after a while they just fired

31:30 a sort of burst and then they must've withdrawn because we got back without too much more trouble. We got our wounded back.

What went through your mind when they first started firing?

Just under fire.

But I mean what sort of reaction do you have when there are suddenly bullets flying around you?

You just hit the ground and look around and try and keep your head down and

32:00 see what is happening.

Are you frightened?

Haven't got time to be frightened. I was no more frightened then. You were frightened all the time. You know, you're just looking to see what's happening and keeping down as low as you can to the ground.

Is there any kind of adrenaline that starts?

Not really I don't think.

32:30 Anybody who says they're not frightened, they've never been anywhere. You don't know what's going to happen. That was my first night in Tobruk.

Once you got back behind the lines after that first patrol, did you have any kind of shock or

response?

Yeah, well you know, you've

33:00 lost two men, there's two men gone from it. Of course not being in charge I didn't have to answer to anybody for the patrol. So I don't know just what happened as far as the officer in charge was concerned.

How did you deal with losing those men so soon?

Well, they'd lost them before.

But you personally?

Personally I just took it, this is what happens.

33:30 You're lucky yourself to have got out of it.

These patrols that you were doing, what was the purpose of them? What were you trying to gain from these sort of patrols?

The reconnaissance patrols were to go out more or less and listen and you'd hear whether they were Germans or Italians there,

34:00 who were in front of you. You could listen if you could to them talking, or see if there was anybody out there patrolling on their behalf. If there wasn't, there was a small number, you could fire on them and get back. Some patrols used to go out and you'd see

34:30 where they'd set mine fields. Some of the patrols that went out, they'd pick up their mines and put them over on their roads where their vehicles went, reset them over there. But there was disturbed earth where they'd set the minefields or anything like that, or mainly listening and what you could observe, whether there were troops moving about or whether there were

35:00 vehicles moving about, things like that. Then there were the different fighting patrols who went out deliberately to attack some of their positions. But towards the last the Australians controlled no man's land in Tobruk. They became so desperate that they brought in searchlights, and you'd be out there

35:30 and all at once there'd be a searchlight blast down. You had to hit the ground because if they put it down and you were standing up you were silhouetted against the light. They could see you. You never knew if they were putting it in front of you or behind you, so you had to be on the alert the whole time. As soon as you see the light, they were movable, they used to move them. You didn't know where they were on, the backs of trucks, located,

36:00 and as soon as you saw the light shine it was usually up in the air first and you'd see it and you'd hit the ground so that when they beamed the light they couldn't see you. The light would be shining either over the top of you, or so that you were down you weren't silhouetted. I don't think there's any mention of that in any

36:30 of the war histories that they used searchlights against us.

What does it feel like when a searchlight stops on you?

You hit the ground and stay there until it's gone off and then you know that they're looking for you. So whoever is in charge, you decide whether you go any further or whether you come back again, don't go any further.

Were there more losses after the searchlights were brought in?

What?

37:00 **Were there more losses?**

No, no, not that I can recall. There may have been an odd one, but the patrols I was on, we didn't lose anybody.

Tell me about the formation in a patrol? How do you walk and that sort of thing?

Usually in line keeping contact with each other. Sometimes you send

37:30 somebody ahead and then they bring you forward. They haven't seen anything so you bring the rest forward and then do the same thing again. But other times, instead of doing it that way, you're in line and you've got somebody up ahead, but you go forward all spread out in line. It depends on the circumstances.

38:00 **What was the main type of patrol formation that you were using in Tobruk?**

It was either what we call single file or open formation, that's in line.

Where was your position in a patrol generally?

Usually being a corporal in charge it was more or less in the centre

38:30 or behind the forward scout. If there was an officer there of course you took up any position because he was in charge.

Was a lot of the patrol, it might sound like a strange questions, done on your feet or would you crawl?

Walk if you could, but crawl in places you had to crawl. You crawled under the wire. You had to go out through the wire,

39:00 under the wire. You were down on the ground crawling, and they had set machine guns on the wire and they used to fire bursts up along the wire so that if there was anybody crawling through it, if they were lucky they'd hit somebody. So you had to crawl under it and you used to wait your

39:30 chance after a burst of machine gun fire. They'd fire a burst and then you'd fly through underneath it before they fired the next burst.

We'll just pause there because we've just reached the end of that tape.

Tape 4

00:38 **I'll just talk to you about arriving in Palestine from the ship. Tell us about what you were hearing about North Africa, what was happening in North Africa?**

Well, by the time we arrived there, of course

01:00 we didn't leave Britain until the October and in about the December, January the 6th Division made their first push up against the Italians. There first and main battles were Bardia, that I can remember. I think there was Sidi Barrani before that.

01:30 Bardia and then Tobruk and then they forced the Italians back. They followed them back and they took all North Africa right up to Derna and Benghazi, right up the top there, they were relieved by the 9th Division that had arrived in,

02:00 arrived over in the Middle East, and they came back to reform to go to Greece. The British intelligence had said that there were no Germans in North Africa, it was only the Italian army that was in North Africa, but the German army were coming down through

02:30 Greece. So the ones that were up there, they were more or less, they were untried, they hadn't been in action at all. They were trained but not fully trained. They were not seasoned soldiers to a lot of extent. Even the British that were with them as well,

03:00 in charge, the units that were up there, and the next thing was that Rommel started coming down through there with the whole of his armoured division. I was back, after I had my nose operated on I was back at

03:30 Palestine camp, and Blamey ordered that they start their own Australian intelligence school to train the officers, men in intelligence work, and I got sent to it. I was only an infantry corporal, and there were men from different units there.

04:00 There were also officers there, some high ranking officers there at that school, and I understood that the idea was that once we'd done that school and been trained in intelligence work we would go back to our units and go into the intelligence sections. Some men were already officers. Others that were trained went to their units and became officers in the intelligence section.

04:30 That's how I came to be sent to that school. I don't know that it was ever utilised. As far as I know it was only the one course. I don't know whether they ran any more.

What was that course again?

Middle East Intelligence Course.

What were you learning?

All intelligence work and how to,

05:00 direction finding by the stars, direction finding compass at night, map reading, long range desert patrol work and things like that. We had to plan actions

05:30 against things. One thing, we were taken down to Beersheba and shown the ground and told what units took part in the battle of Beersheba which was the last charge by a cavalry unit, the light horse. We were shown the ground and then we had to plan the battle tactics

06:00 using the number of men we had, the machine guns, the artillery, the light horse, position the men and plan the battle, the time to commence the artillery and when to start it, when to stop the artillery, when to start the machine gun firing from their positions,

06:30 like put them in the positions. Then where they'd have the light horse stationed so that they could make their charge and things like that. That was the type of training that we got. Then we had to go direction finding across the desert part there, like long-range desert patrols

07:00 with just a map and compass and find our way from one point to another. Of course a lot of the training was what to look for and what to listen to, if you got conversations or heard a little bit of information from here and a little bit of information from somewhere else, how to put it all together.

07:30 A lot of it was mainly direction finding and finding your way around, so I suppose you wouldn't get lost because that's what happened to some of the units that were coming back from Benghazi. They ran right into the Germans. The Germans had better intelligence and that, and they went right around

08:00 them and they came in between them and where they were trying to go, in behind them you might say. They also had their spies there, and they had them dressed up in British or Australian uniforms and directing them down to where the Germans were waiting for them. It was very poor intelligence work on behalf of the British intelligence

08:30 there that they had no idea that the Germans were in North Africa. They knew they were in Greece, but as far as their intelligence was concerned it was only the Italians that were in North Africa.

How long was this course for?

I'm not sure if it was a fortnight or three weeks.

09:00 I'd have to look up my records and see if I could pick the length of time I was there.

And where was it exactly held?

In Palestine, that's where the camp was. We used to go out from there.

Did you feel special being chosen for this?

Not really. I wondered why they sent me as a matter of fact.

09:30 **During that time when you were talking about a lot of the battles with Rommel coming in through the desert in North Africa, where were you during this time? Where were you based?**

Of course I was back there, but the unit was at Ikingi Marut in Egypt. That's where we'd

10:00 gone from England out to there, and the last strong hold that they hadn't captured was at Jaghbub way down in the desert. That's where the 2/9th Battalion plus some units, other ones, were sent down there to capture that fort, Fort Palestrino. It was the last remaining

10:30 fort held in the desert. They went down there and I was in hospital and back at the convalescent camp and back at the staging camp. It wasn't long after they got back from there that Rommel came down through the, came down while

11:00 I was there and going to the intelligence school. Rommel came down through there and he was coming down and driving the others back and the 18th Brigade got sent into Tobruk. They'd decided that they had to hold Tobruk to stop him from getting that port. The 18th Brigade plus other

11:30 units were thrown in there and had to stop the division that was coming back from Benghazi, falling back all the time, they had to stop them and turn them into Tobruk instead of letting them go on down past there. That's when the end of April, it was during April that the brigade plus other troops was

12:00 sent into Tobruk to halt the Germans and hold Tobruk, to deny them that port.

How did you feel about having to be away from the other men for this period in hospital and at the intelligence school?

I didn't like it because, you know, they'd gone into battle. I'd been with them all the time. They were getting the battle

12:30 experience, and I was back there as far as I could see for no reason because I couldn't see why they had to operate on my nose. It wasn't that bad. They didn't do a very good job on it because they took all the nasal septums out and afterwards it was quite easy to break my nose.

13:00 In fact I had it broken a couple of times since then and all they could do to straighten it is just pull it straight and say, "Don't blow your nose for a couple of days." I've had trouble breathing ever since. In fact I've had my nose cauterised since then.

And so you missed being in the first battle?

I missed being in the first battle. The first real action

13:30 was Tobruk.

Upon getting there did you still feel this way?

Yes. That's one reason I volunteered for the patrol the first night I was there. I didn't volunteer for any more.

Tell us also, in the time in Palestine and Egypt did you get to

14:00 **mix with any local people or see the local life?**

Yes.

What did you think of it?

I had leave. You couldn't trust them. You still can't trust them. They live by their wits from the time they're small. They live by trickery and thievery and taking you down with merchandise, anything at all.

14:30 I managed to get to see some of the old biblical areas, all around there in Jerusalem we'd go on trips right through there. I've got pictures of the Garden of Gethsemane and the old walls of Jericho, the Dead Sea, all those sort of

15:00 places that I managed to get to. Down in Cairo, I got into Cairo and that, because in those days at that time I wanted to improve my knowledge of things and I visited places. I got to see the Karvitkin [?] and Jewish settlements

15:30 and talk to them about their methods of agriculture, what they were doing and how they were doing it and talk to some of the ones that were in charge of it, and see them road making with a hammer breaking up the blue metal. Women on the side of the road and loading

16:00 boats. We said, "We never want to see our women do that." Now they demand to do it. They want to be equal. And inquired why were the orchards, why they didn't have machinery and that in there, and they said that if they put machinery in, all those people that worked there were only getting small wages, but they had a job and they had a living.

16:30 The same with them breaking up the stones on the side of the road, they said if they put big machinery in, like all those people would be out of work and they'd starve. So that's why they did it that way. That's where I first saw the intensive style poultry farming. They used to have the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s in the cages and they'd cover them.

17:00 They had big lights in there, and they'd put the covers on them and the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s would think it was dark so they'd go to sleep and they'd give so many hours in the darkness. Then if it was still dark they'd put the lights on and they'd end up and they'd lay again. They were literally getting,

17:30 some places were getting two eggs a day from them. They had no feathers on them. It was intensive style and that's what I was interested in, that sort of thing, and see the way they used to plough with a wooden plough and perhaps a donkey and a cow side by side, things like that, primitive methods. They said if they used machinery all the people were out of work.

18:00 **You didn't really drink, but did you go to anywhere for entertainment of shows or anything?**

No. No, I just went around. I did drink at cafes and go for coffee or something like that, but I didn't drink any of their liquor. I didn't drink in those days, I didn't smoke.

18:30 **Tell us how did you get into Tobruk?**

I went up on the Waterhen, the destroyer, at night after they'd closed it off, after the Germans had gone past Tobruk. See, they bypassed it when they were pushed down the coast, and they didn't get any further

19:00 down than, they retook Bardia and Sollum and they got stopped at the, I don't know just the exact line that they stopped them, but they couldn't get any further because the lines of communication were too long and without the harbour at Tobruk they couldn't get their supplies and that down from Derna, Benghazi area. They had to all come by

19:30 road, whereas if they had got Tobruk they had a deep sea harbour there that they could have come in by sea and supplied. There was an airfield there and they would have had a base. As it was their lines of communication were too long for them. Even though they had air superiority there were no planes in Tobruk.

20:00 What few planes were there and went up, they shot them down. They could hammer them by air from Alexandria and the airfields and that, and they were denied access to their lines of communication by sea.

Tell us about your journey there on the boat. What was that like?

20:30 On the Waterhen? Well, we mainly went at night. We started off, they used to go into Tobruk by night, we'd do that part of it. We had aircraft came over and bombed, dropped bombs and tried to strafe but the little destroyers, they used to zigzag and obeyed them, but they also used to

21:00 fire back at them themselves. While it was daylight of course, if any planes came over the British air force that were stationed back behind, could come up and engage them.

So you were bombed on the way?

Yeah, but they evaded that because they used to drop them from a fair height because when

21:30 they were up in the air they had to keep out of range of the destroyers guns.

Tell us about arriving at Tobruk. What were your first impressions?

Just a bombed out harbour, we went in at night and we had to find our way in through the wrecks in the harbour and just unloaded, and we walked out to a camp not all that far away,

22:00 still at night, and just laid down there until the next day when we were taken up to the front line.

What were you seeing then?

We were seeing the wrecked harbour, the boats and the wreckage of all the buildings, and then wreckage of vehicles and that as we went further up the line.

The front lines,

22:30 **what do they look like?**

What was it like?

Yeah, what did they look like?

It was only just, where I went in was just the, in what we call the salient where the Germans had broken through. It was only just little tenches that they'd dug there to hold them back, and little bits of shelters that you put over the top of them because you couldn't dig

23:00 deep in Tobruk. You only got down about eighteen inches and you struck stone, so you had to build above with anything you could find, the dirt that you dug out of the trenches, communicating through, you crawled along in those and the little shelters that you dug in on the sides of it, and you scrounged timber and iron and whatever you could get and built up over the top.

23:30 **What was it like to see the old blokes again after a few weeks apart?**

Well, you sort of said hello to them and they just looked at you, and it wasn't long after that I got up there in the evening and they started shelling it. Just duck your head and do the same as they were doing,

24:00 try and hide under your tin hat.

Describe that first night of shelling, what was that like?

Well, you don't know where they're going to fall. You don't have to worry about the shell that you hear, but the one that you don't hear. If it strikes near you, you might get hit with flying shrapnel, but

24:30 sometimes you could hear the, if you hear the explosion when they fire you've got time to know there's a shell coming, if you hear it. If you don't hear it, it's arrived there before you hear the noise coming through the air. That's what happened when I got hit and a mate got killed in Tobruk.

25:00 We knew we were a ranging mark. I'd lost men there previously. They used to shell us every afternoon. I did not hear the one that hit me. It was a direct hit on the dugout. I came out of it, I shouldn't have. My mate was in there with me, there were two of us in this little thing, in the side, and they buried him there.

25:30 I didn't hear that shell. It was just, I sort of blacked out. I came to and I thought I was gone. I sort of blacked out again and my mates, when the shelling finished, they came and pulled the debris off me and

26:00 got me out. I had my clothes blown off me. They didn't, I had cordite and powder burns, black all over me, dirt all over me. I was blinded and deaf, both eardrums burst. A few little wounds and that all over me, but mainly bits of cordite and little bits

26:30 of shrapnel and things like that. There's a bit there still they won't take out, it's sitting on a nerve. No real damage except I regained my sight, I regained my hearing. My eardrums healed, but I didn't hear that shell. It's one of those things that I was just lucky. By all rules and regulations I should not

27:00 have survived it.

How do you think you managed to survive?

Just like, and somebody was looking after me, had further plans for me.

What was the pain like? What were you feeling?

More or less numb from what I can recall of it, because I was more or less half blinded,

27:30 but more or less blasted, and deafened. They tell that I refused to leave there until I made sure that my mate was dead. They had to take me away and they wanted to put me on a stretcher and I walked. I got back to the platoon headquarters and the platoon commander, the same one as I'd gone out on that first patrol with, he was cowering in the

28:00 bottom of his dugout. I'd asked to be moved to another position earlier because we were a ranging mark and then they got me back to battalion headquarters and they got me on a stretcher and took me back to battalion headquarters, back behind, and I can't remember too much of it but our commanding officer, Colonel

28:30 Martin, they tell me I abused him and told him exactly what I thought of the fact, what I thought of the position, and that the men should have been relieved. I know he went inside and got his own tunic and put it over me and got me taken back, and the doctor didn't recognise me. They got me to there. They tell me that he immediately relieved what was left of my section and

29:00 brought them back behind and never let them go back into the front line until the battalion was relieved shortly afterwards.

What do you mean by you were a ranging mark?

Where we were, they had artillery up in their positions up on the hill, what we called Hill 207, a high range, and they used to, every afternoon they'd fire

29:30 three or four shells all onto that position where we were. They could see it. They knew where it was and that was their ranging mark. They'd just range their guns so that they knew they'd have the right elevation, the right distance, and they'd land them in around there every afternoon. We reckoned with their binoculars

30:00 and that sort of thing they could see us. They knew the position was there, and there was another position that had been dug a bit to the side that they didn't range on. Well, we could have done the same job, watching and see that nobody attacked.

So what were you doing there?

Just holding the line. We were there if they attacked. We were

30:30 the front line and that's where we used to move forward from at night on patrols, down the front in there.

Couldn't you have been better placed though?

I reckon we could have been, that section, because they used to land their shells on that position, around that position every afternoon. The ones that we relieved, the 43rd Battalion, before we went into that position

31:00 the last time we were up in there, when they moving out one of our fellows said to them, "Goodbye and good luck." The fellow said to them, "It's you that'll need the luck here." So they experienced it beforehand.

So what did you think

31:30 **of the commanding officers keeping you there?**

I better not say over air.

Why not?

Well, he was the same fellow, a lieutenant then, he'd been a bank officer. He was an officer in the CMF beforehand I believe. He was the one that took us out through the wire that first night

32:00 there. He was there and he wouldn't take notice and asked for us to be moved sideways. He was cowering in the bottom of his trench dugout when they took me past there, and I'd lost men before, and I spoke to him and he turned his head and was sick.

32:30 I had that same officer in Milne Bay and he ran, cowered behind a tree. He left the army after, I don't know just when he left it. I only ever saw him once afterwards when I was at Canungra and he was being passed through there and

33:00 complaining about having been sent back to a base job. He passed away some years ago.

What did you think of the army having officers like this occasionally?

Just a thing that happened everywhere, some of them were sent back from the Middle East, 'Services No Longer Required', because of things like that, and when we got

33:30 back to Australia there were a couple that had been sent back from our unit had good jobs back here on base. They weren't discharged. Services No Longer Required was more or less what we called a 'snarler'. They should have been given a dishonourable discharge, but they used to send them back as Services No Longer Required.

Why wouldn't they give them

34:00 **a dishonourable discharge?**

Well, they hadn't done anything dishonourable. There's nothing dishonourable in being frightened. I don't blame any man for losing his nerve. I've lost it myself at times, you're on the brink. In fact that's why after I'd been wounded again at Milne Bay, which would have been actually the third time although it was only twice

34:30 officially, when I got back to the unit the same doctor, Dr MacGregor, that we had at the last in Tobruk, had him in Tobruk, and he asked me did I smoke and I said, "No." I said, "Why?" and he said, "If you smoked occasionally, I think it might help to steady your nerves." I didn't realise I was showing it.

35:00 I'd never rolled a cigarette. I'd smoked a cigarette occasionally and didn't like it. I got a pipe and half the time I used to just hold the pipe in my mouth with nothing in it, chewing the stem. I did that until after I was discharged from the army. I always say that when I got married I couldn't afford it. I just gave it

35:30 away. I only smoked at night, mainly holding an empty pipe in my teeth. I'd be holding it between my teeth. I don't blame any man for cracking under fire. That's what I said from the start, I would not accept a commission until I proved myself under fire. I did not want to be one of those

36:00 that ran and left his men behind, and no man knows what he's like under fire. The strain and the tension at all times, you never know when you're going to be fired on, when you're going to be bombed. The main thing in Tobruk was the screaming Stuka bombers that used to come down and the scream of them. We

36:30 had no air support, nothing there, and they'd come down. You'd swear they were coming right at you, and they'd scream, screaming noises they used to make, the Stukas. They'd drop the bombs right at you, you could see the fellows leaning out the side laughing at you because they knew you couldn't fire back, you had nothing.

You talked a little earlier about how far you could dig your

37:00 **trenches because of the stone. In this position where you being fired on with artillery, what kind of protection did you have? How deep were our tenches, what kind of protection did you have?**

Well, the main trenches, the main fortification of Tobruk out on the outer line that the Italians had there, they were concrete. They dug them with machinery and they had tank pits all around them. We had no machinery.

37:30 We had nothing. It was only pick and shovel work, and back behind occasionally they might use dynamite, but up in the front where the Germans had broken through we only had a pick and shovel, not even a crowbar, and you'd get down to where the stone was, down there, and you, for the communication pit, trenches

38:00 between where the things were, to where you had your pits to fire from, you used to crawl along those. You used the dirt you dug out of those to build up on top of where you slept in and in front of your pits. If you didn't have enough there you went back behind you and dug dirt from there and brought it up

38:30 to build over the top there. You couldn't dig down deep. Sometimes if a shell landed there it might dig it a bit deeper.

How deep was it about?

Eighteen inches to two feet, that's about as far as you could go down without hitting the stone.

How comfortable could you make the ground to sleep on?

It wasn't comfortable, but you used to

39:00 just put something under you to sleep on. It got very cold in the desert, but the fleas and that used to keep you awake. They used to get infested with fleas. You couldn't wash. We only had a water bottle full of water per day and that had to do you for cleaning your teeth and shaving and anything else. You

39:30 couldn't wash, and for discipline purposes in our battalion you weren't allowed to grow a beard. There was none of that. You had to shave as often as possible and keep yourself clean. It was for discipline purposes. Then you used to use as little water as you could. Occasionally they used to bring up brackish water

40:00 later on that you could have a bit of sponge wash in, that's all.

We might just have to take that up after lunch because we've got to the end of the tape again.

Tape 5

00:37 **I'm just wondering if you can explain to me a bit more of the layout of Tobruk? Can you explain what the salient was?**

The salient, what we called the salient, was where the Germans broke through the fortified line around, when they attacked on the 3rd, 4th of May.

01:00 They occupied that portion of the fortified line where they'd broken through and we held that area, but we were in those little pits and that inside. We weren't in the concrete pits. They were in the concrete pits out on that land, and they commanded the high ground of Hill 207 where they

01:30 could overlook where we were. We were just dug in in that area in front of them. I suppose from where we were it was only a couple of hundred yards. It might have been a bit further from where we took it. They broke through a bit further and when they broke

02:00 through, and the battalion counterattacked and took some back off them, but that was as far as they got, inside the perimeter at Tobruk. They never got any further.

And how long would you stay sort of in the salient at a time?

I can't

02:30 remember now just how long we were in there. It used to be a couple of weeks or three weeks at a time, the tension all the time you were in there and the conditions, we used to be relieved even if it was only by another company of our own battalion. When we went into it

03:00 that last time we relieved the 2/43rd Battalion that were in there.

Can you tell me, take me through what a typical day would have been like when you were in the salient?

Well, you couldn't move around much. Most of the time you'd be lying down or trying to build up a bit around your

03:30 post. You used to have to have a shave occasionally or try and have a wash or try and clean some of the fleas out of your clothes. Put them out in the sun, take them off and put them out in the sun and see a few crawl out of them.

04:00 We could go, you know, move about a little bit even though we knew they could see us. We'd move back down say to our platoon headquarters or somewhere like that, but there was very little movement or moving about while we were up there. Any moving we did was more or less early morning or night to just move around. You didn't move too much because the tension

04:30 and you regarded any movement as being made by an enemy. So there wasn't much movement about.

When you were just sort of lying during the day, what sort of things would you be doing aside from what you mentioned about getting fleas out of your clothes and stuff?

Well, really nothing because we didn't have anything to read, we had nothing coming up there. We had no communications, no wireless or anything like

05:00 that at all.

Would you talk to other people around you?

We'd talk to our ones in the section and that sort of thing. Sometimes we'd crawl across to one of the other sections and talk to them.

What sort of things would you talk about?

I can't remember now. I suppose it was just about different people, what was going on.

Was there any

05:30 **sort of humour or anything that kept you going in that time?**

Oh yes, there was a lot of humour. There was always something funny going on. Occasionally our Salvation Army padre, old Padre Mac, he'd come up with his gramophone and play his records for us. He was the only one that wandered around much in Tobruk, he became famous for that of course. His gramophone

06:00 is down in the archives, down there in the museum in Canberra.

What sort of records would he play?

Just the old time records of those time. One thing we always played, and it became a theme song of ours, in fact we sang it at a funeral yesterday. This fellow that was there, he promised that wherever he was, a reunion and that, it was the verse of Sunshine on the Hill.

How does it go?

I've got it there somewhere.

06:30 "Shadows in the valley, sunshine on the hill, keep on shining until the sun comes shining through." I just forget it. I should know it. There was always something humorous. I remember one incident when we were up there. Of course the toilet, we didn't have one, so we'd just dig a little hole and we found a box and cut a hole in the seat of it to make

07:00 things a bit more comfortable, and in the afternoon a fellow in one of the other sections further along, we just had the one we used to use, he's sitting on it and they started shelling, so he finished up in a hurry and he was running for his dugout, and the shell landed and blew it away.

07:30 Flossy Owens, we used to call him. I don't know what became of him afterwards. He died years ago. There was always something you could laugh at.

Were there any times when you found it hard to laugh at things?

Yes, of course.

08:00 When I had lost Harry Elm, he happened to be out in front, out on the top when they shelled and before he could get to his dugout a shell landed close to him and he got hit in the, I heard him sing out, there were other

08:30 men out with him, they'd been trying to improve their dugout, and I was in mine and as I soon as I heard him scream and the shell, I dived out and I layed over the top of him while the shell fire was going on. Just an automatic thing you do. But he lost his legs from about there, and all this here was shot up and the bone sticking out, and at the time when

09:00 the shelling finished we got the stretcher bearer and got him away. They got him treated. He didn't know he'd lost his legs. We just kept talking to him. Of course they came up, and the stretcher bearer came up and gave him a needle and they took him away, but he died the next day. He was only eighteen.

What sort of things did you say to him?

You just keep talking to him and tell him that he's all right. He had a bit of a wound in his leg, but he'd be all right,

09:30 though he didn't know it was gone. We wouldn't let him look at it.

Would he talk back?

Pardon?

Did he talk back?

Yeah, he started screaming because he was in pain and that sort of thing. He started talking, just talking and saying about his leg. I kept talking to him, but all the others dived out. I ordered them back under shelter. I stayed out with him. It's just an automatic thing you do.

10:00 You think nothing about it. He'd been one of those that came over as a reinforcement and went to Greece when they were being evacuated, and he got evacuated from Greece and then he was in Crete and there when the paratroopers landed in Crete, and got out of that and came up to Tobruk eventually and ended up being killed.

Is there any sort of, I mean what happens when someone really

10:30 **close to you dies? Is there a service?**

No, because he didn't die there. He was taken back and you don't go back to any of the services, the ones back behind if they were buried. The Salvation Army padre was attached to our unit and he conducted most of the burials there. All those that were buried in Tobruk,

11:00 there's a picture in that book of the cemetery there, they've been removed now. They're buried in, I'm

not sure, there is a permanent cemetery at Tobruk. I think they stayed there in Tobruk, they were left there. I haven't been over there of course, but I think that cemetery is still there. Tobruk, there's nothing there now. It's a sort of deserted port I

11:30 believe. There's a few people live there, navy personnel and that sort of thing. It's still a fort, but just the desert.

And who told you the news that he'd died?

Pardon?

Who told you that Harry had died?

Harry had died? I don't know. Word gets through that he died. Probably came

12:00 back up from battalion headquarters or from the hospital, that's if they got him to the hospital. They probably did. There were a couple of hospitals there. One was in what they call the 'Few Caves', and they were all sort of a bit underground, and there was another one, a building there being used as a hospital but they used to bomb that occasionally.

When someone

12:30 **died would you talk about them a lot afterwards in the trenches?**

Not really that I can remember. They weren't replaced. He wasn't replaced. I didn't get any reinforcement to take his place. There was another chap that was wounded at the time. He came back, Merv Smith, he was out and he got a

13:00 bit of shrapnel. It wasn't real serious so he got treated and came back up to the post.

The fact that you were slightly more senior that some of these men, for example Harry, that you were a corporal, what kind of relationship develops?

I had a good relationship with my section because I never ever pulled rank

13:30 on them or anything like that, any more than what I had to do. I never ever put anybody on a charge sheet. I meaned to evade that, talk to them. The only time of course if they went absent without leave, that was automatic. They automatically went onto a charge sheet. You had to call the roll and if they weren't there, well they weren't there. You'd cover for them sometimes as much as you could. Occasionally when they'd been away for a couple of days you couldn't do it.

14:00 **Would they look up to you in any way or come to you for advice?**

Yes, they did. I had one lad with me, Sid Stevens, his photo is there, he was only a young lad and he was a nervous wreck. We couldn't trust him to go on sentry duty, we couldn't take him out on patrol or send him out on patrol, and I asked the old medical officer,

14:30 Dr MacGregor that was there if by any chance he could get him relieved and sent out of Tobruk and talk to him about it. He said he could do it, but if we could keep him there, even though he was a burden to us, like keep him there and keep

15:00 him in the section and he was there when the unit went out of Tobruk he'd recover from it. But if he went out as he was, his nerves shot to pieces, he'd never recover to it, so we had to keep him there. He was there when I got wounded and I don't know what happened to him after that. I never ever heard of him again.

How did you look after him?

I used to talk to him, just talk to him and

15:30 one night before he came in, I was there and he talked to me and asked me if I was ever afraid and all those sort of things. You know, you're talking.

What did you say?

I was afraid all the time. I said, "You've just got to fight it and beat it," and talked to him. We could never rely on him. You could never trust him to stay awake. Day and night there was always, say if there were two of you in a little pit, there was one fellow awake all the time

16:00 while the other had a couple of hours sleep, so that there was always somebody wide awake. Watching along the post all the time. We couldn't trust him. We'd just leave him and bypass him, let him sleep.

How did the other men in your section react to this?

Well they had to react to it because they knew the story and just had to

16:30 all help. There was nothing, you know, there was no way we could get out of it.

Was anyone mean to him?

Pardon?

Was anyone nasty to him about it?

No, not that I know of. After the chap that was with me, Wally Clark, had been a mate of, had been with Harry Elm in Greece and Crete, he put on a

17:00 act and abused the company commander, Loxton, that was there. He abused him and got put on the charge sheet and taken away and put in the boob [military prison], as we called it, and been charged. I didn't see him again, and

17:30 after we came home he went AWL [Absent Without Leave] there and the provos [Provosts – Military Police] were looking for him all the time, and I saw him again when I was in Sellheim camp after being wounded at Milne Bay and went on the staging camp there, I saw him in Charters Towers and I went in one night on picket. He was in the provos. That's where he hid.

18:00 They would have known who he was and what he was, but he didn't come back to the battalion. They were supposed to be looking for him and he was there in their own ranks.

Why did he abuse the CO [Commanding Officer]?

The conditions, and the way he carried on, he was a B as a matter of fact. He came

18:30 to the battalion. He was the cause of me being sent to the hospital when they went in the first place. He put me on a charge sheet and he was judge and jury because there was light shining from my tent and I wasn't even in it. I was away at Ikingi Mariut before we went up, and we never ever saw him except when we were back out of the lines in Tobruk. He came up to the front and he was known for what he was.

19:00 He was a barrister by trade. His father was the general manager of Burns Philp, a commission, and afterwards he was sent back to the AITB [Automotive Infantry Training Battalion] when we came back to Australia. We never saw him again and he had to be promoted and when we were up in

19:30 New Guinea the second time he came back to the battalion with the rank of major. He had to be promoted, that was the way they went on. I believe our CO tried to avoid having him back but he couldn't avoid it. I was left out of battle when they went over the Finisterres and he, up in the mountains there on Shaggy

20:00 Ridge he copped a two inch Japanese shell all to himself and fell about 200 feet down the mountain and nobody would go down the mountain and pick his body up, until they were forced to. One of the old corporals, or a sergeant by then in the battalion, old Jock Hall from Nambour he lived, or came from Nambour, I believe he said, "The best thing that ever happened to the battalion."

20:30 That's the sort of thing that happens in every battalion.

Do you think the conditions you were in at Tobruk were especially harsh because of him?

Harsh conditions?

Do you think that they were especially harsh because of this man? Do you think he didn't make them – ?

Well, he didn't do anything to help us. He didn't do anything to help his men, and there were different stories about him. One

21:00 story that we knew, we could neve substantiate them, it just gets through to you, that they sent up a forty-four gallon of drinking water by mistake and he had a tin bath and he poured out and had a bath to himself and then poured the water back in the thing, so the men wouldn't get any additional drinking water. Whether that was true or not we don't know, but you hear those

21:30 stories. Unless you see it and know it personally it's just one of the furphies [rumours] you get through. Occasionally we used to get a drum of brackish water and when we were back behind a little bit, so that we could have a little bit of a wash and wash our clothes if necessary, but on one or two occasions when we were back behind we went to the beach and had a swim.

22:00 Went down there and could wash our clothes and have a shave and a swim and clean up. Different ones on guard in case they came over shelling and strafing because German planes were the only, they had control of the air and occasionally a reconnaissance plane would come and they'd see what you were doing and send them over. They'd radio back and of course the next thing they were over strafing and

22:30 bombing. But he was disliked right from the start. In fact he joined us just before they went to Jaghbub and on parade, and he came to Don Company on parade there one day. He said he'd seen the best army in the world on parade in Berlin and we were no match for it, which didn't go down

23:00 very well with any of us. He'd been to one of those, Oxford or Cambridge [universities] or somewhere over there in England.

You mentioned that all your clothes would have fleas in them. What other sorts of bugs and creepy-crawlies were around the trenches?

There were lice of course. You get lice and there were scorpions there

23:30 around, and the fleas were the main thing and flies of course. There were droves of them, and then there was a desert rat that used to come around there too and they had a bush on the end of their tail. I've got photos of them and there's one on that. The rat, and of course Haw Haw [Lord Haw Haw – William Joyce, propaganda radio host for Germany] called us, 'we were living like rats in holes in the

24:00 ground', so that's where we took the name. We called ourselves the 'Rats of Tobruk'.

Do you ever remember hearing Haw Haw?

No, I can't remember him because we didn't have any radios or anything up in the front line or anywhere.

Did that name spread while you were still on the front line?

Yes, yes. It came though and it got around, and we were just rats, we

24:30 were rats living in holes. Of course we adopted the name, called ourselves the Rats of Tobruk, and there were fellows there that used to write poems about these things. In fact I had some that Wally Clark I spoke about, he wrote a few poems and I copied them out into my notebook and left it down in the museum in Kelvin Grove, poems in my notebook and a lot of my roll books and things like

25:00 that are down there.

Were you proud to be called a Rat?

Oh yes, we still are. We still are, it's a trade name that we keep, the Rats of Tobruk.

Lord Haw Haw might have meant it to be bad for your morale. Did it have any of this sort of effect?

No. No, made it better, feel better.

Why did it make it better?

Well, we knew that they

25:30 respected us and were trying to ridicule us, and we knew that they were trying to defeat us and get us out of there and they weren't doing it. We were holding them out and we were holding up Rommel's advance down into Egypt and all the while we were there he couldn't go any further.

Did it appeal to the Australian sense of humour at all?

Yes, the Australians have got

26:00 a sense of humour. You hear that, all the time there is somebody makes some funny remark or sarcastic remark, you know, that makes you all laugh. There was no, occasionally fellows living like that had a bit of an argument or a falling out. We had

26:30 the British Royal Horse Artillery in Tobruk and we had the Northumberland Fusiliers Machine Gunners. The machine gunners were behind the front lines and the artillery were behind them, and they said when we saw them, we used to

27:00 tell them that we weren't worried all the time we knew we had them behind us, and they used to say they weren't worried because they knew they had us in front of them. Each supported the other. We knew the British Army wouldn't give way at all, they'd fight to the last and they knew that we'd fight to the last too. All the while they were covering us behind

27:30 and firing over our heads, that sort of thing, supporting us. They did have what they called the bush artillery, the captured guns and some of the base units, that had been base units, and units from headquarter company and that sort of thing, rig them up and they used to fire them as artillery pieces using their own captured shells. They became proficient at it too.

28:00 **Just talking about the conditions in the trenches still, what does it feel like to have fleas in your clothes?**

It's not very comfortable. They're biting you all the time and you're scratching at them. You know you can't get rid of them. There's nothing there that we could put on our clothes like insecticides or anything

28:30 like that. We just had to put up with them.

On the whole what was the temperature like?

It was very hot in the daytime and cold at night. The sands of the desert grow cold, and they do grow

cold.

What would the heat be like during the day?

I couldn't tell you the exact temperature but there was no shelter except a little dugout that we had. There were no trees, nothing. Where we were there was only one tree that you could see in

29:00 the whole area. It was all just little camel bushes there.

What would you wear during the day?

Just shorts and shirt and quite often you'd have the shirt off so the fleas couldn't get at you, and just shorts on, and of course boots. You wore them most of the time because the sand was that hot on your feet. You'd take them off when you were resting.

Was there a

29:30 **problem with sunburn?**

Never thought about it. Nothing you could do about it. We didn't have our felt hats. They were tin hats all the time. Felt hats and things like that in those times were all left behind in your main kit. You only carried your battle gear in with you, which was a ground sheet and about half a blanket.

30:00 Up there in some places they did have their greatcoats with them because it was so cold. The heavy uniforms, they were back in the kitbags and left behind. [UNCLEAR] line as they called it.

What would you wear at night to keep you warm?

Just the same clothes.

Was it every night that you would patrol?

No, no.

30:30 It was only occasionally. You didn't patrol all the time. They took it in turns, it was in turn because you didn't send the same ones out every night. It only came down when it came around your turn for the battalion to send somebody out, or the company to send somebody out. Once or twice there were fighting patrols went out prepared to shoot up the, get in and shoot up the enemy, but it was mainly

31:00 reconnaissance patrols to see what was going on or to lay mines or something like that.

And how did the atmosphere change in the trenches when the sun went down?

Nothing really changed. It just became a little bit cooler, that was all. The moon came up of course eventually, you could see a bit. You couldn't see much, only just the normal

31:30 night vision because we had no night vision glasses or anything like that in those days that they've got now.

Was there more tension at night?

Yes, although they didn't do that much patrolling that we knew of there was always the chance that they were going to make a night attack and try and get through the wire, so you were always

32:00 short of tension. That's why you had somebody on guard every night, and then sometimes we used to put in certain areas, we'd send somebody out at night to a forward position where they could see and be hidden and watch during the daytime.

32:30 They were out there with very little cover and couldn't move sort of thing all day. They used to go out at night and come back the following night. We weren't left out then more than one night at a time.

Were there more shells being fired and this sort of thing at night?

No. Mainly

33:00 in the afternoon they shelled because they could see where they were landing. They do it from the observation posts and they could direct the shellfire. At night they'd be firing blind. They'd just have a fixed line. They used to shell the harbour more at night and they knew there'd be, suspected there'd be ships in.

So what were the sounds like at night?

33:30 Very little sound really except that you could hear motor vehicles moving about. They used to move about at night and they used to come up with supplies and that sort of thing. They'd bring food up at night and just before daylight in the morning they'd come up with the meals. As often as they could they'd send up a hot meal in little dixies and

34:00 separate it out for each section. You could go back to where the trucks came to and collect your supply of water or food or whatever it was. Mainly we had a supply in those little trenches at the front, was

goldfish, as we called them –

34:30 herrings and tomato sauce – those things, bully beef, dog biscuits – the hard biscuits – and tinned cheese. The tins used to swell with the cheese and bulge and it would turn to grease, but we still ate it and it didn't kill anybody.

What did it taste like?

Any food tasted all right.

35:00 Hard rations, but we knew it was only supposed to be so much a day and that was it. If they couldn't get the rations up you didn't touch your reserve. You had to rely on the reserve supply that was there.

When the Germans got the searchlights, the spot lights that we talked about earlier, was it more dangerous to bring in food at night?

No. They didn't seem to put them on the inside.

35:30 They used them mainly out to check on the ones that were out in no man's land. That's what they were frightened of. They didn't know where anybody was or what they were doing and there was frequently fighting patrols went out and attacked them as well there.

I know that you didn't smoke at the time, but were people allowed to smoke at night because of the light?

36:00 Well they weren't supposed to, but I suppose they did. When you were in under cover there and you could hide it they could smoke. But there wasn't such a big supply of tobacco because that sort of thing was rationed and the ones that did smoke, a lot of them were Egyptian tobacco and Egyptian smokes and of course we used to reckon that they were King Farouk's secret

36:30 weapon. The fellows that smoked reckoned they were rubbish, they'd only smoke them if they had to.

Tell me a bit more about the padre that you mentioned earlier?

Padre MacIlveen? He was the Salvation Army padre and he'd been around the bush. He'd been a battler in the Depression and he cut scrub. He'd done all the bush work and that sort of thing and he was

37:00 in the Salvation Army and he was allotted to the 2/9th Battalion. The Church of England minister was allotted, no, he and the Catholic padre were allotted to the 2/9th Battalion. The Church of England minister and I think a Methodist, I'm not sure, attached to the 2/10th and there was others attached

37:30 to the 2/12th. Old Padre Mac, he used to walk around there and he used to hold church services whenever he could back behind, but he'd come up, even right up the front there. He carried a little portable gramophone and two or three records and he'd come up and he'd have a few lollies or something and he'd talk to the men right up in the front and play his gramophone and talk to them. He became a legend

38:00 and I understood that some fellows that were killed out in the front line, they couldn't get back, he came up and conducted burial services. They were buried where they fell. He'd come up and conduct the service. The Church of England fellow I heard one time complained about it because he reckoned he wasn't an ordained minister.

38:30 But he never came up, he never came near us. Old Padre Mac was well liked. The Salvation Army was marvellous in action. They were always back behind and always had something wherever they could. Back behind they had their tent and you could go and get tea and biscuits and things like that. There was always something as close to the front line as you could get.

What sort of things would he talk to you about when he would come

39:00 **up to the front line?**

Anything and everything. Not so much religion, he never ever pushed that. He'd just talk to you about our home. He's always remember, always say when he was leaving, "Don't forget to write home," always. On rare occasions we got mail, it would come up and if you had written anything and he was there, a letter, he'd take it back. Of course we weren't allowed to say much. You just

39:30 said, 'AIF Abroad', that was all. Nobody knew where you were. You weren't allowed to say your unit or anything. That's why I disposed of all my diaries, everything I had so that I wasn't recognised. I did have a camera with me that I wasn't supposed to have. I got those one or two photos, but I didn't take photos of any consequence because they could

40:00 recognise who they were, the unit. You didn't wear any colour patches or anything like that. It was only your name, rank and unit. Normally all you were supposed to have with you was your pay book.

We'll just pause there because we've reached the end of that tape. We'll just take it up on the next one.

Tape 6

00:36 **Okay, you talked earlier about some of the men being fearful and not coping with the stress and the tension of the place. Did this manifest itself in many injuring themselves or self-injurious behaviour?**

Occasionally. I had,

01:00 my section had one fellow who was getting ready to get on patrol and the next thing there was a rifle went off and he'd blown his thumb off. It was supposed to be he had his hand over the muzzle of the rifle and he caught his blanket in the trigger

01:30 and blew it off. Of course you can never prove those sort of things. They went down as accidents. Very rarely they went down as self-inflicted wound. I know another fellow who was getting ready to go too out on one of the patrols and the next thing he'd taken his boots off and was supposed to be lifting a rock up on top of his

02:00 dugout to reinforce it and dropped it on his foot and nearly cut his toe off. Of course he went out too. Things like that, that was in Tobruk. There were a couple of fellows in the first action at Milne Bay. Supposed to be carrying a loaded cocked rifle over their shoulder pointing down and got a bullet through their foot. There was one

02:30 sergeant with us, he'd only just been brought out of the orderly room into the front line unit. He'd been back in the orderly room, an orderly room sergeant back at base and he'd been brought back to the unit. Came up into the platoon and the

03:00 first night in Milne Bay we bivouacked in a circle and all sort of laid down in front of it, and had perimeter around to fire there, and heard the rifle go off and sang out and they went there and his rifle was still smoking and he had a bullet below his knee, but he died of shock.

03:30 You can't prove it wasn't an enemy bullet that him, but generally expected. That's why I say I never blame anybody who lost their nerve. It can happen to anybody at any time, but usually they covered up, wounded in action, or in his case, wounded in action, died of wounds. You never

04:00 blackened a man's reputation.

Did you ever feel close yourself to feeling the pressure at all?

No, not really. I knew the pressure and the tension but I never ever felt anything like injuring myself.

And what about the preparation of the men, were they all well prepared in Tobruk for the fighting?

Well, they were all,

04:30 the original battalion and that were trained but the reinforcements weren't. It tells you in that book where Rollison said that they came up and his book, it's his war story, and he was only in the army a few weeks and they were sent overseas and told that they would be trained in Palestine.

05:00 When they got to Palestine, the camps there, some of them were sent to Greece to reinforce the 6th Division. Others, they came up to us in Tobruk. They weren't trained at all. They were unfamiliar with the weapons, and I think you read a little bit there that he said,

05:30 "Where possible, and there was such a shortage of weapons that they were taken back behind the line and trained in the use of those weapons." I was one of the instructors that was sent back. I used to go back from the company I was with, Don Company. They used to send me back. We'd go back there and we'd do weapon training.

06:00 Training with them, pulling the pieces, putting them together again blindfolded and things like that, and practise firing with them. We'd go through the motions because we didn't waste any bullets and didn't use any blanks and make noises like that. When it came evening we'd send them up and they'd probably go out on patrol with that weapon the same night. Tommy guns, that

06:30 we didn't have, then we'd been issued with the Bren gun. Previous to that we had the old Lewis guns that they used in the First World War. There were weapons like that, or we'd teach them grenade throwing or use of grenades with a launcher from a rifle, how to fit it on and the angles to hold it to get the trajectory

07:00 to fire it, fire the rifle, and that would send it out and project it away. There was training like that that they'd never had.

How did you feel about having to do this right in a war zone?

Well, I was a qualified instructor and it was part of the job to do it, to try and teach them because

07:30 it could have been that your life depended on them being able to use a weapon.

What about the idea that you were actually training when you were already there in the war zone?

We knew what was happening and knew it had to be done. We didn't want untrained men there alongside of us. You wanted somebody that was trained to use a weapon and could support you. They had to be trained and it was crash training.

08:00 **I mean the fact that they weren't trained when they were already sent. How did you feel about that?**

Well, disgusted. This was the whole thing, the army hierarchy more or less said, "We're sending men to their death." The same thing happened when untrained men were sent up in the islands. The CMF were trained a bit, but they weren't battle

08:30 trained, and then the reinforcements that the units got when they were up in New Guinea and that, they were breaking up CMF units here in Australia and sending them up as reinforcements to the AIF brigades and battalions but they weren't battle hardened. They'd come up, and there was a lot of us,

09:00 myself included after I recovered from wounds at Milne Bay, sitting in the staging camp at Sellheim champing at the bit knowing your battalion was getting shot to pieces at Buna Sanananda, and they were sending up raw reinforcements. That's where a lot of the old members of the battalion, especially the NCOs and the officers that

09:30 had been there and had come up through the ranks were killed trying to protect the untrained men. Well, they might have been trained in some things but they'd never been in battle before. You've got to have been thrown into it before really, to know just what's going on and what to do.

10:00 **Just pause for a second there. Okay, so did you ever communicate these kind of annoyances at being sent untrained men to senior officers?**

Yes, but there was nothing we could do about it. We just had to train them. We just had to take it as a matter of course, and I think the senior

10:30 officers complained about it too, especially the battalion commanders complained about these men being sent there. They were keen enough and they were in there, but usually when you get reinforcements they go with you on exercises and that sort of thing and mock battles and get some training. But these fellows were just

11:00 thrown you might say from being back here in Australia, some of them might have been in the islands, but straight into battle.

Were any particularly kind of, not hopeless because that's not the right term, but particularly unready, that you remember in Tobruk?

I don't know of any really personal ones that I can recall, but I know the ones that came

11:30 up that hadn't been trained on exercises with us, they'd only just done the basic parade ground training and that, and route marches and things like that, we were a bit frustrated at times because we had to train them, and I think some of them were a bit embarrassed by the fact that they

12:00 were coming in and felt that they didn't know what they were expected to do.

I was interested to know, you were talking about fleas and lack of water before and not being able to wash, was there ever a time when you would be able to wash at all after a few weeks?

12:30 As I said, in Tobruk occasionally when we were back behind we were taken down, we went down to the beach and had a swim. It was a harbour, but it was only when we were back and could walk down to have a wash, but by the time you got back to camp you were just as sweaty again. But you could wash your clothes in the salt water and let them dry, or even if they dried

13:00 on you, which didn't take long sometimes.

Tell us about finishing up at Tobruk. When were you given orders and what were you doing at the time you discovered that you'd be moving out?

I wasn't there.

Of course.

I was wounded just beforehand.

I've just forgotten.

I went out on a stretcher, so I don't know just what their orders were or what they did.

13:30 Apparently they didn't get much notice, they just handed over and were taken back and more or less

straight out.

Sorry. Actually I just forgot about that for a second. Tell us about, you got to telling us a fair amount about how you were injured. Take us through the process once you found out that your mate was dead, how were carried out and what was done to you?

Well,

14:00 I can remember walking back. I refused to leave there until I made sure he was dead. I couldn't see too much at the time, but they assured me. The fellows dived out of their dugout of course as soon as they knew it was hit, the same as I dived out before, and I can remember them getting me out, lifting me out,

14:30 taking bits of rocks and things that had been the roof of the dugout off me and getting me out, and I can remember saying about getting Jimmy out. They said, "No, he's gone, he's gone. You can't get him out." I said, I can remember saying, "He's breathing. I can hear the air and the noise coming out of him." They said, "That's just the noise coming out of his

15:00 stomach." I can remember saying that, and I said, "No, you've got to make sure he's alive, get him out, get him out," and the fellow finally said to me there's nothing he could do for him, he's blown into three pieces. I found out afterwards there were bits of bone

15:30 embedded in me. So then I said, "Yes," and they assured me he was dead and they came out, a stretcher bearer came up and they lead me out and took me back. I walked back to the platoon headquarters, back to there and I can remember looking at my platoon commander and I could see him

16:00 turn his head away and he was sick in the bottom of the trench because of the look of me. Then I think, I'm not sure whether they took me back or got me on the stretcher, and they got me back to the battalion headquarters and the commanding officer, 'Sparrow' Martin as we called him,

16:30 Lieutenant Colonel Martin who'd been the original CO, I got back to him there and I can remember a little bit of it. They told me I abused him and I told him exactly what I thought of the position, and not being a ranging mark and the men I'd lost and that, and I know he got his own tunic and put around

17:00 me. His own jacket put around me and called for the doctor. Dr MacGregor came up and he looked at me and he said, "Oh, it's you Sandy, I didn't recognise you." They didn't. I was powder burns and black and dirt all over me. Of course they got the ambulance and they took me back to the

17:30 Tobruk Hospital, one in the open air. I can sort of remember that, and I was there for a couple of days because they got an air raid over it and at the time there were holes in the roof and we were in there and there was no protection really. But I got out and then they took me down and put me on the Hotspur, another

18:00 British destroyer, and I went out on that. Ended up in the hospital in 2nd AGH [Australian General Hospital], I think I ended up in. I gradually got my sight back and the nurses used to come and sit alongside of me in the ward and pick the bits of stuff out of me, cordite and things out, and gradually cleaned me all up.

18:30 I know the doctor ordered drops put in my ears. I remember that, and the sister put one in the first ear and I reckon I felt it come right down to my shoulder. I jumped. "No way," I said, "That went right down, right down through inside my neck." She looked and she said, "Of course it would, there's nothing there to stop it." But they were amazed when my eardrums healed. They were both

19:00 perforated, both eardrums, and it was only a couple of weeks later that the unit was relieved and came out of Tobruk and one of the first things our CO did was come around the hospitals to visit the wounded, and he came in. I can remember, I was recovering by then, and he had his officer, his adjutant at the time with him.

19:30 I think he was his adjutant, and they spoke to me and I told them the position I was in and said I didn't know whether I'd ever get back to the unit. He said, "We want you back in the unit if at all possible," he said. After he'd gone he said, "Colonel Martin said when you get back to the unit you're getting a commission." He said, "You're to get a commission."

20:00 He'd gone by the time I got back to it. But I saw him years later just a couple of years before he died, not all that many years ago at a reunion in Brisbane. There were a lot of reinforcement officers there and some that had been with the battalion earlier and they were talking about it and they said, one of them said, "We could never understand why you weren't an officer," and I said, "It's

20:30 just one of those things that happened. It doesn't matter now. It's all water under the bridge. It doesn't matter now." Old Colonel Martin, he was brigadier then, retired of course, and he said, "You earned a commission. It does matter. You earned a commission and you should have had it." I said, "Perhaps the way they treated me kept me alive." Otherwise if I'd have got a commission like

21:00 my mates did, most of my mates did. They got their commissions in the field at Milne Bay and they told me I'd get one, they all got killed at Buna, the majority of them. They've ended up, so being left out of battle and the way I was treated possibly kept me alive. I was sent to different units and even divisional

headquarters and that to

21:30 instruct them and smarten them up on parade ground drill and things like that. I was instructing all reinforcements at different places, and of course as I said, I got shanghaied to the jungle warfare camp in Canungra. I was there for six months and the CO couldn't get me relieved. Even though

22:00 it was Colonel Clem Cummings by that time and he'd been promoted and transferred. The day my six months was up at Canungra they had another sergeant there to replace me and I went back to the unit.

Just back on your wound from Tobruk, I was interested to know what work they did on you in the Tobruk hospital. Do you remember any of

22:30 **that or what kind of things they were doing for those two days?**

Mainly treating, it's on the report there, superficial wounds, cuts, bruises. I had a big piece, like a scar there where they chopped a piece of my side, but nothing really big. Those three fingers were broken. It took years for them to work again, get those working. The knuckles of those fingers

23:00 across there were broken. It took years and years of manipulation to get those working again. As I said, there's a little piece of shrapnel in there and the doctor looked at that and he said, "That's sitting on a nerve," and he wouldn't touch it because he thought if he touched the nerve it might leave me with a stiff finger. It only hurts if I bump it. And I was sitting getting treatment one day and one of the

23:30 doctors came around and I said, "There's a little lump on the side of my head there and it keep weeping, and it feels to me as if there's something sharp in there." He had a look at it and he got his magnifying glass and he got a probe and he said, "There is something in there, there's something there." So he got the sister sent up and he had another look and

24:00 he dug in deeper and he pulled out part of the nose cone of the shell, the piece of metal that was there. "Oh," he said, "I never credited that was in there." He said, "Just as well you've got a thick skull." That was all the remarks made. I had that for years, I don't know what became of it. The bullet they took out of my leg when I was shot in Milne Bay was there,

24:30 it didn't go through. I gave that to my mother and after she died I got it back again. It's upstairs there somewhere.

Tell us, you went to one hospital, was that the only hospital you went to after you got this Tobruk wound?

As far as I know. I think it's on the records, I think it's the 2nd Australian AGH and from there you went to a convalescent camp

25:00 and from there a staging camp and back to your unit.

Go on, continue.

After I came out of there I went to, I corrected the thing when I looked at my records, they'd gone to Syria by that time. They were relieved from Tobruk and they were up in Syria and I went to the

25:30 base camp, staging camp, the AITB as they called it, in Palestine and that's when they sent me to the Middle East Intelligence School. From there I rejoined them in Egypt just before they came back to Australia, but we were destined to go to Java, but the Japs got there first. So we came

26:00 to Australia, we came home.

Tell us about that journey, what were you being told? What ship was it first?

We left the Middle East on the Nieuw Amsterdam and went to India and from there I can't remember the name of the, we went into Bombay and were there a few days and then we got onto a smaller boat.

26:30 I just can't think of the name of that boat. It's in that book that Rollison's written but I can't remember it. It had been just a passenger boat, more or less a cargo boat for inter-island trading and it was crude conditions on it, and we struck bad weather and we

27:00 had to do a submarine watch out on the bow of the boat. I know one night they had us on submarine watch out there, myself and the section I had then at that time, and it was so rough we tied ourselves on, and the skipper when he found out we were there he ordered us off the bridge. It was too rough. He said no submarine would operate in that weather anyway. So we got ordered

27:30 off the bridge. But people weren't too happy coming back. The conditions, we were crammed in like sardines down below decks. I know there were some tough boys in the army and they were putting on a bit of a disturbance and singing out, playing up a bit and making noise down below, and one of the officers who was there went

28:00 down to quell the disturbance and show his authority, and he went inside and one fellow said, I believe he said, "God, strike me pink, here's Errol Flynn." Errol Flynn got hit behind the ear with a tin helmet

and the next thing he knew he woke up in the ship's hospital. They were just at the stage they weren't going to listen to anybody like him.

28:30 **Was this a nickname?**

What?

The Errol Flynn?

Well, Errol Flynn was in his hey day around those days, a one man army, film actor. This fellow went down showing his authority and one, going to quell all the disturbance on his own.

How did the men,

29:00 **and did yourself feel about having to go fight the Japanese now?**

Well, we knew that when we came home, that we were fighting the Japanese because I had a fellow from New Guinea in my section at that time in New Guinea, and when Singapore fell and when Hong Kong fell

29:30 he said, "That's the end of Singapore, it will be next." He said, "I worked there on installing the guns protecting the harbour and they can't turn them. They'll only fire out to sea." And that's what they did, they came down inland and their harbour protection for Singapore was useless. They couldn't turn the guns.

30:00 So we knew what was on, and when we left India of course all the story was that we were bound for Java. As a matter of fact, some of the units, particularly a machine gun unit that landed in Java and their guns were on

30:30 another boat and they walked practically straight into a Japanese prisoner of war camp. This was the muck-ups in the army you get everywhere with administration. I know that for a fact what happened because the fellow who was in charge of that machine gun unit, I struck him

31:00 years afterwards at a reunion, he'd been promoted and was our original adjutant, Willy Wearn, he was a permanent soldier. W.W. Wearn, 'Weary' Willy Wearn we used to call him, and I believe in Singapore, Changi Prison, he was senior to [Sir Edward 'Weary'] Dunlop, but Dunlop

31:30 claimed seniority because he was a surgeon and he knew he could do more the men by being in charge than he himself could being a doctor. He could demand more for the men. But we didn't know where we were going and we were sort of on the ocean there and finally

32:00 there was no word where we were going to and during this time there was the argument between the Prime Minister, Curtin, and Britain about where we should go because the British wanted us to go in on the Java side and go into Burma from that side. The 14th British Army under General Slim were in there holding the Japs out of India, out of that area, and then we came,

32:30 the next thing we knew we were almost home when we got the word that we were in Perth, or Fremantle, off Fremantle, and then we came around and we landed in Adelaide, Port Adelaide, and off-loaded there and went to a bit of a makeshift camp outside Gawler and

33:00 our carriers and transport and that sort were on different boats. We had to wait for them to get here and unload them. In the meantime some got leave, the ones that were in their own state or close to it, and we went from there, we came up to a camp outside Tenterfield and we were there for a little while and some of us got leave

33:30 from there, the Queenslanders, and then from there we went to Kilcoy camp and from Kilcoy that's when we were sent to Milne Bay. We left from there and went to Milne Bay.

Tell us about the feeling about coming home after this hard campaign in the Middle East?

Well, we knew the Japs were in the war and we knew things were going well for the Allies over there and I think the majority, we felt this was our place back

34:00 here now to fight for Australia, save Australia.

How did you feel about coming back to Australian soil, albeit to fight, but how did you feel about coming back to Australia?

Well, we were home. We were fighting among our own people and we knew, even though they sent us to the islands, we knew we'd be fighting there, but we knew that the Japs were coming

34:30 down and that and they had stationed troops in New Guinea. The Americans were here, MacArthur was here and the Americans were here using it as a base.

Did you enjoy being back in Australia?

Yes, we got leave and met our own people.

35:00 There was no telephone in my home and they didn't know where I was or anything at all, and I just walked home, walked in in the middle of the night and woke them up.

How were they when they saw you?

Mother couldn't believe it, that I'd come home, I was back. She had a younger brother killed in the First World War.

35:30 **What kind of things did you do during this leave?**

I just went home. I more or less stayed at home and just relaxed. I just went and saw a few people that I knew around the home town. Then the CMF were camped all in there

36:00 and there was nothing much you could do. The Americans had taken over Brisbane and places like that and in the south. There were Americans everywhere.

How did you feel about that?

We didn't like them. What we found out about them, what we knew of them. They were, the majority of the first ones

36:30 that came here were base units, they weren't fighting units. A lot of them, especially in Brisbane, were Negro units. That's why they were on the south side. They weren't allowed to come over the bridge into the main part of Brisbane. Americans there, and they didn't ask any questions with them. If any of them played up they shot them, they're own troops. And of course they'd taken over everything. We weren't here long

37:00 enough much to get into tangle holds with them. Some of our fellows did, had fights with them. Then we went to Milne Bay and then they took the credit for everything. They didn't say the Australians were doing all this, it was Allied Forces. Everything that happened up in the islands, New Guinea and that, it was Allied Forces. The Americans were

37:30 putting in the airstrip at Milne Bay but they did no fighting there whatsoever at Milne Bay. They went over there and I believe they were outside Buna for weeks and weeks there and wouldn't move. They didn't move. They reckon while the Japs left them alone they left the Japs alone, and they

38:00 got the best of facilities of course, the best of food there and they took over everything and dictated what was happening with MacArthur. They only reason they came to Australia was they had nowhere else to go. It was the only base they could get. They'd been kicked out of the Philippines.

38:30 They'd been kicked out of everywhere. Pearl Harbour, they'd been bombed out of there and Australia was the only place they could form a base and reorganise. But they had the equipment, they had the air power, they had their navy here and that, and they had the airforce and the equipment to build roads and everything there to

39:00 deal the massive blows on the Japanese shipping, and the airforce to bomb their airfields. We didn't have them.

Did you ever talk to any of the Yanks in Australia or Milne Bay?

Not really. I spoke to one or two of them,

39:30 but I had nothing really to do with them. I know there was two of them, two of them that were so disgusted that they joined the Australians and went over Kokoda to fight. They went to fight with the Australians. Even up in the islands they wanted their

40:00 beer and ice cream and all the best of facilities. We were prepared to rough it. Well, we had nothing, we had to put up with it. We were always afraid of them because we never knew when they were going to strafe us, their aircraft. In fact they did strafe us in Balikpapan

40:30 because the word they claimed didn't get back to them. They were coming off the aircraft carriers and we were a mile further inland than we were expecting to be at that time. They thought they were bombing and strafing the Japs.

We'll just pause there because we're coming to the end of the tape.

Tape 7

00:35 **So tell me what ship you left Australia on?**

I can't remember now, it's in that book, he named them all. If you get the book I could tell you, if I could just see it

01:00 with my glasses on, but I just can't remember the name of it.

That's all right, we can come back to it. It's not that important. Do you remember anything about that journey?

Not really, except that we were on the boat and another day or so we

01:30 landed in Milne Bay.

Tell me what your first impressions of Milne Bay were like?

Jungle. I'd been used to the scrubs in Queensland, in scrub country. But the jungle there and the coconut plantations were something different altogether and there were no roads of any

02:00 consequence. They were putting down the airstrips but we just went ashore and walked inland to where we were going to camp outside Gilly Gilly as they called it, just all in amongst the coconut plantations. We just rested there waiting to see what was happening. There were no tents up, there was nothing there. There was just

02:30 a couple of native huts you could see along there. I said before, where my section stopped just up a few yards away, about fifty yards away, I could see a hut there that I recognised as an army cookhouse with smoke coming from it, and I just said to the section, "I'm going up here to see if I can cadge a cup of tea," and I went up there and the fellow

03:00 that came out of the cookhouse was my brother. Needless to say we got our cup of tea.

What did you say to your brother when you first saw him?

I think I might have said, "What are you doing here?"

What did he say?

Probably the same.

What did you talk about?

Nothing much really, except I suppose home from what I can recall,

03:30 and how he came to be there, where he'd been. He was with the CMF there then and they'd been permanently encamped for a while before they got shifted to New Guinea. He just more or less said that he had heard that units of the AIF were coming but they didn't know anything about it. They had heard rumours that the

04:00 Japs were on their way to invade New Guinea, but they didn't really know what was going on.

What did it feel like to see your brother there?

Surprised, because I knew he was in the 9th CMF because we were in the CMF together in Cooroy and I knew that

04:30 they'd been sent to the islands but I didn't know where in the islands.

What did it feel like to know that he was nearby now?

Well, I just knew he was there. We didn't see much of each other because we weren't there long before the Japs made their invasion attempt.

You mentioned that the first thing you noticed was the jungle. Was there anything else about Milne Bay, a smell or a feeling in the air that struck

05:00 **you?**

Just the dampness and things like that, and the natives that were there then had been of course under the rule of the church and the missions and things, and they were very protective of their womenfolk there. They had near where we finally camped, they had

05:30 one big hut there and the womenfolk slept in that hut and the men slept around the outside standing guard over them. Of course I can't speak for everybody, but there was no way at all we intended interfering with their women. We didn't in an overseas country and it

06:00 wasn't the general way of life for the Australian soldier. Just the short time I was there and you were walking along the road and there was a native coming towards you, they'd step sideways off the road to allow you to pass, and if you put half a tin of bully beef or half a packet of biscuits down they wouldn't touch it unless you gave it to them. Apparently before

06:30 the Australians had been there too long fraternising with them they'd lost all that, they'd thieve it every chance they got. That's what you get for fraternising with the native population after they've been treated differently by the missionaries and church people. They were taught respect, although the

07:00 natives at Milne Bay went out of their way to help the Australian soldiers. Any that were caught were brutalised by the Japanese, men and women, especially women, the way they treated them in the short time they were there, the brutality that went on. When we went back there this time for the dedication at Milne Bay we

07:30 still had their respect, the ones around the Milne Bay area. They really greeted us, welcomed us there and put on shows for us and treated us well with a meal while we were there, a cup of tea and sandwiches while we were there and things like that. They are different. The race of natives

08:00 in the Milne Bay area are different to the ones over the other side of the island, Popondetta. They are different altogether. They seem to be a cleaner race of natives there and they had their own little villages and that, but it's all clean, and the coconut plantations have all gone. It's now

08:30 oil palms for the oil. Of course they weren't in flower while we were there, but there's still the kunai grass and a lot of the jungle and that there that we saw along the coastal strip at Milne Bay when we first landed there. The airstrips and that have all changed, it's all different.

And how did

09:00 **you go about setting up your camp at Milne Bay?**

We just got allotted an area and we put our tents up. They unloaded the tents and we just put our tents up and moved into them.

What were your tents like?

The tents? They were just ordinary army tents, about eight to a tent. Of course we had no beds or anything like that to sleep on. We didn't even have a palliasse of straw there. We only had a

09:30 ground sheet and we were only there a few days and we heard the Japanese invasion fleet were on its way and where they were. Of course we struck our tents. We just pulled all the tents down and packed up our kitbags and things like that that we didn't need and they went into storage. We just went into battle

10:00 dress.

And how did you prepare for the Japanese to enter the harbour?

We did a little bit of route marching and we were helping unload the ships and doing the, putting the strips down, the metal down for the airstrips there, and did a little bit of

10:30 patrolling. I took one patrol at night through a jungle track and where we were down to where the 9th CMF were, down through there at night, and I know that a lieutenant from another platoon in our company went through on a different track into the same area where the CMF were camped and instead of being standing-to as we

11:00 were, we found them in bed. I was told when I got into where their camp was with a fire going and a tent, and I went over to it and it was the sergeant cook stirring up the fire about three or four o'clock in the morning, and he wanted to know how I got there. There were supposed to be men manning machine guns all down that track.

11:30 **How different was it taking a patrol out in the jungle than it had been in Tobruk?**

Well it was different, it was just a track more like a cattle track down through there and there were a couple of creeks we had to cross on a log. It was dark under the trees, in the dark you just had to more or less find your way and not getting off the track.

And how do you

12:00 **move differently in a patrol in the jungle compared to how you would patrol in the desert?**

You put your scouts out in front and you keep track of each other, within distance of each other, and in some instances you put something you can see on the back of the man in front of you so you can see him, but they only did that one patrol

12:30 through there because we didn't have time to do anything like that, to get any training before we had to prepare for the Jap landing.

And you said you'd taken all your tents down, so what were you sleeping on?

Just on ground sheets on the ground. We had half a blanket and half a two-man tent.

13:00 They were carried on your belt, half a tent, half a blanket and a ground sheet. We carried them on our back on our belt with our battle gear and ammunition pouches and ammunition in the pouches on the front of us.

What sort of defences had you set up around your areas?

We hadn't set any up because it was the CMF, we didn't know where

13:30 the Japs were going to land and they did have defences set up around the airstrip, but the CMF were manning those further up and they were up near KB Mission further up the coast, and to all intents and purposes they had no defences whatsoever set up. We just had to

14:00 wait and see where they landed, and as it happened they landed in the wrong place. They mistook, they were intending to land at Gilly Gilly where they knew we were and the depth of the harbour, but they landed further up the coast towards the strip, towards the point and had to come down from there. They

14:30 struck the CMF camp there in defence. Fortunately they got information that they were coming and they landed on Goodenough Island with their barges and they put them all there with their barges that they intended coming across to the mainland on, and the airforce

15:00 that were there, the few that were there, they strafed them and sank most of their barges. Then when they landed they landed where, a different place than what they intended to, I call it Wagga Wagga, we sort of said 'Wagga Wagga' when we were there. But it was mainly the

15:30 air force, well, the Battle of Midway, the navy stopped a lot of their navy getting in there, and it was the airforce, the few that were stationed on Milne Bay, Australian air force that strafed them and bombed them and sank their boats and killed a lot of them before they got there. Later during the invasion, I believe since

16:00 that they intended to make a landing on the other side of Milne Bay and come across the point, the track across there. There was about 2,000 of them and the airforce got onto them and sunk them. The navy sank a lot of the boats that were bringing more reinforcements in.

16:30 They never reached Milne Bay. So it was more or less navy action and the air force that did the most damage to them. We did the damage because the ones that did land, we stopped them from getting a foot hold there and taking Milne Bay. From the information we

17:00 received they did not know that we were there at Milne Bay. They knew that there was a force there, a small force, but they did not know that our brigade had landed there, that there was a larger force than they expected at Milne Bay.

Tell me about the first time you met the Japanese at Milne Bay?

17:30 Well, when they first landed it was the CMF that struck them first, the 61st Battalion CMF, and they fell back to the airstrip and they met them there and they were behind cover at the end of the airstrip, and the Japanese came down, marching down there and singing out and

18:00 yak-highing and that, and they had to cross the open airstrip and the Australians were waiting for them. They just mowed them down. The 2/10th had been sent up there too. They met them at the airstrip and they denied them actually getting across the airstrip. We don't just how many Japanese were lost or killed there, but they estimated

18:30 there was about 800 killed there. We know further on where there's a bit of a memorial to 'Bluey' Truscott, who got shot down there. Strafing at tree level he hit one of the trees and crashed and got killed. There's eighty buried in one grave there. They just bulldozed them in and dug a mass grave and buried them. But

19:00 nobody will ever know just how many men the Japanese lost. They lost practically all their invasion force. If we hadn't have held Milne Bay they had access to, they had the airstrip there, they could have mobilised the force and taken Port Moresby no trouble whatsoever.

19:30 They had landed at Buna and they were coming across the ranges there and they got to the end of their supply line at Kokoda. That's about as far as they could have possibly got across there. But if they had have got Milne Bay with the airstrip and the harbour there, they could have reinforced their

20:00 men and they could have come around and taken Port Moresby and they'd have been right behind the Australians that were defending Port Moresby, and then there was only just a little string of islands between them and Australia. So the Battle of Milne Bay was like Tobruk, it was the turning point of the whole war. The 2/9th were the first troops to defeat –

20:30 or the 18th Brigade – the 2/9th was part of it, were the first troops to stop the German army at all and we were the first troops to defeat the Japanese on land.

And tell me about when you first me them, when your battalion met them?

Well the other battalions went in first. The 2/9th was kept in reserve.

21:00 2/10th went in on the airstrip. They were relieved by the 2/12th and they pushed them back to KB Mission. There were a few huts, it had been a mission station there, KB Mission, and they got stopped there. The Japanese were falling back and defending because they were under cover and up in the trees and we had to drive them out. The 2/9th, we were

21:30 sent in, went up from Gilly Gilly. Some of them went up the road to KB Mission. Some of us got in little dinghies, little launches and we went across the point and the harbour and landed in KB mission, and that was in the afternoon by the time we got organised there.

22:00 The 2/12th had been held up and C Company of the 2/9th relieved the 2/12th and they went in and they drove the Japs back a bit further and they were held up. I was with Don Company, the 2/9th, we went inland on the flank and came down on them from the side and we got to

22:30 a creek there and that's where we stopped for the night. We bivouacked there and to bivouac, what we did was fell all the scrub, the low lying scrub and that in the perimeter, just cut it all down with bayonets and our what's its that we had, knives in our belt,

23:00 machetes, and we put it all level to the ground as much as we could, and all laid on the ground sort of inside it and had men standing all around the edge of the jungle to fire at any noise outside during the night.

23:30 When we first met them we went in on the flank of C Company and we didn't strike, or I didn't strike much resistance there, but there was a little bit of resistance when we drove them back. They had snipers up in trees and things like that and we lost men.

24:00 That was at, we got held up on the creek. We were going in there and my section that I had, one Japanese soldier was on the bank of the creek. He came trotting out of the jungle there and we spotted him before he spotted us and they cut him down, rifle fire and machine gun fire.

24:30 Then we went a little bit further down and we struck a couple of machine guns, light machine guns being manned and I lost one man there. Two actually, he was number two on the Bren and I was alongside of him and they fired, hit across, went across the front of me and blew his stomach out and he died the next day. His brother was my lance

25:00 corporal, and they engaged the machine guns there and finally overtook them and they went back across the creek, and that's where we stopped. It was getting late in the evening. That was our first encounter with them.

How would you compare being in action against the Japanese compared to the Germans?

Well, different warfare altogether because what we'd seen of the Japs and what we'd heard of the atrocities they were committing,

25:30 and what we saw of what they had done, bayoneting fellows tied to trees and women with their breasts cut off and all sorts of things they claim didn't happen.

Did you see that happen?

Some of it. I can show you the war trials, what was done and war criminals, what they did. We treated them just as animals, no mercy with them. They acted like animals.

26:00 But it was different altogether because we'd been used to open warfare where you could see your enemy. There they were up in trees, they were lying doggo among their dead and then they'd hop up behind you and shoot you. So we got the word it had happened. We were told to take no prisoners and make sure that every one we saw was dead,

26:30 just make sure. Put a couple of bullets into them.

Was that a hard order?

Well it was a hard order. It was a matter of survival. As I said, what we'd heard of what they were doing and what they'd done in Malaya and Singapore and over there, the atrocities they committed, we didn't more or less regard them as men at all. We

27:00 regarded them just as animals.

Who told you the stories you heard?

It came back through the grapevine as you say by word of mouth and by news items that we picked up and what we were told about them, what was happening. We were told to take no prisoners, unit orders, unless we wanted a prisoner for interrogation.

27:30 In fact at Milne Bay when they heard they were coming we had orders to sharpen our bayonets. They set up grindstones and that putting an edge on all the bayonets and machetes that we had to cut scrub with.

It is a hard thought to think about, taking no prisoners?

Well, it's either you or them.

28:00 They showed no mercy, so you don't either in the heat of battle. It's a different matter when it's all over.

Does that stay on your mind when it's all over?

Not really. It fades with time.

Was there anyone amongst your section who found that hard?

They didn't say. We didn't, we knew what had to be done and

28:30 there was no hesitation when it came to firing. You just fired at them and it was close quarters. It wasn't like out in the desert when in most cases you didn't see who you were firing at. It was just a long-range thing. It wasn't the desert warfare that we struck. It was different to the

29:00 trench warfare say on Gallipoli and France in the First World War. We didn't do any, we were desert fighting. We didn't fight in towns at close quarters. We hadn't fought at close quarters there, not in my unit.

Even if like you said, you know what you're doing is right, is it a more

29:30 **emotional kind of fighting, fighting at close quarters?**

Well, it's more or less you can see the one you are fighting, and he's the same as you. He's probably just as frightened. He's fighting for his country or fighting for what he believes in or what he's been ordered to do and you just do it. When everybody is in it and

30:00 all the firing is going on you can't guarantee that it was your bullet that hit anybody because there were thousands of bullets fired that hit nothing. You're just putting down a wall of fire. It's just more or less unlucky if you get hit with one of them.

You mentioned in Tobruk there was so much tension all the time, was this similar to Milne

30:30 **Bay?**

Well, we didn't have, the short time I was there we didn't have time. You felt the tension, you didn't know what was in the jungle. You couldn't see in the long grass, kunai grass. You didn't know who was up a coconut tree and somebody lying dead, doggo in the grass. You just didn't know. You were tensed up all the time. Just

31:00 tense and watching and listening all the time, just never knowing when you were going to get fired at or when you expected to see a Jap hop up in front of you.

How does this tension affect you?

Well, your nerves are on edge. You're just tensed up all the time wondering what's going to happen next.

31:30 **Does it affect your body in any way? Do you shake?**

You're shaking all the time. If it's not from being wet and miserable it was from nerves, tensed up nerves. Your brain might be clear, but your body shakes.

32:00 **After the first action where you met the Japanese that you described to me, was there any sort of reconsidering of the way you were fighting?**

We had to drive them back. They were falling back and they were in position in the grass and we had to go forward and more or less dig them out, find out where they were and expecting to be fired on at any moment.

32:30 When I lost my first man I stayed with him and I lost, I was ordered to stay there until stretcher bearers got him out, he died the next day. His brother had gone out, and the platoon commander I had, he was only a sergeant, he hadn't got his commission then, and he ordered me to stay with him until the stretcher bearers came up and took him out. Then I was on, the

33:00 section had gone on and I was looking for them and the company commander came along with another platoon and he said to me, he told me to tag along behind him until I found the rest of my platoon. He had the job, we had to go inland and go around across the creek and go around behind and come in from the rear on that creek where the Japanese were. We thought they were still there.

33:30 We got around behind them, it was hard going and no telephones or no communications or anything, and I just tagging along with him. We came in behind them and we struck equipment and a Japanese officer came trotting back towards us and he spotted us and he pulled his revolver and fired at us and shot one of our party

34:00 in the stomach, so we had to fire at him. And the others with the noise and that, we knew there were more of them further in towards the creek, so we had to retire out of there and we had to carry the fellow out. We had to get him, we had a stretcher bearer with us being company headquarters, we had a stretcher bearer and we had to get him on the stretcher and carry him out, and then do a detour back

34:30 around and come back around back to our own troops on our side of the creek. When we got back the CO had two companies ready to make an assault across the creek, and the company commander that we

had then, Captain Hooper, he'd been with us from the first, but it was his first action, he'd been back at the ITBs [Infantry Training Battalions], he relieved him of his command

35:00 and sent those two companies across the creek. The Japs were there waiting for them and they got slaughtered. That's where John French won his VC [Victoria Cross].

Why did he do that?

I don't know what the real reason was, and I've maintained it all along, if he'd have listened to Captain Hooper he would not have sent them across that creek because apparently he intended to bring down

35:30 an air strike or an artillery strike. I don't know what happened, but then we went in without that barrage down in front of us and the Japs were there waiting in position, waiting for them, and they ran into heavy machine gun fire and mortar fire and that and they had to withdraw

36:00 back across the creek. That's where John French won his VC. There were other ones reckoned that were earned there. Then they withdrew back to the position where we were and we dug in there for the night on that side of the creek. The next morning when they sent the troops forward they'd withdrawn further back.

36:30 There were a couple of wounded lying over there, our wounded. They recovered them and got them back. From then on I was with, I had regained what was left of my section and our platoon sergeant had been wounded and the

37:00 platoon commander said to me then, he said, "You're now the platoon sergeant." I was the next in line. I said, "Well, can I stay with my section until the action is over and do both jobs?" He said, "Yes, if you want to." So I was, I stayed with my section and I was forward section

37:30 in the advance forward there. We came to what had been one of their headquarters at Wagga Wagga where their supplies were and barges, and all the medical equipment where they had been treating their wounded all laid out and stuff there. We took that and stayed there and then another section,

38:00 a platoon then was told to take over as the leading platoon and I went back, the platoon I was with, we went back behind them. They went across a creek there and their officer in charge of them left them there and he went back to

38:30 company headquarters. He wanted to get further orders, and the Japs were waiting for them and they, the 17th Platoon, and they opened fire on them and I forget how many were killed and wounded out of that platoon, and I went in, was ordered to go in and cover them as they came out. I went in

39:00 giving covering fire and firing into the bushes. You couldn't see any more or less. The Japs were under cover. You'd just fire to where the noises were coming from. An occasional one you could see. They got the order that the platoon were all out and to withdraw. So I ordered my section back, and I'm coming out backwards and facing them and I got a bullet up through the leg up here.

39:30 I was carrying a Japanese revolver that I took off an officer that no longer wanted it, hanging off a lanyard in the back pocket of my trousers, and it bounced that out of my pocket and the bullet didn't go through. It was a big blue lump hanging in there, and I got myself back. Walked back, got myself back out to where the battalion headquarters were and they had the other wounded on the ground there and

40:00 then I laid down on the ground and my leg went stiff and I couldn't move it. Then they got ready for a counter attack. They thought the Japanese would counter attack, but anyway they didn't counter attack.

We'll just stop there for a second because we're going to reach the end of that tape.

Tape 8

00:37 As I said, I got myself back to the battalion headquarters where the stretcher bearers and the other wounded were, and they were preparing for a probable counter attack, and when I laid down my leg went stiff and I couldn't move it. They

01:00 went forward and the Japs had withdrawn. So that was in the afternoon, so they bivouacked for the night. I got taken back with the other wounded and I thought, well with the wound, the bullet I knew was there, I thought they'd just take it out and within a week or so I'd be back with the battalion. Instead of that

01:30 they put me on the hospital ship, the Manunda, that had come in and brought me back to Australia. The following morning when the battalion moved forward the Japs had evacuated. They had all gone, except for stragglers. I was one of the last wounded and I never got back to Milne Bay. They brought me back to Australia on the hospital ship, stuffed around. I ended up at the old Glennie [Girls'] School

02:00 that had been turned into a hospital in Toowoomba. By the time they got around, they were going to

operate and take the bullet out, all the dirty pieces of my trouser leg, my trousers and that had gone in there with the bullet, it had turned septic and I had septicaemia all up in my stomach. I was out of action for longer than I should've been.

02:30 I thought that they'd just take the bullet out and clean it up and it wouldn't be too long before I'd be back with the battalion again. Instead of that I ended up in the hospital and I didn't get back to the battalion. In the meantime they went from there, they went up into action at Buna and Sanananda where they lost half the battalion, more than half the battalion.

03:00 Horrific things there, so that's another thing that saved my life probably because the mates that had got their commission, corporals and sergeants and different people there that had been promoted, they were all killed or badly wounded at Buna and Sanananda.

03:30 It was just the luck of the draw the things that happened.

How bad was your leg, what was it looking like?

Well, it didn't look too bad. It was just a bullet hole in the front there and a big blue lump on the back where it hadn't gone through. Actually it didn't knock me down. It just felt as if somebody hit me with a hammer.

04:00 A bullet, I knew I'd been hit. I knew that I stiffened the leg. Apparently the bullet just touched the bone and flattened on one side where it touched the bone and went around. It didn't cut any large blood vessels, but ever since I've had varicose veins in that leg. The battalion never recognised –

04:30 the army never recognised. The surgeon that operated on my varicose veins later on in life said it amazed him the way repatriation doctors think. He said, "Of course it caused the varicose veins." It cut off the blood supply down there and the other veins had to take over. It

05:00 hasn't caused me any worry.

Was it painful after a day or two?

Not that I can recall. No more than anything else. I was on crutches of course. My leg had gone stiff and I couldn't walk properly. I know I was on crutches in the hospital and they reckon it was funny in the Glennie. They came along

05:30 to the ward, to the bed when they were going to operate on me and the patient wasn't there. I was in the toilet. This had gone septic and I had diarrhoea. I was in the toilet. They came looking for me to take me into the operating theatre.

What was the hospital ship like?

It was good. One thing,

06:00 the Japanese warship that used to come in there, they hid behind it and fired over the top of it, but it was after they'd sunk the one here, the hospital ship they sunk. They used it as protection. They put searchlights on it and saw what it was and fired over the top of it, but they didn't attempt to board it or anything at all. We were on it and of course we were helpless.

06:30 We had no arms or anything, we couldn't have done anything if they had've boarded it.

What was the journey like, lots of men with wounds? What was the ship like?

It was full of wounded people, mostly in the beds on the hospital, nurses on board. When they were firing over the top of it one

07:00 of the nurses came and she was hanging onto the bed between me and the other fellow in the bunks and she was shaking that much it was shaking the bunks. She said to us, "What do you do when you're under fire? Do you pray?" And the fellow alongside of me said, "You're too busy trying to save your life to be bothered with praying."

07:30 We talked to her and calmed her down.

What was it like seeing women again?

Well, we hadn't been all that long away from Australia so we didn't have that experience really, being all that long out of contact with white women. There were only two times when we were in Tobruk, that was the longest period that

08:00 there were no nurses or female nurses in there, but once we got back to Egypt and Palestine to the hospitals, there were white women and women around, and once we came back to Australia we had leave and were close to towns and that sort of thing, so it wasn't that we'd been away from contact with white women for any length of time.

08:30 **Tell us about this hospital that you were put in for this operation to remove the bullet? What was that like?**

It was the old Glennie Girls' School in Toowoomba that they'd taken over as a hospital and turned it into a hospital with the normal wards and doctors, army doctors and army nurses and

09:00 what they called the Voluntary Aid Detachment, women working there as orderlies alongside the hospital unit, and men from the army hospital units. It was just like an ordinary hospital. Different doctors and surgeons working there, all in army uniform of course, army doctors. Then once we could get about at all

09:30 we had to wear their blue hospital units but they'd give us leave to go down town. We had a reasonably good time while you were in there, unless of course you were mortally wounded and couldn't get about. They suffered quite a bit. But like myself, once they operated on it and got the bullet out I healed up fairly quick and was able to get about.

10:00 **What kind of things would you get up to in town?**

I didn't get up to anything actually really. People you knew, you'd go and visit them or go to the pictures or just walk around town or something like that if you had a leave pass. I overstayed my leave one night and they put on a surprise

10:30 inspection. I was only a couple of, I overstayed my leave so I only got remonstrated with. It was just one of those things that used to happen. I misjudged the time and was a bit late getting back.

Take us through what they had to do in the operation. Was there anything involved in it to remove the bullet?

11:00 **What did they have to do for you?**

I went under the anaesthetic like an ordinary operation and they operated on it and took it out and bandaged it up and put me back in the bed. From there they just treated it until it healed.

And what about the septicaemia?

Well, that cleaned that up, treated. Once the wound had been cleaned out and the bullet removed

11:30 the infection cleaned up. I heal pretty well, even now I've had sunspots cut off and such like and no problems whatsoever. I just heal without any complications.

Where were you to next after this period in hospital? Where did you have to go after hospital?

I went up to the staging

12:00 camp at Sellheim outside Charters Towers. When the battalion came back to Australia I rejoined the battalion.

Did you hear news about how they'd lost a lot of men?

Yes, we knew that. We were, well some of us reckoned we were fit and we were at the staging camp as they called it at Sellheim and we wanted them to send us up

12:30 because we were battle hardened instead of sending in raw reinforcements. They didn't do it. There was only one man that I know that was there. He was a lieutenant, Lieutenant Herron. His father was a brigadier. He was wounded at Milne Bay and he was at Sellheim and he got one of the Yank airmen and got flown back

13:00 up to Buna and rejoined the battalion and was killed. The rest of us from the brigade, there were hundreds of us being held there when most of us thought we should be back up with the battalion.

Was there ever any thought that you'd have enough, you'd been in the Middle East, you'd been in Milne Bay?

Just the thought that they

13:30 were your mates and they were in action and you weren't. You felt that you should be with them.

How ready were you to go back into fighting a war, apart from your mates, how were you coping with the idea of having to go back and face potential death?

I was ready to go because I'd been certified as

14:00 B class for at least six months and I didn't tell them. I went back to the battalion.

Why wouldn't you?

I didn't think there was anything wrong with me. Then when they were going over again I nominated to the doctor, and a lot of them were parading and trying to

14:30 get out of going, different ones trying to get out of the battalion, and I nominated to see him and he said, "What's wrong with you?" And I said, "Nothing." He said, "Well, why are you here?" I said, "Well, I

understand from my papers that I'm B class and I'm not supposed to, and I want to be reclassified as A class, so that I can go into action without

15:00 the battalion getting into trouble for not leaving me behind." So he just said, "Oh," filled in the papers and got me reclassified as A class.

He didn't check you out?

A little bit, but he knew that I'd been with the battalion. I hadn't been on sick parade or anything.

How was your leg coping? How was your leg?

15:30 Good.

Not now, I mean back then?

Then it was all right. It was all right. Only one thing that I never told them, that after Tobruk and after having my eardrums burst I flinched when I was using the rifle, the discharge, the noise. I tried to get into the paratroopers, tried to transfer to the paratroopers and the doctor I went up against

16:00 had treated me at the 2nd AGH overseas and he said, he shook his head and he said, "No, your ears would never stand the drop from one altitude to another." I had tried to transfer previously from the battalion and the acting adjutant

16:30 at the time got my application through and he called me up and he said, "We can get you killed quick enough here without you going there," and he tore the application up.

How about now with your ears?

Well that's what I think might have affected them when I went to New Guinea, the old noisy Hercules bombers, they were very noisy, even though they

17:00 gave us ear plugs for the ears. I didn't think that affected me at all but when I came back I lost all my balance. I couldn't balance myself at all and I'd stagger and that was for quite a while, and I went to the doctor and they did a scan and the only thing they

17:30 could come up with, and there was a lot of it going around at the time, was a viral infection inside the middle ear, inside where they couldn't get at it. It was a virus and they could do nothing about a virus, and there were young people around the district that had the same problems around that time. I eventually got over it. It comes back every now and again for no reason. It seems to be

18:00 just suddenly hits, and when I was up I saw him a week ago or so because I had to go up for an examination for a driver's licence. I've got to get a medical certificate every twelve months, and I told him about it and he said that once I've had it it will keep coming back. It's just one of those things that you can do nothing about. That's why I feel

18:30 I'm better without shoes on. It seems to affect me when I put shoes on, and especially shorts and long socks tight around the leg, and on slippery floors, a shiny floor. I seem to get that uncertainty that my feet are slipping out from under me and then it will pass. When I went away yesterday, going down to that funeral I carried a walking stick with me just in case.

19:00 The way it affects me a walking stick is no good to me because you want to grab something and this arm won't work so I've only got one arm to grab at anything with, and a walking stick is no good because it only stops you from falling. That's the way I feel about it, but it's better than nothing. Normally I don't even carry a walking stick. I've got it, they gave it to me in

19:30 Greenslopes Hospital when I had my spinal surgery. They issued me with a walking stick but I've never needed to use it, but they gave it to me for nothing so I took it.

Good on you. On being staged there, so you would flinch

20:00 **with a rifle, how would you disguise this from other people?**

It was only when I was aiming and doing, it was all right when, I found it out more when I came back and joined the rifle clubs. As you fire you sort of flinch your head as it pulls off, but it doesn't worry you in action because you're not really

20:30 aiming. You don't get up unless you're a sniper. You don't get up and take aim or anything. You're just firing at each other and it's more or less snapshots. If you're using an Owen gun or that sort of thing it doesn't matter because it splays the bullets anyway. Mainly you fire from the hip when you're going forward.

21:00 You've got your rifle and you don't get time to get it up to your shoulder. You mainly fire from the hip and hope that you hit somebody, hit something or at least wound them. But nobody when you're going forward, and everybody firing, nobody can say definitely that they hit them, that it was their bullet that hit anybody. Some do, some don't but if you've got a machine gun and there's only one fellow in

21:30 front of you, you fire in a hail of bullets, well of course he goes down, at least you can consider that you've hit your target.

Tell us about when you got news that you were going back out there to fight the Japanese after being staged in Queensland?

Well, the battalion were back in Australia then. They were back here and I joined

22:00 them and more reinforcements came up and just went on with normal training and doing bivouacs and things like that, but a lot of the time I got sent to other units as an instructor. I know the divisional headquarters reckoned that the men attached to divisional headquarters

22:30 like the office staff and base staff and that were getting lax and lazy and undisciplined. So they wanted them put back on the parade ground doing parade ground drill, rifle drill and that sort of thing, and smartened up again. So I got sent from my battalion there to do the training and things like that. That was there, and the reinforcements, different

23:00 ones if they were put on parade ground drills to smarten them up on the parade ground or to give them weapon training, I would be there as an instructor. That's probably what saved me. They used me and when we went back over to New Guinea I used to be seconded to

23:30 the New Guinea force headquarters for things like that. Then when the unit went over the Finisterres there, went into action there, I got left behind at Port Moresby as what they call left out of battle. It was the personnel that they considered could form a nucleus of a new battalion

24:00 if they suffered heavy casualties. That's when I understood I was left out. They told me I would eventually, because there were no more promotions in the field, there were so many reinforcement officers coming up from disbanded units that there were no more field commissions and I had to come back to do the officers training school to get it. That's what I understood. They called me out and sent me, I came back to Australia and they gave me

24:30 a few days leave and I had to report back into Brisbane. I reported into Brisbane there and they sent me to Canungra. I looked on my papers there, it was authorised by New Guinea Force, not the CO of my unit. When I found out I was Canungra I couldn't do anything about it. They said I was there

25:00 and I had been seconded there for six months. I wrote to him and told him where I was and asked if he could take me, if I could return to the battalion. I saw the telegram that they got there, "Services urgently required by the unit in the field. To be returned immediately." They showed me it. They wouldn't let me go.

25:30 I had to serve my six months there. Even though he'd been promoted and gone, at the end of my six months there they had somebody, an AIF instructor their to relieve me. I was one of the first AIF officers, I think if not the first AIF instructor who went to Canungra general training school. Up until then they were all CMF officers and NCOs that

26:00 hadn't seen action or anything like that that were doing the training at Canungra. They were training them in the wrong things, things that we didn't do in jungle fighting, and from then on I got sent there and they sent AIF men that had seen action to Canungra as instructors.

What were the wrong things they were teaching?

26:30 Just silly things. They were killing men, forced marches carrying heavy equipment. See who could do it the fastest, and they were jumping off towers fully clothed and fully equipped into ice cold water at Canungra in winter time, boots and all on. Things we never did. Never even thought of doing.

27:00 These forced marches of men that a lot of them were in office jobs in the units at base headquarters and they used to do this course, and then a forced march as they called it down to where they went under fire with machine guns firing live ammunition over their heads at Wasp Creek, fully equipped, ammunition and everything, and the officers had competitions

27:30 to see whose unit could do it the fastest, and if the fellows fell out with blistered feet exhausted and couldn't do it, they had to stay there and do another course. I used to tell them what a lot of bull it was but it didn't do me any good.

What were the right things you were teaching?

They should have been teaching them jungle craft and scouting and things like that, what to expect with Japs and Japs jumping

28:00 out in front of them unexpected, and booby traps and things like that, bush craft. I took a platoon of Victorians out on bivouac and teaching them how to patrol with scouts moving through the jungle and what to listen for and what to look for and that sort of thing, and the others coming

28:30 up behind them, and they had to camp of course and cook their own meals and I made a camp fire and I cooked them a damper in the coals and we killed a carpet snake and I cooked him for them, to survive in the jungle, in the field, survival, and

29:00 showed them what fruits like wild passionfruit and raspberries and things like that that you can eat. I grew up in the country and they're the sort of things we knew, knew what you could do and how to make a campfire and cook and as I say, make a damper out of flour and stuff

29:30 and cook it in coals, how to survive.

Did you enjoy this time instructing?

Yes, in a way because I knew that I was teaching them something. Later on in life our two boys were in the scouts and I got implicated in the scout movement and became a group scout master.

30:00 Both here and in Maryborough and Cloncurry. It's much the same thing, training kids in survival, bush craft and how to survive and discipline.

After the six months what were you told would be happening to you?

I returned to the unit.

30:30 I went back up to the battalion. They'd returned to Australian then again after the Finisterres. They returned to Australia and I rejoined them and I stayed with them then and trained with them up on the Tablelands and a lot more reinforcements. A lot of the older ones were gone and got out, and we were then trained up at,

31:00 outside Cairns up at Trinity Beach, up there for invasion training and then we went to Morotai and were there a little while and a lot of men got sick there, and I did too, and popped a thermometer in my mouth and the next thing I was in hospital with a wog that was going around, influenza

31:30 type of thing. I was going around all the tents looking my men and then the battalion got word that they were going to Borneo to the invasion of Balikpapan, and Mert Lee, that was then the CO came to the hospitals and there was another sergeant and myself in the hospital there and he came into the ward and especially asked the doctor if we could be released, if it was possible for us to be released

32:00 to the battalion to go with them into action. We were both old originals, and they released me. I said I was well enough to go but I had to go through the process. I went to the staging camp there and there were supposed to be a staging camp there for a little while. I'd been classified as fit

32:30 to go, and they had two or three fellows who'd been AWL there and they wanted them returned to the battalion. They wanted somebody to escort them back to the battalion, so I volunteered. I said I'd take them back, so they issued me with a rifle and I found out afterwards the bolt didn't fit in it. I took them to the battalion and the battalion had already started to go aboard the Kanimbla, the boat to go for

33:00 the invasion of Borneo. So I rejoined the battalion and went with them. I was with them for the Borneo campaign. The other sergeant didn't get out for a couple of days after me and he wasn't at the actual landing. That's where I finished up,

33:30 in Balikpapan, through the Balikpapan campaign. The platoon I was with, Don Company, we were keeping contact with about 800 Japanese that were moving down the coast towards Banjamasam in Borneo. We were just keeping in contact with them, walking behind them. We had a couple of natives with us, 'Nika' officers,

34:00 sort of Dutch army fellows. We had one of them with us and some of those fellows down where we were, the natives, they were head-hunters. They had no use for the Japs. We were keeping behind them and we got out of wireless contact with the wireless that we had and we were out and finally they

34:30 contacted us by a little aeroplane and dropped us a message to rendezvous on a certain point on the coast there and we went in there and they came ashore with a boat and picked us up and told us the war had been over for two days. They dropped the bombs and the Japanese surrendered. So we were out for at least two days after the

35:00 war was over before we knew. We heard afterwards at the same time those Japs heard the news too and they were coming back towards us to surrender. So I don't know what happened, apparently they surrendered to somebody, but we went back to where the rest of the unit were.

How did you feel when you heard this news?

Relieved.

35:30 Thank God it's over. We knew that they'd killed thousands and thousands with the atomic bomb, but they saved thousands and thousands too because the Japanese wouldn't have surrendered otherwise. They'd have been prepared to sacrifice men, women and children. When they saw that devastation that's what convinced them.

36:00 Then they said that they were going to send an occupation force to Japan and I would have liked to have gone there. I put my name down for it to go to the occupation of Japan to finish the war. I'd been right through it and all the actions, and they hummed and ah'd and went on and they couldn't make up their

mind. They said, “You might

36:30 just be kept on garrison duties in the island. You might do this and you might do that.” They were getting back onto regimental drill and so forth so I put in for discharge. I’d had enough.

I just wondered one question about Borneo, what was the landing like?

We landed without incident. The navy and that with the American army and the force they had,

37:00 they bombarded nearly out of existence. We met very little opposition. It was only more or less rear guard action if you got caught in an ambush or mortars, ones that were going forward. The Japanese were retreating all the time and they were just fighting little rear guard actions.

37:30 Actually the platoon I belonged to as platoon sergeant, I wasn’t with the patrol that went out. I think we had the last man in the battalion that was wounded. One killed, he was the forward scout, should have known the Japs were there but he’d never seen action until Borneo and there was nothing, and another fellow who’d never seen action was second scout. He’s down

38:00 at Hervey Bay now. He got shot up and that was the last I think killed, and one more or less killed in action or wounded in the unit. We buried a young lad, I think he was seventeen, a young lad, we buried him alongside the track up in Borneo. They’ve recovered him since I believe. They recovered the bodies like that.

38:30 Just marked a spot where you buried them, and the other fellow, Cunnington, he joined us a late reinforcement. His brother was killed at Milne Bay, and he came in as a late reinforcement. He was younger and he was one of the last wounded. I don’t that there

39:00 was anyone wounded after that because the Japs sort of pulled back, and then when we were following, that’s as I said, we estimated about 800 of them that were withdrawing and we were just trying to keep in contact with them as the were withdrawing and going towards Banjamasam.

Overall, how do you feel about your wartime service?

Well, it’s an experience that I suppose in a sway it was

39:30 something I did. I thought as I said at the beginning, I was single with no ties and I wanted to, thought enough of Australia to protect it and I always said that single men should be the first to go, and you don’t wait until they get to your country to do anything. Like if you were going to fight somebody, you wouldn’t invite him home and fight him in your own lounge room. You’d go and meet

40:00 him on his land. Do all the damage to their country, not your own.

So do you have any final words to add to the record?

Not really, but except that I firmly believe in national training, always have done, for the discipline and the training that young men

40:30 get and it qualifies them really for civil life because if you’ve got a boss you’ve got to take orders and you’ve got to be disciplined and you’ve got to learn to live with other men and get on with them and help each other. Not just

41:00 brawling, getting drunk and brawling down the streets. That’s nothing. I’ve seen fellows that were fist fighters, they’d brawl and they’d get in the ring and brawl. When the chips were down they were dingoes. It was different when they had a fistfight they could do something. It was different altogether when the chips were down.

Okay, I think that’s just about the end of the tape.

INTERVIEW ENDS