

Australians at War Film Archive

Keith Read (Bushy, Alan) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1291>

Tape 1

00:35 **Okay Keith, can you give us a life summary?**

Well I was born in January 1920, in fact the 26th of January – so everyone gets a public holiday for my birthday. Mainly I was brought up in Swan Hill on the River Murray in Victoria where I went to school. In my youth I

01:00 was dominated by what I called the four Ss. There was sport, school, scouts, Sunday school, but no sex. At the – I finished school in '36, the 12th year. And I had won a scholarship type thing with the boy scouts and I went to a jamboree in Holland paid for by The Age newspaper, and we

01:30 were away for 7 months – because we went by ship. When I came back I started work in the public service, Commonwealth Public Service. After I had been there a few years I didn't like the atmosphere so I resigned and went up and worked for my father who had a farm machinery business. It was up there that I met my wife again, because we had in earlier years been in the same form at school. I was in the militia

02:00 both in Melbourne – the Melbourne University Rifles and the 17th Light Horse, when I went up to Swan Hill. When I decided I was going to join the AIF [Australian Imperial Force], I applied for my job back in the public service which I got and I waited the few months and then joined up in June 1940. I went away in December, 1940, with 2/3rd Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

02:30 I was in 9 battery and we went up the desert. We were the only Australians up the desert at that time under English control. We came out of there and went to Syria, and then on anti-aircraft defence along the Suez Canal. That brought us up to the end of '41 and then two divisions came back, the 6th and 7th came back

03:00 and the 9th Division stayed behind. And they formed a new anti-aircraft regiment for the 9th Division. They took some out of each of the units that were already there. I was one of those who transferred, and I became a gun sergeant in the new unit. After all our training we then did the battle of El Alamein and during the battle I received my commission. We came back in early '43. I got married when we were on leave. Then we

03:30 went to the tablelands, trained, then to Milne Bay for further training. Then we did the landings at Lae and Finschhafen – beach landings. This was the first time Australian troops had done a beach landing since Gallipoli. We had a pretty torrid time there. I got dengue [fever] and a few other things and was in hospital in Moresby for a while. Came back.

04:00 We didn't go into action again, and then January '45 I was called back to go to the Defence Department as a civilian, because they were setting up a new organisation for post war. So I got this early discharge which I was happy to take after just about 5 years in the AIF. After the

04:30 war I finished off my two degrees – did economics, known as commerce at Melbourne, and arts. I went back into the militia or CMF [Citizens' Military Force] or whatever it was called, when they started up again in 1948. Did about another 3 years and then resigned out. I was in various positions in the

05:00 Defence Department and then transferred to the Department of Supply. They had formed a new security branch, and I was in that as the administrative officer. I had a very sick son with bronchiectasis and I had to move him out of Melbourne. And I was fortunate to apply and get a job at Nauru Island as the official secretary, so I had two years at Nauru Island. When we came back I was at

05:30 Adelaide as the regional security officer. From there I then went to the administrative officer at Woomera, then to the Public Service Board in Canberra as Commissioner of Housing for the ACT. In 1945, no sorry, when I was 45, no I couldn't have been, 65 yes, I resigned and joined Anaconda, mining and exploration company. I was with

- 06:00 them for 15 years until they were taken over and then did 4 years as the Secretary of the Real Estate Institute of New South Wales. In that time I had bypass surgery so I resigned and we bought a hobby farm up here at Eudlo. I Had somebody to do all the work for me. And
- 06:30 after 7 years there we thought it was time to get closer to people and we moved into this place in Buderim. And as I say, mentioned earlier, my wife died 3 years ago. She had Alzheimer's and for about 5 years I nursed her here. I kept her home and made extensions to the house so I didn't have to put her in a nursing home.
- 07:00 That's roughly it.

Excellent, thank you. Okay, let's talk more about your childhood. Can you tell us about your parents?

My father was much older than my mother. I had an elder brother who has just turned 90; an elder sister and a younger brother. My younger brother died of a stroke a couple of years back. So there was 3 of us there. My father was a

- 07:30 hard working businessman. He had a farm machinery agency. He wasn't a good businessman because he kept giving out credit and never getting any money back. He had a very large bad debt collection and of course with the Depression in the 30s. My mother was a very soft gentle lady and it was through her saving 2 shillings here and 2 shillings there to pay my school fees
- 08:00 that kept me at school. My father said, "I was feeding pigs when I was your age, time you went and did some work." So as I said, I was in the scouts. I was in that as a troop leader and then I was a King's Scout as it was called in those days. And so I said, from that I got the trip overseas.

What is your earliest memory?

- 08:30 One of the early ones was being pulled out of the river instead of being drowned. We lived quite close to the Murray River where our house was and as kids we used to go swimming. The older ones could swim across but I was still dog paddling. They were all on the other side of the river and had left me by myself. So I got half way
- 09:00 across the river and yell out help. And my older brother rescued me once and he threw me on the bank and he said, "Stay there you silly little bugger." I remember that one. Then of course the big secret, don't tell Mum. Yes, earlier than that - Our early years as a child, we lived frugally as most people did. You didn't
- 09:30 know any different. We had a Coolgardie Safe, you know what a Coolgardie Safe is? Just a box, a hessian box on legs and you had to have jam tins full of water so the ants couldn't get in. And you had a galvanised top on it, and flannel drapes down so the water ran down the side of the thing, and then the wind blew through and kept your things cool. You had one of those
- 10:00 outside underneath the grape vines. And my job was always to make sure the water was filled up. And when I didn't and the ants got in I used to get in trouble. We had plenty of fruit in the garden. Citrus fruit, oranges, mandarins and always grapes, plums, you know. So we thought we were lived fairly well.

- 10:30 **What kind of things did you get up to?**

As a kid?

What did you do after school?

We'd go fishing, collecting birds' eggs. Playing sport, kick the football. Summer time play cricket. Always something to do, and of course you had your few menial jobs around the household.

- 11:00 You know getting the fire wood and things like feed the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s.

Did you get pocket money?

Did until about 1932. There was no pocket money then. But my mother - my mother had to take in a boarder. She always had a boarder and now and again those kind ladies would give me 6 pence which I thought was great. Our biggest

- 11:30 problem of course was playing cricket in the backyard, and next door to us - In the mean time we had moved up into the centre of the city centre of Swan Hill, and the next door neighbour had a nursery and some hot houses, and our cricket ball always seemed to go into a hot house and she refused to give us our ball back. So there was always the problem of trying to find enough money between us, 3 or 4 of us

- 12:00 to buy another cricket ball.

Did she ever give them back?

No she gave them to friends or relations of hers across the river. I later played cricket with them and I found out where all the cricket balls went. As I got older and in high school, I was in the school teams - tennis, cricket, athletics. I played

12:30 senior tennis and cricket and football while I was still at school. As I said, sports, scouts, etc.

Tell us something about your early school years?

Real early ones, primary school? Oh we lived about a mile away from the school and you walked there,

13:00 and walked home for lunch. Now and again I could get lunch cut. There was no tuck shops or anything like that, only the little lolly shop across the road. It was – you know, just ordinary school. Those days a lot of the kids went to school without any shoes. I can remember once I took my shoes off and

13:30 I was told if you come to school wearing your shoes you wear your shoes all the time, but those who came without shoes, that was okay. I was a good average student I think, in the top group, so I enjoyed school, right through.

What were your teachers like?

Generally fine. There was

14:00 only one I didn't like when I was in grade 6. I didn't have any problem but there was a couple of kids he didn't like and he used to lay into them with the strap which I used to think was quite unnecessary. And he was trying to make them cry and they wouldn't cry. But everywhere else – really all the teachers were fine,

14:30 kind, whether they were men or ladies.

How did the Depression impact on your family?

Very badly because my father was a farm machinery agency for International Harvester Company, the American company. So when he sold a machine on time payment he would then get his full commission. But then when the firm – when they couldn't pay it off, they were repossessed

15:00 and he had to repay his commission. So during those years not only was he not making any money he was paying money out. So I've often wondered how he stayed afloat. So that's why there was certainly no pocket money. In those days you could sell papers and bottles. And I used to grow beans. We had a galvanised iron fence, and I would grow them against that and get the reflective heat

15:30 and I would get early beans. So I was getting a whole shilling a pound, pocket money. Another way of getting money was – there was an old orchard and it had almond trees right down the side. So another lad and I we used to belt the – not inside the property, but those that were leaning out, pick up the almonds, shell them and sell them for two shillings a pound.

16:00 We would go out mushrooming and we used to put boot boxes on the carrier on the bike and then pick your mushrooms and then put them with layers of paper in between. We would then take them in and sell them to the green grocer. Never caught enough fish to sell.

16:30 **What kind of fish did you catch?**

Well there was Murray cod and perch were the two things in those days.

So you went overseas with the boy scouts? Tell us how that happened?

There was a jamboree to be held in Holland, a world jamboree in 1937, and the head of the –

17:00 president of the Victorian Scouts, Colonel Cohen – who was the head of one of the breweries also, said he would donate the costs for one scout. So then The Age newspaper said they would do the same. So you put in an application, and they assessed your scouting prowess or abilities.

17:30 There was small jamboree called a corroboree at Belair in South Australia at the end of '36, beginning of '37. So all the people got hold of you and had you for a day doing odd jobs and talking to you so they got to know you. And schoolwork I guess came into it, and sporting as well as your scouting. And

18:00 I was very fortunate enough to get The Age one. We left at the end of March '37 and came back in October because you sailed over of course. So we went to see the coronation procession of King George the VI and you know, lots of tours – tours around England and Scotland and

18:30 and tours on the continent. We saw the jamboree which was in August. Some of the time you had two periods, one of 4 weeks and one of 2 weeks where you looked after your own arrangements. I had people at Swan Hill who had relations in Scotland and England and so some of the time I stayed on the Isle of Aaron off the west coast. I

19:00 stayed there for 10 days. He was the brother of the local shire power house engineer, that type of thing. So when I came back – perhaps I should have said earlier that when you left school in those days, if you didn't have work with your own family, you would apply to all the

19:30 banks, state public service, federal public service and school teaching, and you took whichever came up first. I got called up as a teacher in February '37, and the

20:00 first day I was there I applied for 7 months leave without pay. But as you were on 6 months probation they wouldn't give it to me. So I resigned. Whilst I was away the public service position came up and they - almost as soon as I got in the door of my grandmother's there was a phone call, "When are you ready to start?" sort of thing

20:30 and I was then posted as a junior clerk in military intelligence. After I had been there a while I said to the senior clerk, "How do you know that I can't divulge all the information I'm getting?" There was no problem of access to classified information and he said,

21:00 "They know more about you than your family knows about you." So they did a check. And another thing he said to me was, "Oh, you've been away overseas in a uniform. It won't be long before you're back again but in a different uniform." So he was anticipating war. It was on the horizon, 2 or 3 years beforehand.

How did you feel about that?

21:30 It didn't worry me in those days. I was 17 or 18.

Did you have intentions of joining up?

Well I was in the militia. I was doing university part time so I joined the Melbourne University Rifles which was infantry. And then when I transferred up to Swan Hill into my father's business - mainly to see if I could recover any of those bad debts, I was

22:00 transferred to the 17th Light Horse which was a local unit. But while it was light horse, fortunately it was mechanised and that was a Vickers machine gun regiment. But we did a camp immediately war was declared, at Bendigo race course, and then early '40, we did a 10 week camp with the whole regiment. It was

22:30 drawn from Bendigo. I don't know if you know Victoria, but it was Bendigo, Swan Hill, Kerang - that north western section of Victoria. So we did a full regimental camp.

Just going back a bit. When you were a junior clerk, what kind of work was it?

Mainly

23:00 logging in all the correspondence. In and out. I had a set procedure in all public service at those times. You had your topic, then your in and out correspondence would relate to it. So that's a summary of the complete file of correspondence. They also looked

23:30 after the maps of the survey department, and so I issued the maps. They used to produce a monthly bulletin and it was sent to certain people interested in the security intelligence type of game -

24:00 Australians throughout the world, and my job was despatching that, getting it away, making sure it was sealed up and that type of thing.

Can you remember what type of information you were coming across in the correspondence?

I'd rather not answer that one.

24:30 Yes, there's one particular lot that is still confidential so I'd rather not answer that.

Were you ever tempted to reveal anything?

No, no. I was just a clerk in the public service. No there was never anything. And when I came back up after the war, and I went

25:00 back into the Defence Department, I was with different assistant secretaries as a personal assistant - in finance; there was a research and development chap; a senior policy; research and development as I mentioned, and then the control of joint intelligence. And then they had

25:30 set up a new intelligence section which controlled the joint intelligence. He was controller of both the defence signals branch and it still operates, and the joint intelligence bureau. So I got my enthusiasm and did a couple of extra subjects at university on economic geography as they called it, which was based on the

26:00 Pacific area, the Pacific Rim. And likewise in economic history. And I thought they'd be helpful, and ultimately I got the job of chief clerk of the Joint Intelligence Bureau.

What can you remember about the day Menzies declared war?

If I remember correctly it was a Sunday night. I was

26:30 up at Swan Hill and I was with my friend when we heard it. I was 19 and he was 20. He had a deformity so he couldn't have gone in. And we sat and talked about it and what was likely to happen, took it all very seriously

27:00 the first night. Then I talked to chaps from the First World War. My father hadn't been in. He would

have been 40 when the war started and then again he also had a great big piece out of his thigh. They used to ride pigs, races, and the one pig didn't like it and took a great big lump out of his, big enough to put your

27:30 fist into. I talked to some of the First World War chaps whom you know - in the country town you knew most people. And as I said, I was already in the militia, already in the light horse machine guns. So it was a

28:00 case of when, when was I going to join up and as I said, I didn't join up till May, June '40.

Can you tell me about joining up?

Well, I knew I was going to join up after I came out of the camp, the militia camp which would have been probably the beginning of March 1940. I had the exalted rank of two stripes being a corporal. So

28:30 I said, to my father - he was selling imported farm machinery, and I said his business was going to be dead as a door nail, so I'll go back, see if I can get a job. So I applied both for school teaching and public service and both came through. So I took the public service and went back into the Defence Department, not the same job, not the intelligence.

29:00 And after I had been there 6 or 8 weeks, I joined up. But it was the time of Dunkirk and so it was just the normal thing to do.

What kind of training did you have in the militia camp?

The militia camp? Well the first one was with the Melbourne University Rifles.

29:30 And we were rained out, like it rained here the other day and they sent us home for 36 hours to dry out. Well I was boarding so it was some great difficulty for me to go home and dry out and be back in 36 hours. That wasn't so bad.

30:00 I might put in a little aside there. When we were at the Melbourne University Rifle camp, I found out some of the district cricketers - Ian Johnson who later became captain of Australia, he was one of them, and a bloke called Fido Gwilliam, who was a wicket keeper in the district, and they got time off to go and play cricket. And then I heard there was a tennis player who played, you know, pennant tennis. So

30:30 I promoted myself in the grade of tennis I played and I got permission likewise to go home for the weekend and play tennis. I played South Suburban Churches Association. But anyway I got the day off and went up to Melbourne for a game of tennis. I've forgotten the -

What sort of things did they teach you in training?

31:00 Well of course there were always route marches to try and get you fit. A drill in the infantry, your rifle drill. There wasn't too much firing. We had one firing practice and they had us

31:30 lined up into two ranks and the front rank got 5 bullets to fire and the rear rank didn't get any. So that was our total firing, but later on when I was up at Swan Hill and we did get ammunition we would go out to the rifle range, informally. We would get one of the chaps who might have been a sergeant and say, "Let's go out and have some firing practice."

32:00 With the machine guns which was a Vickers machine gun, they had a squad, corporal in charge and it's air cooled, sorry water cooled. You have to have a gallon of water with you everywhere you run with it. So you had a team of ammunition carriers and so we did a lot

32:30 of that. When I first went there I was on the range finder where you get to decide - peering into a telescope, wide telescope, you know, and you'd get to call out the ranges and you had two people on that. And we'd just - after work or knock off early at half past 4 go out,

33:00 grab the range finder and go out and crawl around in the paddocks, you know, a couple of miles out of town, practise just to get the idea of the thing.

You became corporal at the end of the training?

Yes at the beginning of it.

33:30 I was made a lance corporal at the Bendigo camp. And then they did a camp for officers and NCOs [non commissioned officers] and I did that and I got the second stripe. So then when we did the 10 week camp I was a corporal in charge of a gun. Of course you dropped that when you joined the AIF and started off again. So I

34:00 had the exalted rank of one time being a private and being a trooper and being a gunner, all the same rank, nothing.

What sort of things did you do on weekends and after work?

We were a fairly

- 34:30 compact group particularly when I was at the machine guns, because we were all at Swan Hill and I knew them all. You know, I had been at school with some of them and others. My father told me that one of his clients had come in, he'd been down to see his son at the camp - he was an Englishman and had been in the First World War, an Englishman. And he was horrified that we called our officers by their
- 35:00 Christian names. Of course we knew them in normal conversation, but if it was something formal we always did a salute and called them 'sir'. No, I went home from the camp at Bendigo for a weekend to do my father's accounts because I was still working at his office
- 35:30 at that stage and got the weekend off to go and put out his monthly accounts. Some of us were selected to go to the races, the Geelong races it was, and we knew nothing and we got a hold of the broadcaster and
- 36:00 we'd ask him what should we put our money on, not that we had much money. He said, "Well I'm not supposed to give out tips." And we were all in uniform so he gave us all 3 or 4 good tips so you put on your 5 shillings and got a pound back.

Did you enjoy the training?

Oh yes, not only that, there was a bit of pocket money. When I

- 36:30 started in Melbourne I was on 2 pound a week and I was paying 27 - can you convert this? 2 pound 4 dollars, and three quarters of it went on board. So I had 10 shillings, one dollar, for the rest of the week, including fares, university fees, clothing. So it was pretty tight.

37:00 So then you joined the AIF and had to start all over again?

I joined up and was put into the 2/2nd Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment at Puckapunyal that was just opening up as a training camp.

- 37:30 I was there for 4 or 5 months, and it looked at if I was going to be transferred into the signals section, and I didn't want to do that.

Why didn't you want to go into signals?

I wanted to be on the gun. And so talking to friends in military intelligence - when I was down on leave I'd call in and see them and one of the chaps -

- 38:00 people to whom I used to address envelopes, was a chap Hughes-Hallett, and he was a major in the 3rd Regiment, a battery commander in the 3rd Regiment. And he'd been in talking, you know, and he'd indicated he was deficient in one particular type of bloke he was looking for. So they suggested to him, me. So sight unseen

- 38:30 he accepted me, and I was transferred down to Werribee race course where we slept in the stables. I went there mid November, '40, and we sailed at the end of December. So I was only there a short time. I was put into battery headquarters and given this altered rank of one stripe, a lance bombardier.

- 39:00 So I sailed then with the 3rd Regiment.

What kind of training did you get in that month and a bit?

Virtually nil because they had no anti-aircraft guns, and they were training on using Vickers so I thought this is easy I've been on Vickers, you know in the militia. But no, they had a different mounting trying to make them anti-aircraft guns.

- 39:30 We had two final leaves. So we had a final leave and then came back, and then apparently the boats weren't ready so they sent us on another final leave, grand final leave. And we came back on Boxing Day 1940, and sailed

- 40:00 a couple of days later.

So the Vickers guns weren't the guns you were to be using?

No, no. We didn't have any Bofors, didn't have any anti-aircraft guns. They did have some 3-inch guns, down at Maribyrnong and they went down there and did some training on those but they weren't the guns that we were ultimately going to get, they just weren't available.

Tape 2

00:36 You said you had a double last leave. Can you tell me about the first leave?

I just went home and you know there were few mates from there - Lake Boga which is 10 miles from Swan Hill and then later on it became a Catalina servicing base. But

01:00 there were 4 from there, most of whom I went to school with, sat at the same desk type of thing. And when we were going back, probably a population of only a few hundred, everybody in the town was out to see them off, and they kept pushing beer and pushing beer in through the window. So we were very very inebriated by the time we got to Melbourne. Yes, very happy time.

What was it like saying goodbye to your parents, the first time?

01:30 They came to the station to see me off, and I've got a photograph there, you know. It was harder saying goodbye to my girlfriend, my lady, because I didn't tell you, we got engaged when I joined the army and she was 19 and I was 20.

02:00 And we got married when I came back in '43.

So you had gone to school with her?

In the same form for a few years and then she went down to a girls' grammar school. That's her you see in the grammar school uniform. I stayed on up at the high school. And then she came back at the same time when I moved up in '39. I thought she had a nice pair

02:30 of legs.

Was that hard saying goodbye to her?

My word. My word. Yes.

So you went back and the boat wasn't ready, what was it like going back home for the second leave?

It was a bit of a - well you were welcomed it, but

03:00 probably it was the logical thing rather than just keeping us in camp doing nothing, so get rid of us. So that's why we got the extra leave. And the convoy wasn't ready. If they had known the convoy wasn't ready they probably wouldn't have sent us off the first time. But that's the way it went. So just trying to live a normal

03:30 life and you'd see a few of your friends. I had a bit of a conflict of interests. My girlfriend lived 10 miles out of town and I had parents in town. And they wanted to see me all the time and I wanted to get out there.

How did you negotiate that one?

Oh 50-50 a bit of time here, lunch here and dinner out there and things like that.

04:00 Were there any men who had last minute nerves?

The ex-students association for the high school had produced a record of all the students who joined the services - those who were killed and those that were wounded, and they had a little snapshot and

04:30 all I know was they were in the services. I didn't know anything about what they did and so on. And there was one chap who committed suicide when he was home on leave, he couldn't take it to go back. And he's not even mentioned anywhere, I tried to find it, but didn't, they were apparently diplomatic. But it was always hard going back from leave. Sometimes we felt that we were lucky that we stayed

05:00 on that extra time over in the Middle East - to come home and have some leave. But not all of those who came back from the Middle East got leave and some of them went straight off to New Guinea. So just luck of the draw, when you joined up and what unit you were put in.

Were there any personal things that you packed?

Photograph of my girlfriend. Lady love. That's all.

05:30 No lucky trinkets?

No just what we called our dead meat ticket around our neck, that was my total trinkets, yep.

What was your uniform like? Can you give us some detail on the uniform you were issued?

Oh it was a heavy serge uniform.

06:00 Webbing, pouches for ammunition, tin hat. We had a respirator in the early days. Lot of times you've seen photographs - the tin hat was a bad nuisance, although I know of a case where it saved a life

06:30 where the tin hat took it. It took the top of his head off but if it hadn't been the tin hat first he would have. No, it was uncomfortable, heavy greatcoat, boots of course, and gaiters. In the infantry when I was in that, they had the old style wind arounds. And you had to put it on the same leg

07:00 the same way so that they stretched a bit to your muscle, and it was quite easy in the early stages, then they would slip. So there an art in putting on your what ever they are called.

You went back to town and got on the boat?

Yes, the Mauritania and it hadn't been made into a proper troop ship.

- 07:30 We were in cabins you know, extra bunks had been put in but it was very comfortable. Then when we got to - we changed ships at Colombo, others did at Trincomalee, and then we went into a troop ship, a British troop
- 08:00 ship because they had troops out in the east, to and fro. And there you slept - you pitched your hammock up above the mess deck where you ate during the day and you slept up above it at night time, and it had to be pulled down during the day and all your gear stacked. But the officers and sergeants had cabins, and I swore then I would come back
- 08:30 at least a sergeant. I had my 21st birthday on that ship going up the Red Sea. Stinking hot and I went down into the bowels, down below the water line where the two-up school was being played, and I thought I have to be lucky on my 21st birthday. Did my money which wasn't unusual, and a couple of mates in a different battery
- 09:00 said they would stake me, put their money in. I'd do the gambling and we'd share the prize. But I did their money as well.

What other pastime activities were going on?

Virtually nothing. Just boredom, the ship was too crowded to do anything

- 09:30 but we tried to do a bit of physical training and they tried to give us some lectures and things of that nature. So then our ship went straight through the canal and up to Haifa. So we unloaded at Haifa
- 10:00 and then came back down by rail, through Palestine - down further south to the camp.

What kind of lectures were you given on the ship?

Goodness me, it was so long ago. They would have been

- 10:30 sort of a tactical exercises of what the layout of guns would be, which we had never seen. Things like that. There would be hygiene lectures. Behavioural - how to make sure you behave when you are in the
- 11:00 country, in Palestine and some idea of what to expect. That was fairly simple, but the main thing was trying to keep everybody occupied or busy doing something and there'd still be a few two-up schools going.

What were your first impressions on arriving in Haifa?

- 11:30 Well it was beautiful, after the trip on the Devonshire. But we were to get off the boat, and then we had to stay back on it overnight because the trains hadn't come up, that sort of thing. And we went by train and it was, you know,
- 12:00 as the Jews would say, God's own country. Orange groves and green grass and the Australian troops had camps off the main road, probably one or two miles off the main road. During the weekends we'd find out where other Australian friends which were not in the unit, which camps they were in.
- 12:30 You had to go up onto the main road, and the army vehicles would always pull up and pick you up and drop you off wherever you wanted to on the way, things like that. So you'd find friends, meet people. We had a bit of leave into Jerusalem, 3 or 4 days. So you'd go to the Dead Sea and Jericho and whatever.
- 13:00 And there was a picture theatre there which you paid to go and see. Initially we got paid weekly, and so you put aside enough for one bottle of beer and 2 ounces of tobacco and then go to the two-up school with the rest hoping to get enough to get a taxi. Then the 4 of you would go in a taxi and you'd go to Tel Aviv
- 13:30 on a Sunday for the day. That type of thing.

Did you ever do that?

Oh yes. We found out it was better that instead of each of us trying to get the full amount, we would tic-tac each other about how well we were going. And of course if we lost our money it was hopping on the trucks up to see somebody else.

- 14:00 **What did you do in Tel Aviv?**

A few grogs mainly. And seeing the countryside. I was very interested in the history and geography of the total area. And jumping ahead a bit, when I was on leave I would try and read a bit about the place and go and see

- 14:30 whatever there might be, there wasn't so much in Tel Aviv. But there was a book called by HV Morton, In the Steps of the Master, which is supposed to be the geographical history of the wanderings of Christ through there and I had that so I used to read it up and then get a group together, and for a day we

would go and

15:00 visit these sights and that type of thing. So I saw a fair bit of the country like that because there is no point in just getting full of grog - not that you could get too full because you didn't have enough money. So I did quite a bit of that and later on I can expand the places I went to at different times.

15:30 **How long did you have between when you left and when you started moving off again?**

We would have got there the beginning of February some time, and we left in April.

That's a fair amount of time?

Two months. Very little time because we didn't have any guns at first. So by the time we got our guns, there were

16:00 3 batteries in 3rd Regiment, 7, 8 and 9. Eight battery was pulled out and they were sent to the desert without any equipment whatsoever and was captured, that was their equipment. Then they went through up to Benghazi, came back and then they were in Tobruk for the 3 or 4 months, that was 8 Battery. 7 and 9 Batteries were to go

16:30 to Greece. And Greece fell to quickly so 7 Battery Was sent to Crete and 9 Battery went up the desert under English control. We were the only Australian battery in action up the desert at that time.

Is that when you were issued your guns, when you got there?

None initially but after a while they came up

17:00 from Cairo and people would go down and they would be brought up.

What was training like then on the field?

Well training would be a plan on the ground assuming that was the points of the guns and where the people had to go to, to go into action. That sort of training.

17:30 **Did you have any concerns at this stage?**

Well we had nothing, there was no equipment. Then you'd get one or two then and then people would be training on it from daylight to dark - different groups for half an hour or an hour.

18:00 **In that one and a half months, how often were you reminded of the war surrounding you? Did you have meetings every day?**

No, usually a route march every day. Pinch a few oranges from the orchards. There was plenty of citrus fruit.

18:30 No, it was a case of filling in time really until we got our equipment. We had rifles so therefore you could do some infantry rifle training and drill. And then when we went up the desert I was

19:00 in 9 battery. I was in 9 battery headquarters and by this time I'd become a bombardier two stripes and a lance sergeant. In other words you get a third stripe. The benefits of a sergeant but no pay. So I was a lance sergeant when we went up the desert and I was on the battery headquarters. When we went up there we were

19:30 mainly on the series of small landing fields and there would be some infantry for defence of it. And they were mainly for planes. They would land and pick up more petrol if they were going on up further to Benghazi, that type of thing. And we had the guns, 3 or 4 guns around each of these small landings.

20:00 Moving to and fro and backwards and forwards. At one stage our battery headquarters was on the sand dunes and there was time when Crete had fallen and bodies were being washed up on the north African beach. We'd go along and get the bodies and put them up above the high water mark and

20:30 dig the sand and put them in. You didn't know whether they were German or Australian or British or what. They were just bodies, you know, bloated black.

Had their uniforms disappeared?

Some you couldn't tell really what they were. Some were covered in oil, others had been nibbled by sharks or fish. It was not a very pleasant job we did.

21:00 We'd go from where we were about a mile each part along the beach and we'd find the bodies which had been rolled in. That was probably the worst part of that period.

Where were you burying them?

Just in the sand dunes. If we could find a piece of timber we'd stick it up as an indication there was a body there, but I guess they were

21:30 never moved out.

What kind of thoughts were going through your head at this stage?

That it just wasn't a very pleasant job. So that was you know, that would have gone over about 6 or 7 days, I guess.

How were the men around you coping with that?

We were all the same I guess.

22:00 Not much worse than being on latrine duty. You know, when you are in camp, you just had to block your mind out of it all. Just stay strong and do it.

Was it the first time you had seen a dead body?

Yep. And mutilated and stinking and bloated. The other

22:30 interesting part while we were was we were to attempt to relive Tobruk. It was called Operation Battleaxe and it was the British and they had 3 what they called columns. The infantry, artillery, tank attack, anti-aircraft and they would go forward in groups, in columns. And they

23:00 captured Fort Capuzzo and the Germans threw a few tanks back at us and we just came back and retired to where we were. They didn't attempt to chase us up. They didn't have the strength to chase us up and we didn't have the strength to get there. There weren't enough troops on either side. So we were then pulled out.

23:30 Must have been July - July, no August probably. We handed our guns over to a British unit that came in and we were to pick up guns at Cairo and go up to Syria. So coming out - we were in convoy and I was in headquarters truck and there was the battery sergeant major - a bloke called

24:00 Dudley Gallagher - I'll tell the story on him. When I was a 10 year old I used to - the first Commonwealth - the Empire Games were held in Canada and the Australian heavy weight boxer, Dudley Gallagher was about 19 or 20 and apparently he won the heavy weight title easily. But as you know the votings of some of these things are not too good, and he got diddled out

24:30 of the gold medal. And lo and behold he was in the unit with us and he was - as I say he was about 10 years older than me and he was the battery sergeant major. We were in the headquarters truck, and there were about 4 in the back. So he said, "What about hopping into Cairo on the way through?" And we said, "How are we going to do that?"

25:00 and he said, "Well let's pull out of the convoy a bit." So Joe Oddy the driver used to have to pull the choke out a bit and make it splutter and then we'd stop and we'd look at it, and then we'd catch up to the convoy when they were - they'd stop 10 minutes every 2 hour or something and we'd catch up to them then. But again we'd fall back, fall back and then ultimately we'd catch up to them. And there was a

25:30 fork in the road, one road to Cairo and one road to where our camp was to be at Amiriya. So when we got there, you know we got a very imposing 30 year old as the heavy weight boxer and he told the British military police what he wanted and what he was going to do. He had somebody very ill, blah, blah, and he had to get him into Cairo and the instructions should have been left by the convoy when it went through etc. So

26:00 ultimately they let us go into Cairo and I've got no recollection of how we paid or how we got there, but he got us into a hotel which was officers only. And they put on the story about these poor blokes being up the desert etc. So we were given a room and we all had a hot bath and you know, we had to get back into our old dirty clothes. He

26:30 got us a corner in the dining room. We had a beautiful meal, probably the first time since we left Australia. And I've got no idea - we couldn't have paid for it because none of us had any money. I certainly didn't have money up there. So then we got back and found out where they were camping and got back to the camp. Next day, Ginger Dyer, one of the officers said to me, "Tell me

27:00 where did your mob get to last night?" and I said, "Oh, sitting beside the road watching Joe Oddy trying to make that vehicle go." He said, "Rubbish!" And I said, "Well what else would you expect me to say, sir?" and he said, "I'll find out." But little did we know we were then given 4 days leave in Cairo.

27:30 What did you do for that 4 days?

Four of us teamed up together. And so we all put money into a common pool and we all did the same thing as a group so that made it easy.

Is this the same four that you had been with?

No different four. No, another group of mates. And I'd been there with the scouts of course only a few years earlier.

- 28:00 And I said, let's go around to Shepheard's Hotel – Shepheard's Hotel was officers only so I said, "Let's go to Mena House Hotel, out by the pyramids." Officers only. And I said, well we'll go to the museum and see the Tutankhamen thing – museum closed. So all my grandiose ideas of taking them around what I had seen 3 or 4 years earlier went by the wayside. But
- 28:30 we climbed the pyramid. I've got a photograph of us sitting on the top of the pyramid. The other two didn't make it. They got half way and decided that was far enough. There was a Gazira sporting club which was – they were very kind and opened it up to anybody, so we could borrow rackets and shoes and play tennis. And you had a ball-boy and his main job
- 29:00 was rushing over and bringing back 4 beers. It was stinking hot. And we saw some of the sights and things like that. Of course accommodation was a problem and we booked into a hotel which we thought was servicemen only, and there were 4 beds in it and there were 4 on the floor, and
- 29:30 a bathroom up the end of the corridor. So you know, towel over my shoulder and I just walked up in the nude to the shower. So I had my shower and came back but I had wrapped the towel around myself and unfortunately two ladies, elderly ladies came along to use the showers, or the bathroom. So that was a narrow escape.
- 30:00 **Were there many brothels in Cairo?**
- I guess there were but I never visited them. There was one in Alexandria, it was called Sister Street I'm told. And they reckon the first Australian casualty was when a bomb was dropped on Sister Street. Whether it was fact or not I don't know but that was the story that went around.
- 30:30 **Did any men you know frequent the brothels?**
- Yes, some of them did. Yep, later on when I was in the 2/4th, another 12 months on, they would virtually adopt them as girlfriends. So some were very partial to the girls.
- Did any of the lectures you had on the boat on the way over include sex education?**
- Yes.
- 31:00 Yes, when we were going – before we went up the desert, a group would be going out on leave, and they would be issued with their leave pass and a prophylactic outfit and I remember one chap he was indignant that I should give him his condom etc and ointment.
- 31:30 He wasn't going to, and I said, I'm sorry, you can't have your leave pass unless to take them both. So everybody was issued with one when they went on leave. But I guess that didn't stop – they might have used it once and then try again and then catch a bit of a venereal disease.
- Did that happen frequently?**
- 32:00 No not in our mob, no. No they were pretty, you know, educated on that facet as far as I could see. Yes, you came back a MEV, a 'Middle East virgin'.
- Some men have told us that it is a different set of principles in wartime**
- 32:30 **because you don't know if you are going to be dead the next day? So a lot of them felt they could justify things to themselves. You didn't feel like that?**
- No, you know, I had a lady back here and that didn't appeal to me. I've been in them of course and
- 33:00 it didn't appeal.
- After your leave in Cairo what happened then?**
- We were issued with guns and went up to Beirut to Syria, and whilst we were on the way up the Syrian battle finished. So
- 33:30 we were anti-aircraft defence of Beirut harbour and Beirut air port. And there was virtually no planes at all. One of our chaps became sick, ill, after up the desert with the poor food. Oh I should have mentioned this one. When we first went up the desert and I was on battery headquarters and
- 34:00 one of my jobs was to put in the daily numbers for rations. And when we got the English rations the cooks came to me and said, "What the hell, there is not enough food here to feed our blokes." So I increased the strength by 30. And I did that for a few days and my conscience started to prick me a bit. And so I said to the
- 34:30 captain quarter master, a bloke called Gar Margetts – I told him what I had done that I had increased our strength to get some more food. He said, "Well I don't want to know anything about it." But then fortunately – oh when some of the Pommy troops come across to our chaps, they'd say, "How do you eat so well?" And we'd say, "Oh we've got good cooks they know how to do it." But then we found dumps of
- 35:00 Italian food, tinned food. And so I was able to marked those 30 off again. I took them off our strength

because we had plenty of food with the Italian tins.

What was in the Italian tins?

Mainly spaghetti type things. Some of it was fruit, tinned fruit. So you could mix it up with the

35:30 rations. But the English, Pommy rations were very poor. Just like ours were very poor compared with the Yanks.

What were the English rations you got at that stage?

I don't know, stinking margarine I know that.

Stinking margarine? How did it stink?

I don't know but it did.

What did it stink of?

It just stunk.

36:00 **Can you remember anything else?**

No I can't recall, but it was totally inadequate anyway for the Australian stomachs. But anyway, we sorted it all out. Another one I should have mentioned was when we were on this troop ship coming up the Red Sea etc, the food preparation was so bad

36:30 that our CO [commanding officer] who was in charge of the troops on the ship, he dismissed the crew, the ship's cooks and put in army cooks. And the bread, before you ate it, you held it up to the light and pulled out all the weevils unless you wanted to eat meat with your bread. Oh, it was shocking.

37:00 That's why I told you I was going to come back at least a sergeant.

Were there lots of jokes about that?

Oh yes, but everybody was holding it up, plucking out the weevils. Dreadful.

Was there any water restrictions?

In the desert, oh my word. One water bottle

37:30 a day for you to drink shave, wash. You'd get a couple of cups of tea from the cook house, but then if anybody was near the ocean, near the sea trucks would go across and blokes could have a swim, but

38:00 both there and then later on at El Alamein there was always a water shortage. What had happened at that part of the desert, wherever there was a well, whoever held it last and was driven off salted it. So all the wells had been salted. So water was scarce, although we were only

38:30 comparatively a short distance, a couple of hundred miles I guess from Cairo at that stage.

Were there any problems with lack of water?

Yes, mainly what we called 'wog sores'. The smallest cut or graze would get infected and then they'd break out everywhere. Some blokes had them on their face and they'd have to be

39:00 sent off. And of course with crook food, there was always trouble with diarrhoea.

What about dehydration or heat exhaustion?

Oh yeah, well one the first times up the desert we had the khamsin storms, dust storms. The wind

39:30 would just blow, and literally if we were this far apart we couldn't see one another. Blokes would be in their tents and they would go outside to relieve themselves and they couldn't find the tent back again. And they would wander around for an hour. You literally couldn't see a thing two feet, two yards in front of you. And

40:00 that might blow for 24 hours. The second time up the desert we didn't strike those at all, the following year.

Tape 3

00:32 When we reached Syria the fighting was over and we were on the anti-aircraft defence of the harbour and the airfield. Virtually no enemy aircraft around so it was a good holiday camp. To make it even better the battery commander opened up what he called a rear headquarters up in the hills at the back.

01:00 People were drawn off the guns, taken up there for 3 or 4 days and then a truck would take them to

Damascus one day and to Baalbek, the Roman ruins the next type of thing, so they had 4 or 5 days there. Then they would go down where it was much hotter at Beirut. I was still on battery headquarters at that stage

01:30 and I spent half my time up at El Alamein and half my time down on the quarters at some government administration. There was an island about a good half mile out there and that was our daily swim out to there and swim back again.

Were there sharks or anything like that.

No, we didn't worry about sharks.

02:00 While we were there I got a bit of sand fly fever. I was in hospital for a few days and the battery commander was working out new establishments for organisations for the anti aircraft regiment and he worked out two others to prove that they could exist

02:30 and personnel could be put into them. My job was typing them. He didn't want anybody to know he was doing it so I usually typed them at night, 9 o'clock until 12 or something like that and I was getting over this bloody sand fly fever and I wasn't feeling very well at all and I was not blessing him in any way at all. Anyway when it was all over, he was quite happy and he decided he would take some leave and he was only taking his batman and his driver.

03:00 Because I had done sterling work for him he asked me would I like to join in. So it was a 3 ton truck, 30 cwt. with a canopy over the top and I sat in the back with his batman, and he was with his driver. We did about 10 days touring. You really need a map, but from Beirut we went up to Homs Hama and then up to a

03:30 Aleppo for a while. We went up to the Turkish border but they wouldn't allow us into Turkey, but he did, he we went across, so I expressed my contempt by having a pee through the fence into Turkey. We followed the Euphrates down crossed it two or three times, saw a place - I've forgotten its name now, but

04:00 Roman ruins, and then down to Palmyra and we cut across back to the coast. There was a crusader castle - Kraak de Chevaliers and in that 10 days we did about 1000 miles so I saw a lot of northern Syria which most people didn't see. I kept copious notes on that.

04:30 We were then taken out of Syria and went down for defence of the Canal. The Germans were dropping mines to block the Canal. Part of our - the British naval station - they call it HMS Phoenix. Really all it was, was where they assembled their swordfish

05:00 aircraft. They came out in crates. We had guns within the perimeter and some outside the perimeter. If you were within the perimeter you got a rum issue and you got afternoon tea because they were on naval rations. Those guns that were outside weren't supposed to get any. But anyway they overcame that difficulty. The sergeant cook would receive our daily rum rations in

05:30 what we called a dixie [mess tin] and he would dish it out and he would say to some of the younger blokes, "Don't touch this rum, it is bad for you, you stick to beer." When he went back he always had quite a few left and he would then - in the navy you would have to throw it out but not Jimmy the cook, he would bring his mates over

06:00 and they would drink rum for the rest of the day and night. I joined them one time and by God did I have a headache the next day. I was crook.

What was the rum like?

It tasted all right until the next morning. Another thing we used to do there because we were right on the Canal, we would swim across the Canal and back every day until one day we dived in and a ship had been

06:30 sunk and the oil had come through and we dived into oil and it took days and days to get that oil off. It didn't take us long to dive in and come out. So that was the last time I swam the Suez Canal. While we were there we could take leave. We were away from our regimental Headquarters and the battery commander said, "Anybody who has got - "

07:00 He had a scale of how much money you had in your pay book, so I and another sergeant applied and we got 8 days leave in Cairo. We didn't spend much time in Cairo. We took the train down to Luxor which is the old capital, 600 miles south probably, and then did the boat trip from Luxor down to Aswan.

07:30 Had a look at all the Egyptian history of those eras. Tiring, interesting and broadens your mind a bit of what went on in those days. We had some time in Cairo. We were in Cairo when Japan bombed Pearl Harbour and by the time we got up there wasn't an English paper available.

08:00 We had to buy a French paper and try and recall my schoolboy French to find out what had happened. Then we went back and we went down to the southern port of Suez - it's called Attica. I then transferred out of battery headquarters onto a gun crew as a bombardier.

08:30 **What did you think when you found out that Japan had entered the war?**

Amazed, although everybody seemed to expect it, but I was amazed that they were able to do this attack without being detected in any way whatsoever. It was hard to contemplate that, but we've read the stories since on how they did it -

09:00 claiming to be negotiating right up to the time. They did it secretively and the reports came in and they weren't accepted.

Did you know straight away because of that action that America was dragged into the war as well?

Yes.

What did you think about that?

That was very favourable. The unfortunate part was that there was war in the Pacific.

09:30 **Prior to Japan attacking America at Pearl Harbour what was your thoughts as to the reasons why America hadn't already entered the war? Did you have an opinion on that?**

Not really. They weren't under attack in any way. It was obvious I think that Roosevelt and Churchill got on very well together but

10:00 Roosevelt had to hasten slowly because of the temperament and attitude of Americans in general. But of course once they were attacked they were into it well and truly.

Can I ask you before we get too far away from it about when you had sand fly fever. What is that exactly?

I guess, a mild form of malaria,

10:30 or dengue fever, a milder form of that.

Did you have bites all over you?

Not really. It's the way you just feel, very crook indeed.

Was there any way that you guys could stop getting sick from these sort of things?

Not so much then.

11:00 Not until we got to New Guinea were we on Atebrin. It wasn't prevalent. It was more like when you were up the desert and it was dysentery and what we called the wog sores.

What would they do for the wog sores? Was there any way of treating guys out in the field?

Only a bit of ointment and usually it was only when they were taken out and put onto better rations and better

11:30 food and rest.

Where was the hospital? Was that in a rear position?

Yes that would be in a rear position.

You don't know whereabouts that was?

I guess the first time we were up there they would have come back near Cairo or Alexandria I would think.

When you went up on your trip to the Turkey border was it considered safe up there at that time?

Yes.

12:00 there were no problems. Sometimes we slept in the open and we had one revolver with us and we took it in turns to have a revolver under your pillow. During the night I can remember it was moonlight and the Arabs would come up on their horses and peer around and look at us and I would raise my head and say g'day or something.

12:30 They would nod their head and away they would go. When we stopped in at a village, the muktah - the headman - insisted we come in and we would squat on the floor and someone would bring in little cups of coffee. We didn't drink a cup each, the little cup was handed around and you took a sip and passed it on and took a sip.

Generally speaking how did the Arab

13:00 **people get on with the Australian fellows?**

No problem. They treated us like royalty wherever we stopped at these little villages.

On previous leaves were the Aussie soldiers well behaved?

Aussie soldiers didn't go up into these areas.

On your previous leaves into Cairo.

Yes, fights every night.

13:30 There would be the South Africans, the British, the New Zealanders and the Australians who seemed to be the main ones who would fight. Somebody would get annoyed or pick a fight, so it might be the Australians fighting a South African and somehow the New Zealanders would be there and they would be in a night club and they would wreck the place. They were brawling away throwing chairs and tables but the next night the Australians might be their

14:00 arch enemies. When I was there with Gus Gay we always got a can of beer and put it in our hat. So as soon as the fights started we left and we had a can of beer for breakfast in the morning.

14:30 **What happens now?**

We then went down to Attica which was a anti-aircraft defence and any planes that came over, came over at about 8,000 feet. Our normal range, maximum range was 5,000 so we put up a few but they were too high up. The

15:00 British - the American Liberty ships used to come in and moor and they would send out barges and load into the barges. Each night somebody would paddle out in a little boat and inspect the barges to see what was to be found and borrowed, and we didn't need any rations or anything from the cook house because

15:30 they were all American comforts funds we called it. We had an alternative gun site in case we were attacked where we could fall back about 100 yards away.

Can you talk us through the gun, what exactly it's like?

You've got two

16:00 men, one directing the gun up and down and the other one horizontal and you have wires there for laying off - where you lay off. You have a chap standing up on the top and you feed a clip of 4 two pound rounds into the loading area and he fires the gun with a foot pedal -

16:30 he was the number 4 and then you have others bringing up the ammunition to him and handing it to him. Then you have the bombardier, the sergeant directing. There would be couple of spares getting more ammunition and directing the layers because about every fourth one would be a tracer.

17:00 So he would tell them where they were - "You're behind, you're ahead, you are in front whatever," or whatever it might be.

One step on the pedal would that fire all four or one at a time?

He could, 2 a second but you couldn't keep it up all the time.

And the layer what would he be using for his sight?

There is a ring underneath the shell.

17:30 **Can you describe the ring? I have seen the pictures but how did you use the ring sight?**

There were two of them and you could direct to where you would sight through it ahead.

You would have to give the aircraft a lead wouldn't you>

18:00 Yes except when a Stuka came down. The Stukas, they were nice. They would come screaming down and then release their bomb and as they turned up, if they were in the right position you had a lovely belly to fire at. And they were pretty slow as they were climbing up. It wasn't long before they didn't come right down. They would release their bombs further up and that made them less accurate.

When was the

18:30 **first time you saw your first Stuka?**

Not until El Alamein.

Okay so continue on from where you are there in Attica?

The 6th and 7th Divisions were brought back to Australia and the 9th Division stayed. There were 3 anti-aircraft regiments over there at the time so they took some out of each regiment - about 20 out of each regiment. Some officers, some NCOs

19:00 and some gun layers to form a new unit and that became the 2/4th and we became 9th Division light

anti-aircraft, although some anti-aircraft were what we called corps troops and we were the only one who was a divisional anti-aircraft unit. Whilst the others got on boats and two guns onto a boat and gradually

19:30 came back to Australia, we were posted up to Palestine and then went through all the training you had. You had a few blokes with a bit of experience and a lot of blokes with none. We did that - we went back to Haifa and trained on the English guns that were on defending the port. We slept in the

20:00 one man tents on the side of Mount Carmel. So we did our training there and it was leave every night into Haifa, but the girls wouldn't have anything to do with you. The Jewish families would invite you to come and have a meal and it was purely a propaganda meeting and you would want to reciprocate

20:30 and say could I take you to the pictures - you know, the young lady of the house, and no way would they be seen out in public with you. They wanted to pump the propaganda into you.

In any of the places that you went in your time in the Middle East, did you see the reminders of the blokes who went there in the First World War - the Australian soldiers who went there in the First World War?

Not a great deal. I remember when we went through Beersheba I realised that

21:00 it was the water they were after, and all I can remember now of Beersheba was a couple of roads with peppercorn trees. Of course when we were on leave in Damascus there was the history of how the light horse got to Damascus and things like that, but not a great evidence. Except once

21:30 when I was at a film in Haifa and it was 40,000 Horsemen, the pre-war one and one lad came up very proudly and told me his father was an Australian but he had been left behind. So we did our training and whenever I could I

22:00 we would get a group of 4 or 5 and hire a taxi for the day and see a bit of the local biblical sites.

You went to Sunday school as a young bloke. Were most of the blokes in the same boat as you? They had all done Sunday school and knew of these places?

22:30 Yes. During my latter days at Sunday school, there was a teacher from the high school and he didn't worry too much about what the curriculum was supposed to be. He used to give us discussions on morality and philosophy and things like that which broadened our minds. It was not the normal Sunday school stuff. And as I said I had this book, HV Morton, and I would read that up

23:00 and we would go and pick out where we were going for the day. I went to one particular Jewish settlement to see how they operate - Degunyah, it was called, I can remember that. It was on the side of the Sea of Galilee. They made you very welcome and you saw what they do but everything was just a

23:30 community effort. We didn't mind the community effort in the army but not in civilian life. Then they decided they would give each brigade of the Australian Division, 3 brigades to a division, 4 weeks specialised desert training in Syria, and I think 24th Brigade

24:00 and our battery was attached to that and we did the training. Movement in columns and movement at night by compass and distance on a black night and doing things like that. Using our guns as anti-tank guns and we were very proud, we fired better than the anti-tank blokes.

24:30 **Were you using the same ammunition for that role?**

Yes, in our role we were using normal Bofors ammunition but you had Bofors - what did they call it? Anyway, it was not the stuff you fired at planes, it was an anti-tank gun armour piercing. So we did that training and then

25:00 the next brigade was to come up and instead of that we were whistled to go down to El Alamein.

What did you know of El Alamein at that stage?

Nothing. We were aware that the Brits had been pushed right back. The first night, when we were going through

25:30 out of Alexandria and camped the guns with everybody is scattered around, just on first light a German plane came over and shot our sergeant, troop sergeant major, three blokes sleeping side by side beside the thing and the bloke in the middle was killed and the other two -

26:00 that is the luck of the game.

That was from strafing was it?

Yes. So we went forward then and then there was a tank trap, a very deep trap and a couple of guns and mine was one of them. You sat there in case the Germans broke through and the indication was, no matter what happens you don't go backwards, you stay.

26:30 And of course you were up higher and you can only depress your gun so far, so you had to be well back where they could come around in a zig or a zag. I wasn't happy about that but fortunately they obviously held them up and after a matter of 4 or 5 hours we went forward.

The gun position was in the tank trap?

No up on the lip and as I used to say - with due respect to the lady -

27:00 standing out like dogs' balls.

So in the heat of the battle you guys would be the only ones up?

Yes. Then it was going through the El Alamein. As I said, I was a gun sergeant with a team of about 8 or 10 and you lived together, did everything.

27:30 We moved around to wherever the requirements were - normally defence of the artillery, sometimes headquarters. Sometimes we have even been pushed forward to defend the forward infantry. I think it was more of a morale booster for them. One of the biggest compliments I think we got - because everybody else is below ground

28:00 there and they just shock their heads and said, "You Bofors boys are mad bastards!"

Were the guns on wheels?

Wheels yes, then you jack them up.

I have seen some photos where there are four legs coming out and they look like they are sitting on the ground.

Yes that's right and you've got girders and you put a girder out and then you wind the four of them up.

28:30 **How long did that take?**

A minute. That was one of the things when we were training in Syria, we were in columns and then we would be attacked by our planes as part of the exercise, and we would have to stop, pull out, get our gun into action and they would all scatter and then they would go forward

29:00 again and we had to get our gun out of action and then catch up.

What sort of aircraft were you using in the practice stage?

They would have been Spitfires and Hurricanes.

They were the Royal Australian Air Force?

Probably or the Brits, one of them because they mixed up far more than the army did.

In training you deployed a gun and it would just be like 'bang bang you're dead'?

29:30 Yes you hope. But of course, at one time in El Alamein, if there was a concerted attack, the idea was you would merely put up a barrage instead of firing specially at an individual plane. You were putting up a barrage to keep them above 5,000 feet

30:00 even though you weren't going to get a hit. The worst experience I had there was they had a concerted attack on the anti-aircraft guns, so we were bombed and then the Stukas came and then they came along and strafed

30:30 and you didn't know where it was coming from.

Was this at night time?

No

This was at day time?

No, in day time but we were being bombed and being strafed and being dive bombed all at the one time. Our gun was sandbagged and there were sand bags on one side which were just ripped to pieces. That's how close it was. In that particular one

31:00 the barrel overheated and we had to use the method of four blokes who could change the barrel, take the barrel down and put a new barrel in. That was the only time we had to change barrels.

How long would that take?

A minute.

You were well rehearsed?

Oh yes. You practised these things but of course in practice

31:30 if you touched the barrel it didn't matter, but when it was for real it made a big difference.

You didn't have gloves or anything just hands?

You had the - like a clamp you put over it and twist it and take it out. Then they were going to change the scope of the regiment

32:00 and a couple from each battery or several were put up from each battery to be interviewed by the commander of - the CRA [commander royal artillery] - anyway, the artillery boss brigadier, and when I got in I was one of those recommended for interview

32:30 and he came up on top of the establishment and I knew the only way I could get a commission was if there were more officer positions. So I argued for a certain type of organisation and it was one of those that I had typed up when I was in 9 Battery. I told you I typed up it up, I was aware of those and I had that in the back of my mind. So when I got out

33:00 they asked me how it went and I said, "I got rubbished every time I opened my mouth. I didn't do really well at all." They said, "What was the problem?" I said, "I was on the gun establishment and officer establishment and everything I said he had a counter to it." They said, "Did you stick to your guns?" And I said, "Yes," and he said, "Well that's the type of organisation he is after."

33:30 I can remember the night well. It was July 27. It was a moonlight night and the 2/28th Battalion went in to capture a hill called Ruin Ridge and the poor buggers got wiped out - 400 were taken prisoner and a couple of hundred killed and others wounded. So I remember the British

34:00 were supposed to come in on the flank and they didn't get through. They got held up in the lines.

The Bofors were used primarily as a direct firing gun. Could it ever be used in an indirect method?

Yes. They were certainly used in New Guinea as a direct - they were fired at the Japs who were a couple of hundred yards away, but at the actual Battle of El Alamein,

34:30 because the frontlines weren't parallel and they wanted to hit the German line all at the one time, so some of them looked as though they were walking on an angle from their own line, and the Bofors - they had 3 Bofors guns for the Australian troops firing a tracer round every minute. So there was an officer in charge of each

35:00 and they would leap forward how many hundred - a couple of hundred yards and go into action again. And it was the officer's responsibility and they were firing their tracer and this was the middle line for the infantry battalions going in. That was the first time it had been used that way.

You were saying about the Stukas attacking the gun positions and that sort of thing,

35:30 **what was your impression of the Stuka?**

The first couple of times they frighten the living daylights out of you. They would scream down but you got a team grip there and they are firing and you've got the adrenaline going and then because we harried them so much that they didn't scream down to only a matter of

36:00 500 feet or something and they had to drop their bombs higher up.

You said they made a concerted effort against the anti-aircraft guns?

They did at that particular time.

How did they fare?

We lost a few killed and a few wounded, but we had our ammunition there, and then stacked around or buried

36:30 would be some reserve ammunition and then the bulk of your ammunition is then on your truck about 100 yards away and we had to get the reserve ammunition right back to that truck, and blokes were carrying a box of ammunition 24 rounds. Normally

37:00 you would need two to lift them but they could carry one on their own. They couldn't do it on their own without the adrenaline.

Was it too dangerous to bring the gun tractor up to drop off ammunition?

Yes you're right. You kept everything scattered. At the Battle of El Alamein, on the night of 23rd October when we went in, I was still a sergeant but I was in charge of three guns. My commission hadn't come through.

37:30 I had to guard the entrance of the gap through the mine fields and it was a bright moonlight night so on the map so I knew where the guns were going to be. I thought it was no problem, but by the time I got there you could hardly see your hand in front of you because of the dirt and dust and muck and

everything else. So I had to do it by compass and pace out

38:00 and put your guns in. Then the second night they were bombing the gap and we weren't firing and they whacked one of the trucks with ammunition and of course it just went up. So then I had to get a message back. We had no way of communicating at that stage that

38:30 I wasn't mobile, I was one gun light if we had to move.

How many guns per battery were there?

Twelve. So we worked in a section of three guns and then two sections and that was a troop.

How far away were you from the rest of the other section?

Well, you might not see them for days

39:00 or weeks. You would have three guns and they would be spaced around and they might be half a mile apart and you would never see them, you have your own team. Particularly people from other batteries. Like I go to reunions and I have never seen them before in the army, yet we were in the same unit.

Tape 4

00:32 **Because the guns had to be ready to be moved at any time how defensive could you make a gun position?**

You dug in shall we say a foot, and then you would have sandbags another foot, and that would be about it, that was about the depth.

01:00 One of the worst parts was the shelling by the German field gun, an 88 mm gun and they had air bursts, so once you were down below ground level and everybody had a half sheet of galvanised iron to put over them and that would be sandbagged or just sand over the top

01:30 and you slept with your head underneath so if an air burst came and it did manage to get you it would be your legs that were hit not your head. I couldn't to that - claustrophobia, I just couldn't stand it and despite being a sergeant and supposed to obey orders I sometimes crawled out and slept in the corner of the gun pit. I just couldn't handle the claustrophobia part of it.

02:00 A lot of casualties were caused by those air bursts - those daisy cutters.

What millimetre is the Bofors?

40. A two pound shell.

How hard was it to dig?

In parts it was hard and other times it all depends - some of it was like clay and other times it was sandy. So it depends where you were.

02:30 **You spoke of an instance of where a fellow was saved by wearing his helmet?**

He was a friend of mine. He wasn't in our unit, he was in Bardia in the early 6th Division, and he was pulling an officer into a dugout and a shell burst and

03:00 killed one officer, got him and hit his tin hat here. I was talking to him on the phone the other day. We ring each other up at Christmas time. He has a great big scar across here. The MO [medical officer],

03:30 the doctor of his unit - his brother was with him, and he said, "He can take a ticket in Tatts [lottery company]." And then lo and behold, they both started up as privates in the 2/5th Battalion, came back as sergeants and then were transferred to the 15th Militia Battalion and in New Guinea the other brother got shot in the leg and bled to death.

04:00 **So in regard to helmets, did the blokes need convincing to wear them?**

It was optional. They had them on - you will see photographs, some of us have got them on and some haven't. They were a bloody nuisance to be quite frank. I would think that all the time that we were in action firing, most of the time we would be wearing tin hats - some didn't.

Also a lot of photos I have seen blokes were shirtless as well.

Yes.

04:30 They had a pair of boots and a pair of shorts.

Was that summer dress or was that just an optional thing they did?

No, there was no water to wash clothes so why wear them. It was stinking hot, flies and dysentery and wog sores.

How did blokes go as far as sunburn and that sort of thing?

We became very dark.

05:00 Very black. I can remember when we handed over the guns back when I was with the 3rd Regiment, we handed the guns over, and the Tommies came up and they were lily white and they wanted to take their shirts off because all our blokes hadn't had a shirt on for months. And all their officers scolded them - put your shirts back on you don't want to be like those

05:30 bloody colonials.

Did you see much of that colonial attitude from the English over there?

Yes, the battery major was English, Hughes-Hallett. I always got on well with him, as I said, he took me on that tour. When we were on the Canal and

06:00 I suggested to him that I would like to go on leave. He was out having dinner at an English artillery mess and he said, "Where are you going? Where is the leave?" I said, "Gus Guy and I want to go down to Luxor and Aswan." "Good God Read ignorant colonials don't go to Luxor on leave!" So it was still there.

06:30 **You got to Luxor eventually?**

Yes we got to Luxor.

The conditions are pretty terrible aren't they?

In the desert yes.

What was the worst thing about it?

Your so-called living conditions and the food, the flies - millions and millions. If you got food you would have one arm like this

07:00 going the whole time to keep them out of your food. They tried to bring in hygiene where you built a little toilet about 30 yards out from your gun pit that type of thing. Plenty of fleas and a few scorpions and things like that around. But it was the wog sores and poor food.

What sort of food were you getting at that stage?

07:30 Oh mainly bully beef stew. That was all they could give you. Normally they only brought up a hot meal at night time after dark because you didn't want vehicles careering around.

What sort of meal would you get for the hot meal?

Again, bully beef stew.

It was just hot instead of cold.

Yes.

08:00 **How sick did you become of bully beef?**

You didn't eat a lot. When the chaps went back out for 10 days and on good food, the difference in their appearance was amazing.

Did you lose weight?

I certainly didn't put it on. Talking about moving,

08:30 usually if our guns were going to be moved the gun sergeants - the section commander, and they would just go around say your gun's over there and your's there and then you move at night time and you find out where your position is and then you dig in.

09:00 One night we moved and in the morning we found we were up in the middle of discarded Italian hand grenades. They were lying everywhere. How the hell we didn't dig them. We had just got a new reinforcement into our gun crew, a bloke called Arrowsmith

09:30 and he had been at Tobruk and he had been wounded and he was back. He had a clean uniform and clean shirts and everything else, clean hat. Anyway he got a couple of blokes and they were walking around looking at all these grenades and he picked up a stone and he threw it and he said, "See that bastard there, they're dangerous." It exploded and wounded

10:00 him. The other two, one each side didn't get hit - the luck of the draw.

How long were you there in those conditions?

We went up there at the beginning of July and came out mid November in '42. The battle was over on 5th November.

10:30 They opened up with about 1000 artillery guns on the night of the 23rd at twenty to ten. You've probably heard this from others. It was a noise and a sound to behold.

Did they brief you on what was going to happen?

Yes.

What did they tell you?

I've even got a copy of the message. In their

11:00 camouflage of the attack they indicated they were going to attack down the south. Apparently some base people were sent back on leave, so it looked like people were going on leave and there was not going to be an attack. Where our gun tractor - it was really only about a 2 ton truck really -

11:30 and we had it with a camouflage net and at night it would be taken out and a tank put in and our gun would be taken right back. The forward infantry were brought forward and they had to stay camouflaged all day in their holes. Then when it was dark the tanks went out and our guns

12:00 were brought forward and then we went backwards - I don't know how many miles, to get in our right place for the right sequence of coming through and going forward and we were just through the artillery lines when they opened up and nearly deafened us. Then we had to go a few miles to the forward to the part of the gap in the mine fields. I was a section commander

12:30 at that stage, but that's the way it went. When the battle was all over my commission came through.

Can you explain to us what it looked like and what it sounded like - the barrage?

The noise? It was spectacular because it was a line of 900 field guns all opening up right on the moment.

13:00 Of course we couldn't see right down. We were the only ones, mainly the Australians and the 51st Highlanders next to us. The 51st Highlanders went in led by a piper. Poor bugger. He led them in until he was pinged.

How long did the barrage last for?

20 minutes - no, 15 minutes and then there was a gap

13:30 for five minutes or so. And then during that five minutes, they were bombed by planes and they opened up again spasmodically after that.

That's when you were doing your fire and movement as well?

Not at night time, no. We were getting in position for that.

14:00 **What happened after that? After your guns had moved to their new positions?**

I can't recall how many times we moved but we certainly did move probably through the mine field and in no man's land - depending where the support was required. If the artillery guns came forward and I don't think

14:30 they did - or some did. If headquarters moved, they would need defence of those.

So the Bofors were used as anti-aircraft protection for the field gun batteries? Did any enemy aircraft have a go at you?

My word.

Mostly Stukas?

Yes Stukas and Messerschmitts.

15:00 We had a limit of 5,000 feet and I can't recall whether it was there or not until we got to New Guinea, and I think it was when we got to New Guinea the artifices would pull around so it would last to 8,000 feet. You did individual ones and later on they produced a few

15:30 that automatically exploded at the 5,000 limit.

It wasn't the gun that was limiting the range it was the ammunition?

Yes it was the ammunition.

Were the guns from Australia or did we get them from the British?

I have no idea but it is a Swedish gun and the Germans had them too.

16:00 I guess we got them from England.

So presumably you could have been getting ammunition from the same place the Germans were getting theirs?

Yes.

Was there any sort of correspondence from home at that stage?

Yes every now and again you would get mail. You could send mail. My parents and

16:30 my brother Ray didn't know where I was. I never let them know that I was up there. I never mentioned war or fighting, just routine stuff which must have been pretty boring.

It would have been censored I suppose?

Once it was known Australians were in there they could have indicated that they were

17:00 in a bit of aircraft attack or something like that. One I did enjoy - nothing to do with our unit. The Germans built a spotting tower - you've heard this one have you? No? - and a couple of the artillery blokes had a bet who could knock it down. The bloke who had first shot knocked it down

17:30 with his second round, so the others didn't get a go.

What did you guys do to lighten the tension every now and then when you got a chance?

Swish flies away. That's about all because you were in your gun crew. You had your 8 or 10 blokes. Somebody was always a spotter with binoculars and you would hear a plane

18:00 and you could always hear a plane before - because there would be 8 or 10 of them but it would sound like one initially and everybody would be scanning the sky. You had to put your two eyes up scanning to keep the sun out and they would spot it.

How many binoculars would have been on the gun position?

Just the one.

18:30 We had to identify it and to see what height it was coming in where it was going and what height it was.

Did you get pretty adept at seeing an aircraft and guessing straight away what height it was?

Yes. What they did, indirectly answering you, the Hurricanes and the Messerschmitts coming straight at you looked the same, so the British put red on the boss of the propeller

19:00 and the Germans did blue - an unofficial gentlemen's agreement. If one was coming skimming along you didn't know what it was until - particularly if they had been in a dog fight and he was out of ammunition and he was coming low and he was one of ours - and on the other hand if he is a German you let him go.

19:30 So anything that had a blue boss on the propeller he got it.

You don't know of any trickery that was engaged by either side?

No. One bloke, German, when he was brought down and they rushed over and captured him, he went crook because he was fired at while he was crash landing.

20:00 He didn't think that was - it was different of course in Crete when it was the 7 Battery and the other regiment and all the paratroopers coming down. They had good pot shots at them.

How often would you get hits on aircraft?

Not very often.

20:30 Probably one every 1000 rounds. You would bring one down and you would get quite a few hits. When I was a gun sergeant I only had one recorded and that was because it had been seen to come down by the forward observation officer of one of the artillery units.

The blokes would have been pretty happy about that I would imagine?

Yes.

21:00 I don't know what we found, we found some grog somewhere. We used to get one bottle of beer a week. I couldn't see any sense in that.

It would have been hot too?

Yes.

I suppose it was wet and probably tasted better than the water. I have heard stories that the water tasted awful. What caused it to taste like that?

I guess it was bore water.

21:30 Some of our bore water here in Australia is not too good. And as I mentioned earlier, some of the wells had been salted in early to's and fro's of the battles as they spread along.

Early on in your training you did your aircraft identification, how well were most of the blokes

22:00 **in the gun crew? Were they all pretty good?**

Yes you would be talking among one of the others about what it would be but wet never seem to have any trouble of not identifying. I don't recall any firing on an allied plane.

22:30 But you got to know them.

Did you get to know them by sound as well?

Not really, I didn't. Some claimed they could. They would say what it was. I could do that as a kid with the early cars in the 20's and 30's but I couldn't out in the desert.

When you weren't in action and one guy would always be on lookout, what would the guys do?

23:00 Blow flies away. There is nothing. You might have some reading matter but you would talk and smoke.

Did you smoke at the time?

My word. Cigarette smoking was more important than food.

How did you get cigarettes?

23:30 Now and again you would get a comforts fund issue. Now and again when you got your bottle of beer you could buy a couple of ounces of tobacco and roll your own.

All the comforts funds, they were all American were they?

No that was just our nom de plume for the stuff we pinched. It would be Australian comfort fund.

24:00 Then there would be parcels sent.

Red Cross parcels or personal?

Personal parcels, fruit cakes and tins of cigarettes. I gave up smoking after I had sand fly fever and my brother-in-law sent me out a tin of 500 Craven As and I was too lousy to give them up. I said, "I will just smoke these." And I was back smoking again.

Have you smoked for the rest of your life?

No I gave it up when

24:30 my wife was pregnant with our second child. It used to make her ill and I had a Melbourne winter and I had to go outside to smoke. And if I only went to kitchen she would say you didn't go outside, and dash for the bathroom. So that cured me. It wasn't worthwhile having a smoke out in the cold in winter.

Keep telling us about what happened at El Alamein?

25:00 At one stage when they tried to break through down on the southern part, Alam Halfa or something like that it was called, my gun seemed to be put in no man's land. I was on the edge of what they called Materia Ridge and they were expecting if the Germans got through they were going to

25:30 swing around behind. So I had to be prepared to use the armour piercing but I was not to retire backwards, I was to retire north and they had set up another little box - like the old British squares they used to have. Another minor Tobruk type of thing.

26:00 So that was the evacuation to there to strengthen the thing. Fortunately they didn't get through and they were prepared for them and they didn't get through. But it was on a ridge and you couldn't dig in. You were just squatting up in the air. We weren't very happy.

How did it make the fellows feel,

26:30 **that every time there was an action they were so exposed?**

That was our job we were used to it. That's what we were in. We reckon the infantry was a pretty crook game.

Did you ever notice the nerves of the blokes getting worn away?

Yes they would get a bit now and again.

27:00 Not so - yes, in our official history it indicates that some couldn't take it. One bloke who had been in Crete and had got out of Crete - not too many did - he was one of those transferred across

27:30 from the 3rd regiment, the first time in action and he couldn't take it. He curled up in a corner and they whisked him away and discharged him I guess. We never saw him again. There was an officer the same. In fact I met the battery commander - he has since died about 10 years ago. He was the bloke who recommended me for the interview

28:00 for my commission, Baglin and he said, "What happened about so and so?" I said, "He was given a bowler hat wasn't he?" He said, "I don't know, nobody ever told me. All I knew was that one day I was missing an officer."

What was 'given a bowler hat' a euphemism for?

Being discharged.

28:30 **Did you ever have any spare gun numbers like spare blokes?**

Yes, like I mentioned, that bloke Goldsmith. We didn't really require him but he was a spare reserve.

What did you use them for?

Digging, digging the gun in. That was always handy. Keeping

29:00 ammunition up and that type of thing, depending on what type of -

Making brews and things like that?

Yes. There weren't too many brews made.

Not enough water?

No.

Did you ever have to eat at the guns in action positions?

All the time. That's where you lived and your little holes were around the gun site and the truck. When I was a section

29:30 officer then you had your own little headquarters. You had a driver and your batman but I didn't have a batman because I was still only a sergeant.

How much sleep would the blokes be getting a night do you reckon?

We had a guard on each night and it was up to the sergeants whether they went on guard themselves. So I

30:00 always went on guard and you just turned back one or two hours of the total that was on. It was better to have them on for two hours but they overlap like the senate does, so you had a fresh one. Some didn't bother too much about it saying we'll roll back, but our infantry was going

30:30 and they could come back with prisoners so why couldn't the Germans particularly if you are fairly close to the front line. So I was pretty insistent on guard duty.

That was guard duty at the machine gun point?

At our Bofors.

Did you have a Vickers or anything else there?

No. Then at night time you moved around so that

31:00 you had broken sleep anyway.

Being the sergeant and having to organise things, you would have got even less sleep I imagine?

Yes.

How many hours do you reckon you could possibly get in a night?

It would vary. Depending on whether there was artillery going on and what action was

31:30 going on and whether the fleas were biting and whether you had diarrhoea. So it varied but it was always a disturbed sleep.

Could you sleep in the day as well or was it too hot?

Too hot. I don't recall anybody snoozing during the day.

Was there generally more action in the day time as opposed to the night time or was it mixed?

32:00 As far as anti-aircraft we were only firing during day so we were underground then. But during the day

we were on duty all daylight hours.

Did you ever have cam nets over the guns at all?

Yes. At one stage when we were down close to the infantry we were in camouflage and

32:30 not to fire unless we were directly fired at. Then you would have to whip it off.

Did you think they were adequate in camouflaging you or did you think it was a bit of a joke?

We thought that the camouflage would be given away by where – there was a vehicle track that went there and it went to a point,

33:00 and later on there was so many tracks around there anyway. But the ration truck never just drove up and turned around, it just went straight on type of thing. We really needed it only when we moved to a new position and we would have the camouflage, but I would imagine the photo interpretation

33:30 would be able to pick it up.

I suppose it gave the guys a bit of shade?

Yes.

How did you go if you ever needed any resupply of any gear or equipment was that fairly – ?

The officer or somebody would come around each day. They set up a little library arrangement from the unit comfort funds and bought

34:00 books and they were transported around for anybody who wanted to read and that type of thing.

Did you say earlier there was no communications between any of the sections?

Not most of the time, particularly in the early stages of the Battle of Alamein because you were moving all the time. You would see your section officer at least every day and

34:30 he would see his troop officer. You would soon get a message back in normal conditions.

At this stage of the game you are pretty much stationary are you?

You would move every 3 or 4 days. I don't know why we were shuffled around to different parts. I remember one time and we were pulled back.

35:00 It was a low area and they wanted the Germans to come forward into it. We felt very bad about going backwards but it was part of the strategy in trying to get their final lines ready for the main battle.

Were you informed in any way overall of how the battle was progressing?

Yes they came round each day and said first day that

35:30 none of the objectives had been met and what was happening. We got a general picture. I was then a section officer as a sergeant and I let the 3 guns know what the situation was and how it was going.

How did you like the responsibility of being a section commander?

36:00 I reckoned it was good fun. I missed being on an actual gun at first but because I was still a sergeant I had a warrant officer under me, a section warrant officer but that was no problems on that. I enjoyed the additional responsibility of being able to

36:30 put the blokes in what they do and keep them happy.

What were your blokes like?

Just ordinary average Australians. A few – some of them later on became big in business. A few knights among them and

37:00 a judge in the High Court, but basically they were just average butcher, tradesmen, average bloke.

With all the extra responsibility how much extra pay did you get?

Oh I got onto a 1 pound a day when I got my commission. 1 pound a day, what's that? 2 dollars.

37:30 **What would the average gunner been earning do you reckon?**

About 6 shillings or 7 shillings a day, 70 cents.

Were you sending any money home at that stage?

Yes. You could allocate part of your pension out so it was banked back in Australia and

38:00 when you were married there was a short married allowance so there was a minimum amount you had

to send back to your wife, and whatever it was, 3 bob [shillings] a day or something – you could allocate more if you wanted to allocate back.

Did you always feel that you would see it through, that you would survive, get through it?

38:30 Yes I had a bit of trauma in New Guinea later on, but the desert was – we were confident.

What happened then?

In New Guinea?

No towards the end of the Alamein campaign.

I can only say it from the

39:00 Australian point of view. The Australians had to punch a line through the Germans and then they came back along the railway line behind them. When the 2/48th Battalion came out, they had gone in with 650 blokes and when they were pulled out on 30th November

39:30 there were 54 still standing on their feet. The 2/24th, they did a bit better, they had a few more on their feet but they had done the bulk of the hard work. That's why I think it's a pity that the work the 9th Division infantry did in Alamein

40:00 was not recognised anywhere.

Tape 5

00:32 **I wonder if you can talk to me about the propaganda that we just had a look at.**

They were dropped by the Germans over there and would be just thousands of them floating down and you would scramble and pick one up for a souvenir and laugh like hell. It made no

01:00 influence whatsoever. It was a joke as far as we were concerned. I don't think we did it. As far as I am aware we never dropped propaganda sheets over the Germans or the Italians.

How often would they be dropped?

Not very often. It was probably only three lots up in our area because it was a 30 mile front.

01:30 So they would probably have to a few drops to cover all the troops but they would just fly very high, about 10,000 feet and let them sprinkle down like confetti.

So we got to the end of El Alamein. Tell us about leaving there and making your way home?

They had a very large divisional

02:00 parade by 12,000 men. The line they said, was about a mile long. There were 3 ranks about a mile long type of thing. It was done as a parade at the conclusion of Alamein and reinforcements had been sent over from Australia so

02:30 the divisions was fairly well up to strength. We were thanked by Alexander. He was the head of the Middle East. One of the messages he said was that one of his greatest moments was that he served with the 9th Australian Division. We all blew out our chests.

03:00 We thought we were pretty good. I have a photograph of the parade in one of those books that I'll show you. It gives a good indication of the size of the parade. Some of our guns were scattered around, not all our unit marched. We had our anti-aircraft guns around the perimeter of the parade ground.

03:30 **So people had a good knowledge of what happened over there? Do you think people in Australia had a good knowledge of what happened with the 9th Division?**

Not really. A few splurges on the paper. Today they might know a bit about Vietnam and Korea but know nothing about Alamein. What is rewarding thought is that when you march on Anzac Day –

04:00 I march down in Brisbane, and the response of the people and the little kids waving their flags. It's really something. The enthusiasm of the crowd is unbelievable – the way we feel about it.

The trip back home to Australia what was that like? What ship were you in?

I was in the

04:30 Ile De France and it had been converted to a troop ship, but as I was an officer then the cabins might have 2 or 4 in it or something like that. You were just allocated cabins on an alphabetical basis through ranks and you got two other blokes and we had a very comfortable trip. Just a few doors up were four majors

05:00 in one about half our size and it was a very strict rule. Once you were allocated a cabin you stayed there. So we were the envy of those four majors. It was a rather lackadaisical route at the time. A bit of sport activities. There was not much else you could do to fill in your time. Played cards every evening, not high stakes. So

05:30 just a bit of sporting activities, boxing matches and things like that. I didn't partake in the boxing, that wasn't my sport.

How were you feeling physically?

Not too badly. We had had a relaxing time in Palestine. After we came out we were all given 4 or 5 days leave. I went off leave with

06:00 Dudley, the chap I mentioned earlier and we did nothing unusual or exuberant. Just quietly saw a few things and met up with some other people and had a few drinks and had a quiet time. I got measured for my officer's suit – that was at your own expense. You had an issue one but they were pretty

06:30 tatty so you would smarten yourself up and have a tailored one.

Did it get finished before you left?

Yes.

You wore that home?

Yes. In that march I'm wearing it.

What did you know at that stage, before you arrived back in Australia about what was happening in the Pacific?

We were aware, very much aware. We heard the news. We would always get

07:00 the world news wherever we were. The sinking of the battle ships and the fall of Singapore. Some of the 7th Division had come back and gone straight to the islands and were captured straight off, I think they were ashore and their equipment hadn't got ashore before the Japs – so things were tough.

When did you know that you were about to head over there?

07:30 Head back to Australia do you mean?

When you had finished at Alamein had you expected to be going home or to the islands?

We didn't know where we were going. We were moved out and some thought – there were rumours everywhere, and some reckoned we were going back up the desert now that we were refreshed because the Germans were then right back round Tunisia or somewhere or other.

08:00 Others thought we were going to be pushed north against the Germans if they won at Stalingrad and came down south to the oil fields. And another rumour was that we would get home. I have got no recollection of how – of getting on board when we left to come home.

08:30 I have read where we went – and I can faintly remember a very rough track to where we got on the ship down at a place called Massawa. There was quite a large number of ships in the convoy because it brought home the whole division.

Was the food better on the way back?

Yes I was an officer and it was much better food than what we had on the British

09:00 troop ship. But again the men were very cramped, very cramped conditions.

So arriving back in Australia. Where did you land?

We landed back in Sydney and then went by train down to Victoria, down to Seymour where we were given our leave pass and some money out of our pay books, and home on leave.

09:30 **What were your thoughts when you were coming through Sydney Harbour?**

I had never seen Sydney Harbour before but all the New South Welshmen they were excited. They wanted to tell you where everything was. We went by train – we got onto a troop train.

Were there any crowds?

Yes crowds waving, cheering but

10:00 we were Victorians and we wanted to get home.

Did that train trip feel like a long trip?

Yes we thought how lucky they were, they were already home. We had another few days to go and I

lived in the country so then it was an extra day to get up into the country.

Was your fiancée there and your parents?

Her brother was in

10:30 the 9th Division. He was in artillery, the 2/12th field regiment. He was sick with sand fly fever or something and I went and saw him in hospital a few days before we sailed, and I was quite sure he had been left behind. But he was put on one of the destroyers which was escorting the convoy. So he came home on a destroyer and he was landed in

11:00 Victoria, so he was home a couple of days before I was, and my wife peddled her bike to go and see him when she heard he was home and she came off her bike and broke her arm. By the time I got back she had a broken arm. When we were married the archdeacon

11:30 said, "I have never married a bride with a broken arm before," so I told him I hadn't either.

What was it like seeing your parents?

They were holidaying in the country at a place called Daylesford, so I went back up through there and stayed with them for a couple of days and then we went up to Swan Hill. They were far more excited than I was. They were really excited.

12:00 By this time you have been away 2 ¼ years and you've faced death a few times and you're a bit blasé about everything. You don't get excited about things which perhaps you might have a couple of years earlier.

Did you feel relieved?

Yes. Happy to be home. Rae and I talked over the phone,

12:30 because I went back with my parents and we decided that we would get married. Her people were on dried fruits, grapes and her mother said, "It is picking season, you don't get married in picking season," because they were all flat out as you can imagine. She said, "Wait until your next leave," and I said, "I don't know when my next leave is going to be." So

13:00 the headmistress where Rae was teaching at Firbank, she arranged all the wedding for her mother and we got married from Firbank. Then we had about a week together. It had taken us a week to make up our mind and a week for arrangements and a week together.

What was that like trying to organise and get everything together?

13:30 **You got help from the boarding mistress but what about everything else?**

I went down and I got the bridesmaids frocks from friends of my sister's. Rae managed to get a wedding frock from a distant cousin and Rae's brother and my brother were best man and groomsman and

14:00 her two sisters were the bridesmaids. So it was a family affair and I got Dudley Gallagher to be master of ceremonies at the wedding and there it was.

At the time of the wedding did you have any more news about where you were going?

No. When we returned from leave we were posted up to Seymour which is about 60 miles north of Melbourne. We camped there and then we came

14:30 down and did that march through Melbourne and then we were put on trains and away we went up to the Tablelands up at Cairns for jungle training. That would have been about April, middle April.

What kind of wedding ceremony did you have?

Normal one. Everything nicely organised and we managed to find a restaurant which

15:00 would cater for us. Rae's father was a member of parliament and he managed to get a few bottles of grog out of the parliamentary cellar. So it was pleasant.

How many people were at your wedding?

Probably 40 or 50.

15:30 We rustled up everybody. Some of our chaps who were on leave and I had a few of those along and Rae's friends.

You mentioned that the main reason you wanted to get married was because you didn't know when your next leave was. Did you have any other reasons?

No. I liked the girl, I loved the girl. I liked to put my arm around her.

Any other reasons for doing it right then when you were on leave?

- 16:00 As I say I hadn't seen her for nearly 2½ years. When was I going to see her next type of thing. We initially talked it over and we said, "No we won't and we changed our minds." So we only had a week together. When we were at Seymour, Rae rang up and said - I managed to ring her. There was a cricket match
- 16:30 on and I made myself 12th man. I was the drinks man and we would go to the pub nearby, and they gave me a couple of bottles of beer every now and again. I rang Rae up, so a little while later she rang back at the hotel and they yelled out to me I was wanted on the phone. She said she and another teacher,
- 17:00 in fact the lady who had taught her and whose husband was also up here at Seymour in the 9th Division, were coming up, but I said, "There is no accommodation anywhere." because I had been checking. So she said, "We will sleep in the church vestry." I was telling the owner of the pub, the bar lady, what my problems were
- 17:30 and I said, "Haven't you got a bed anywhere?" She said, "There's an old bed in the storeroom, but there is no room to move it out, so you would have to have that." I mentioned the other couple. So they were all sleeping men on the verandah and they got an old wire mattress and they put four kerosene cases under it -
- 18:00 you used to get petrol in 4 gallon tins and two four gallon tins made a case. So we were inside on a bed that the mattress went like that. A couple of the others were very envious that we got our wives up. They found out there was a pub up at Nagambie
- 18:30 which was probably 20 miles away to the north so they booked in there. They were bringing their wives up the next day so we then went up to Nagambie and had two nights up there - very pleasant.

What about the honeymoon where did you go?

We went to Sherwood Lodge, at Sherwood Forest just north of Melbourne in the hills. Then we darted back up to Swan Hill

- 19:00 because the local community where Rae lived wanted to put on a function for her.

How long did you have for your honeymoon.?

Just a week, 8 days. We wasted time.

Did you get back in time OK?

I didn't. I was 2 days late getting back and

- 19:30 many months later I paraded before the commanding officer and I said, "I told a fib." I said "I couldn't get back on the Saturday and I couldn't see any point in going back into camp in Melbourne on a Saturday and therefore why go in on a Sunday. So I was paraded up on Monday morning when my leave finished
- 20:00 I said, "I could have got back yesterday but I couldn't see any point. I was one day late, so I may as well be two days late." He said to me, "Do you wish to face a court martial or be sentenced by me?" I said, "I will take your sentence, sir," he said, "You are reprimanded," so that was it.

How were you reprimanded?

That's it. "You are reprimanded."

- 20:30 **Not too bad.**

For the extra two days leave.

Were there many men who had a similar kind of leave? Who had gone back and married their -

Yes quite a few. So then we used to get hold of the doctor and find out some information - whether our prowess was any good or not.

- 21:00 How often should you have sex.

What did the doctor say?

He said, "Whenever you feel like it."

When you were on leave?

Yes when you were on leave.

You went back to Melbourne and then -

- 21:30 **was it Shepparton?**

Seymour. Then we went up by train to the Tablelands.

By that stage did you know that you were about to go over?

Yes we were in jungle greens now so we knew we were going up to New Guinea.

What was it like getting the news that you were about to head off again?

You just accepted it. We were glad that we were so far away that you

22:00 couldn't nick out and take leave, leave was just out. There was one chap that I had to defend in a court martial. He'd nicked off to see his girlfriend. He had got his girlfriend pregnant and she was threatening to commit suicide, so he nicked off because he knew he couldn't get leave. I had to defend him, when he had seen the girl and sorted things out and then he gave himself up to them

22:30 in Melbourne. I had to do his defence and fortunately he kept his correspondence which indicated it was quite genuine. I thought I put up a pretty good defence for him but he was sent to the gaol - to the military gaol for several weeks. He did thank me and he said, "I didn't know I was such a good bloke as you let them know."

23:00 **Did you have to go in defence of many of your men?**

No that was the only time I did it. And there would be three others who would be the court case - who would be the judges.

What was Rae's reaction to the news of you heading off again?

I guess she had nothing to do but just accept it. It was something that - she did say to me that

23:30 being married like that for a week one time it was just like living in sin. So I asked her how did she know what living in sin was like?

Had she asked you much about your experiences in the Middle East?

No and I never told her ever.

To this day?

Yes. I never -

24:00 She knew things weren't all the best because I would get woken up with a dig in the ribs during the night because I went through nightmares.

When you would wake up in the middle of the night she didn't ask you what was wrong?

I would just say - those bloody Japs.

That was the

24:30 **your experiences in New Guinea that you had nightmares with rather than in the Middle East?**

Yes.

Why is that?

Totally different atmosphere. We were hemmed in. At one stage we were run over. When I say run over we were surrounded by the Japs for about 10 days and cut off, but that is later on.

25:00 **Did you ever tell your children?**

Not really.

We have heard that people were told not to ask what happened and in fact they were issued with information that if men did bring up their experiences, to ignore it and just change the subject.

I am not aware of that in any way. That's the first I have heard of that suggestion.

25:30 When I recently got talking on this subject and a psychiatrist said to me, "Did you tell your wife of your experiences?" and I said, "No." And he said, "Why didn't you tell her?" and I said, "She never asked." He said, "Well why didn't you just tell her?"

26:00 And I said it just wasn't opportune. I didn't want to burden someone. It was a personal thing that happened to me and other blokes. Some like to brag about it but most, when we have a reunion we don't talk about what we - we think of a few funny things that happened but we don't talk about the actual

26:30 experiences of war.

Why do you think she never asked?

No idea. Perhaps she thought I had enough problems trying to sort it out myself. I don't think I would

have explained the details to her even if she had asked me.

27:00 It was something within you. That's the way I felt.

So, the Atherton Tablelands?

After we did some training there and did some training with the Americans on beach landings, we went up to Milne Bay. Milne Bay - the Japanese had attempted to take Milne Bay about 12 months earlier back and

27:30 the Australian troops held them out. And we did some more training there in the mud and more practice at beach landings with the Americans. Oh, when we went to Milne Bay, when we got on board the boat - I can't recall it's name. But when we got off the boat we had to scramble down on nets.

28:00 We had our full gear, your rifle and the Owen gun and everything else and scramble down the side of the ship. It was good training for the first time. It was like the chaps who had to do their parachuting for the first time without any training.

In the Atherton Tablelands you had beach landing training. What sort of jungle training did they do there?

28:30 Compass training. Go through the jungle to come out at a certain spot on the other side. There were Lawyer Vines and everything else. Route marches to get us fit. I'm trying to think where it was. 11 Battery in the

29:00 in the 4th regiment - there was 10, 11, 12 Batteries and 11 Battery went to Markham Valley, north of Lae, and they had their guns flown in. So they had quite a bit of practice in dismantling the gun and being able to put it in a DC3 plane because it is only a short strip.

29:30 And to be able to get it out and put it together again and put it into action. They had quite a bit of time doing that whilst the other two batteries, 10 and 12, were training for the beach landings.

Did you have different guns?

No same guns.

Same guns as what you had in the Middle East?

Yes.

On landing at Milne Bay what were your first impressions?

30:00 What a stinking rotten place it was. It was raining every day and mud everywhere and some of the troops had been there 12 months from the original fighting against the Japs there. We did the training there and then we were told where we were going to do the landing - outside of Lae, back about 20 miles. They had two

30:30 beaches and they were to link up and then follow through. There was no road or track. In some cases crossing a river or a creek they would get swamped and with the heavy rain in the hinterland like a wave would come down. In one case the

31:00 gun was left. It was swamped right over the top and then they had to pull it out the next day and pull it all to bits to put it together again so it was back in action again. Going to Lae, 12 battery went in first for our group and

31:30 the guns I was with in 10 battery were about 12 hours after the initial landing and on our way - because the Japs were well aware and they were already bombing there, and we had our convoy of 6 LSTs [landing ship tank] They were pretty large and they had two guns up on each for the convoy. So that was our 12 guns and as we were going there we were attacked by the

32:00 Japanese - they torpedoed us with torpedo planes. We didn't know what to call these planes and we identified them as Betties, and they were a really a low level bombing plane. And as the things squirmed around the guns on the deck couldn't get down lower. They couldn't deflate low enough, so the pilots were skimming the water

32:30 in amongst the convoy. They were brilliant pilots those Japs. They - now and again we were able to fire at them but they had to be careful when they fired that there wasn't another one of our ships in the convoy at the back. So if it missed the plane it would have hit the other ship so it was a rather complicated manoeuvre.

33:00 They hit one LST. Again everybody was below decks except the anti-aircraft gunners and we were strafed as well as being torpedo bombed. They hit one LST. It didn't sink it, it stove in and all the troops that were on that side of the ship got squeezed to death. It stove in the outside of the boat.

33:30 So when we landed at Lae, I was to link up with our battery commander. He had gone in earlier, up to 12 hours earlier to pick out a site for our headquarters. I was to link up with him and he was missing

and in a bombing raid we never found a skerrick of him at all.

- 34:00 He must have got a direct hit and completely disintegrated. You would have thought we would have found a boot or something. We searched everywhere but not a thing. He was with his batman and when they heard the planes coming the batman went away and he hopped into a slit trench - a hollow. So that was the first bit of bad luck and of course several others were killed as well.
- 34:30 So then they went and captured Lae. There would be no opposition at the landing at Red Beach, Lae, so they decided to hop up to another beach north at Finschhafen, which they called Scarlet Beach, and as we were the last ones in we were the first ones in for the anti-aircraft.
- 35:00 The initial waves would go in and as soon as possible the anti-aircraft would find out where we are going to locate our guns and where we are going to put our headquarters and that type of thing. That was a hairy experience because the Japs were there waiting for us. I was in one of the early waves and I was going through to where - on the map I had
- 35:30 picked out where I reckoned we could put our headquarters but I got startled when I heard shots just at the back of me and there was the infantry still coming through and pinged off a couple of Japs. I wasn't quite so eager to go forward so quickly. So anyway we put up a temporary one. We were being bombed and strafed quite a lot by the Japanese and as the infantry spread out
- 36:00 again and the artillery came in, we put guns with some of the artillery, 2/12th Field Regiment. There were kunai patches like sugar cane, kunai grass, and you couldn't get a field of fire for your guns so normally they would have to put guns on
- 36:30 the jungle on that side and it could only fire that way and put another gun on this side and it could only fire that way. You couldn't get proper anti-aircraft defence. The infantry were expanding out and the beachhead - Scarlet Beach was the beachhead - and then we were told to prepare for a
- 37:00 Japanese beach attack against us. We had three anti-aircraft guns along the beach and a few infantry and we had to prepare for - in case a beach landing came. They came at night time - had a plane going overhead so that stopped the noise of the barges.
- 37:30 It was a cloudy night so you couldn't see very much and they got some shots away at them before they actually beached because they couldn't depress the guns far enough. The tide was out when they came in. So they all suddenly became infantry men and there were two American
- 38:00 heavy machine guns just like a two man machine gun and they were nicely sighted and they pretty well wiped out the two barges that did land. There was a third one that nicked off. It didn't wait. He got a grenade in his weapon pit and he kept firing until he died and they gave him a Congressional Medal.
- 38:30 He was recommended by one of our gun sergeants initially. So then early in that morning as I was battery intelligence officer, before it was daylight I was down to see and there were, say, 50 dead Japs in the water. Some of the infantry blokes there were looking for swords because all the
- 39:00 Japanese officers had a sword. I was able to collect some maps and things off the dead bodies and they indicated there was going to be a land attack at the same - to coincide - so I was able to get those and took them up to brigade headquarters and showed them these maps. Then they had to rush some other troops into the beachhead and then the Japs
- 39:30 came down and cut us off for about 10 days. We were in an area, a pocket of about 600 yards long and about 1000 miles deep back to the jungle. They overran what was called the casualty clearing station, the initial places where you could get the first treatment within the regiment - they overran that and all the patients were just pushed into the river
- 40:00 and carried down. We had one of our guns on the spit down there and they were dragging these wounded blokes out as they were floating down.

Tape 6

- 00:32 When the Japanese were doing the attack they came down the side as well as down the creek - Siki Creek, and there was a troop of the 2/12th field regiment with our guns defending them. The Japs
- 01:00 got so close that it was a grenade throwing exercise, and firing at them as if the Bofor was a machine gun. Then I was in contact with a bloke called Steve Kempton who was the head, the troop commander there and where was
- 01:30 he to retire to? I could get through to my regimental headquarters down near Finschhafen. Every other line was out except our one line so I was able to. So letting the divisional and the brigade headquarters know what was happening, I could notify

02:00 the regimental headquarters and they would notify – because there was only one line open. They told me to send them to the beach. As far as I was concerned there was only one beach and that was Scarlet Beach. So I directed them to come back to Scarlet Beach.

Did you have maps of the area?

Yes. They had to

02:30 pack up and come back because the artillery went the other way. But of course they meant me to send them down to the beach and they would send barges in for them. In our official history there was a balls up of communication but I was the one who did the balls up of the communication and just as well because the Japs were down at that beach within

03:00 another hour and there was no way a barge would have got through to get them out. So we had an extra six guns suddenly perched on Scarlet Beach. So we were a bit crowded with anti-aircraft guns.

They probably wouldn't have had splint X-rounds for the Bofors though, the anti personnel rounds?

No. So then there was a

03:30 big infiltration effort by the part of the Japs and the infantry which was further inland, and I have read reports where the Japanese lost between 1,000 and 1,200 killed to about 40 Australians, but they still had us hemmed in. We had ammunition and bully beef and biscuits dropped by – we used to call them biscuit bombers

04:00 to supply us.

How accurate were those drops?

They would fly in fairly low within our area and if it wasn't in our area we weren't very happy and it would stay there.

Would they cop a hammering from the Japanese when they flew over that low?

Yes and that's why they had to stay up on the beach end of the thing, yes.

04:30 So that was a period of about 10 or 12 days where you didn't sleep. You didn't know – r our blokes on the guns crews would dismantle their guns of a night time burying the handles or the breach block and then they would be infantry during the night time, and then become anti-aircraft gunners when it was daylight. It was a pretty torrid time.

05:00 Then the Australian troops took up what was known as Sattelberg and did a loop further up. One of the other things we did at Scarlet Beach – on the north side

05:30 of the Song River was quite a large hill and we found a set of Japanese binoculars, very, very powerful and we set up a team on the side of the hill and they could see almost up to Lae. When the planes were coming, then we had a communication

06:00 down to the air force down at Finschhafen so that the Australian planes could be up above them waiting for them when they came and attacked.

Did you do retraining in aircraft identification for the Japanese aircraft?

Yes. We knew a Zero and the Betty Bombers

06:30 and I have forgotten them all now. When they had that big red ring on them you knew. One of their capers was that they would form up a couple of miles out to sea and zoom in with all guns blazing at the beachhead and all there would was the 3 anti-aircraft guns

07:00 trying to fire at them. There might be 6 of them coming at you blazing away.

Would it be natural when the aircraft are coming in and strafing the beach that the anti-aircraft guns would become prime targets?

Yes.

You were talking about how at night time they would pull the

07:30 **guns apart and hide the breach and that in the sand, what was the night like? It must have been terrible for the guys to suddenly –**

If the lady wasn't there I would say, a certain way scared. You've heard of shit scared have you? Well that's what we were. Particularly if you wanted to go out and have a leak at night

08:00 you wouldn't dare because you never knew – because everybody carried a gun with them at all times.

So you'd do it right there?

Lean over on the side to have a leak. You asked me about how I felt between the attitude of the Japanese and Germans.

08:30 I didn't have any close contact with Germans except after they had been taken prisoners of war as I did in close proximity with the Japs. If a German put his hands up he was a prisoner. But you wouldn't trust a Jap. If he put his hands up he is just as likely to have a grenade in it. That type of thing.

Did you see instances of that?

09:00 Not personally but I heard of them. And of course they were always - a patrol of infantry would be sent out to bring in a prisoner for interrogation. Very seldom he got back. He would try to escape and they would ping him off until senior officers, brigadiers got very terse and said, "Even if he does try to escape he is to come back alive

09:30 for interrogation purposes." There was no prisoners taken there and there was a silly nonsense in the Australian paper about a bloke up in East Timor. He had man-handled a dead bloke - that is simply appalling. How would you know he was dead unless you gave him a kick in the mouth.

10:00 It is a different war standards to what our day was, and it should be today because you have to indicate that.

So it was a long night?

Long 10 nights.

Did every day repeat the same kind of action?

Yes.

10:30 You never knew when they were going to be - They were down at what we called Siki Creek, which was on the southern end and the Song River was on the northern end and they are about 600 yards apart. The Song River was a very swift flowing stream but Siki Creek was just a little creek, but because of the slope of the land it was quite big narrow valley and they were down there screaming and yelling,

11:00 blowing trumpets and we were up top with very limited numbers.

The trumpets and whistles and that kind of thing did they use them a lot at night time?

Usually when they were going to attack. You had a gut feeling just like with a Stuka the first few times.

That was the equivalent of a Stuka was it?

Yes.

What sort of psychological affect

11:30 **did that have on the fellows?**

Apart from crook food and malaria and dengue fever, some of the poor buggers got scrub typhus and very few recovered from that. I was in hospital in Moresby, evacuated to Moresby in about

12:00 middle or early December I can't remember. All the fighting was over there. I was just buggered.

So 10 nights of this, did you ever think it was going to end?

Yes you knew it would end because you had faith, but what we couldn't understand was why there wasn't more support coming to us.

12:30 They were defending the thing back a few miles inland which we didn't know. Where the hell are they why don't they land more troops here?

So there were absolutely no lines of communication was there?

No.

Did they even know that you were there?

Yes. They knew we had to hold the beachhead.

When you were resupplied from the biscuit bombers what sort of stuff did you get resupplied with?

13:00 Ammunition, bully beef and biscuits.

How was that packaged?

Buggered if I know now. It didn't burst when it landed anyway.

It wasn't landed in a clearing, it was landed in the clearing?

In the clearing, or in the jungle because we had a bit of both, but it was on parachutes.

How dodgy was it to have to run out and grab this stuff?

Well that wasn't so bad because we had the perimeter. All you were

13:30 frightened of was at night time that they would infiltrate through our perimeter.

So I imagine there was very little sleep had?

That's right and of course there was rain as well.

We asked earlier about when you were in the Middle East and you said that at that stage you weren't really concerned about dying but you said later that you were, is that what you were talking about?

Yes.

14:00 **What were you thinking?**

Were you going to get through it? Because you were literally frightened particularly at night time. So as I said I went to hospital and then came back to the unit and - oh that's right,

14:30 they were recruiting people for the Department of External Affairs as it was then called. They were called cadets and I applied for one, applied for a position, and I was flown down to Townsville for the interview. That would have been about

15:00 March, I guess.

How do you find about these sort of things when you are up on the line?

I don't know how I found that out. So I went for the interview and didn't get it. But I said, my unit was coming out so I could go on leave.

15:30 They had no authority to give me leave and I said there was no point in giving me aeroplane seat back up there so I went down on leave. When my leave was over I came back by troop train from Melbourne up to Cairns to a little camp called Redlynch, out of Cairns. I got there and the adjutant there said, "I don't know what we are going to do with you,

16:00 the unit is coming out so there's no point in going up - they're going up to the Tablelands. There's no good sending you, you'd be the only one there. Haven't you got any more leave?" So fortunately they had just given a grant of leave for people for so many six months you had been overseas in the Middle East, so I hopped on the train again and a week later I arrived in Melbourne and my wife said,

16:30 "What are you doing back here?" So we went down to Apollo Bay for several days, down the south west coast. So there was no hurry to get back so I stayed off, a B class 9th Division bloke who was the adjutant at the Brisbane Exhibition Buildings which was used as a

17:00 transit, so I was able to stay and have a few drinks with him each night. And then I got back there and there was a few of our chaps that had got back. Some had been sent down to schools and other things. So we went up to the Tablelands and I was the acting quartermaster and I had to draw about 120 tents and start erecting them as the troops came in. So I did that and we only got about 20 up and they said, "No

17:30 send your tents back, you are going to move to such and such at another part'. By that time I was 2 tents light. One of the local farmers had borrowed a couple so I went to salvage and got four flies and wrapped them up as two tents and flies and put them back, so

18:00 I let somebody else suffer that one.

When 9th Division were pulled out of New Guinea were they replaced?

No. By that time it had moved on up around towards the north coast, Sio and further on.

That must have been a huge relief for you. Did that have any sort of sudden impact on you?

I don't think

18:30 it did because you got over your immediate stress, but obviously it was there many years later on as nightmares. So we were up on the Tablelands at a place called Wongabell and the war was going our way

19:00 and when they started taking out anti-aircraft - you just had the one guarding the Sydney Harbour Bridge and then there were surplus officers. They didn't discharge them so we had a whole bevy of officers who had never seen any action. They were all senior to blokes like me so I reckoned if we went into action again I wouldn't get a Guernsey because

19:30 I wouldn't have been senior enough. Our CO, Uncle John. Oh I had better tell you about Uncle John. His

name was Bloomfield. He was later Minister for Education in Victoria and he was a lawyer. He came across from one of the other batteries, another regiment, the 2/2nd I think, and he was

20:00 elevated up to a battery commander, a major. So he gave his talk to the troops and he said, "I want you to treat me like an uncle. My tent flap is always open. You can come and confide in me etc." So he was always known as Uncle John after that. Can she switch her ears off, because he was also known as Uncle Fucking John.

20:30 UFJ. So anyway – I don't know why I deviated to tell you about Uncle John. Oh, up at Wongabell – then they sent me to a gas school. I couldn't think of anything less interesting and I didn't apply myself very well.

21:00 I passed but I got a bit of a reprimand because obviously my report wasn't very good. Not sufficient application to the seriousness of everything.

At that stage were they grooming you to remain a career officer?

I don't think. I don't know. No. So after that one and we had Christmas Day and

21:30 a bloke called Robin Paul was our adjutant, and he said, "Right, I'm not having a drink. I am the sober one so there is someone sober on duty on Christmas Day." The blighter next day said, "Right, who's going to have a party with me, Read come on."

You had a good reputation did you?

Yes.

22:00 Switching back a long way again, on one of these trips when we went to Aman and Jerash. When we got back the bridge was closed – I don't think I told you this. It was over the Jordan River. It was locked at night time and we were on the wrong side because it was dusk and we were on our way back. One of our blokes Herb Hardy, he had just received his commission and the rest of us were sergeants.

22:30 He was the only officer with us. So we booted him out. "Come on, Herb, get the gate open for us." He took a long time and a lot of talking but ultimately we were let through, we got through. We reckoned we owed him a drink for that but as he was an officer he had to buy it for us. There was always good rapport in the unit – if you were

23:00 a gunner or a sergeant or an officer. What they did: 3 of us got our commissions at the one time at Milne Bay and they switched us into a different battery. So whilst I was a gun sergeant with 12 Battery I was an officer in 10 Battery.

Do you know what their reasoning was behind that?

They felt we were too close to the troops and it might be a bit hard to use me. But it wouldn't have been.

23:30 When you're censoring mail, a sergeant could come to me and say I have some personal stuff in this do you mind, and I would just sign it for him and take his word for it that there was nothing in it. A bloke, some of them were having problems at home and they didn't want it broadcast.

You said earlier you enjoyed the added responsibility

24:00 **when you went from another rank up to sergeant. How was your first step up from sergeant to officer?**

I had been doing it for months already as a sergeant. But the trouble was at one stage they said you're not going to get your commission. They're sending out reinforcement officers from Australia. That is what I thought it was until

24:30 I suddenly got a message for Lieutenant Read to report to battery commander.

How thrilled were you at that?

I was tickled.

You were determined to come back on the ship at least as a sergeant.

Yes.

You spoke about the terrible conditions in the desert but you still got to see a lot of historical things

25:00 **that you had an interest in. Then to go from that to New Guinea but what could you say that was a positive thing you took away from New Guinea?**

Merely the cohesion, mateship of the blokes. They were all in the same pickle. One of the casualty clearing stations –

- 25:30 somehow they were all connected up, the phone was connected up and they said, "We want some of you officers to identify Bombardier Sly," Poor bugger half his head had been blown off and a bullet went through there and there was nothing left of this side. Another time up there they said that some
- 26:00 blacks had arrived at our gun site and they were on the edge of the jungle - "what will be do with them?" I said, "Hang on until I come out," and in the meantime I rang brigade headquarters and said, "I have got some natives, I will bring them over to you," and left it at that. I was a bit apprehensive walking along jungle tracks with these blokes with their spears. I was hoping they were on our side.
- 26:30 It was a several mile walk to get them to brigade headquarters and I got them there and they said, "Who are these?" I said, "These are the natives I said I was bringing in." He said, "Why in the so and so hell did you bring them here, we don't want them," I said, "We don't either," and left them. There, there was a great big Korean, he had been captured he was about 6 foot 4 inches, and he was just sitting there.
- 27:00 He had been sent out to be captured for intelligence purposes. Little incidents like that help the day go by. The intelligence officer had to write up the war book. So each day you penned the activities and some days you -

- 27:30 it would be a week before you got back to it and you would have to remember what you had gone through.

Did you have to in your job as lieutenant have to write letters home to parents of dead soldiers?

No, but none of my immediate group, but the others like Bombardier Sly - which ever officer was in charge of the gun crew they

- 28:00 would write the letters.

None of your direct section of blokes was killed?

At New Guinea I wasn't in charge of the guns, I was an intelligence officer at headquarters.

What exactly was that role? What sort of things were different in that role, as opposed to your other role with the guns?

More or less a backup for the battery commander. At

- 28:30 battery headquarters you had a battery commander, a major, a quartermaster who was responsible for supplies and an intelligence officer who was largely administration. When there was the landing against us, nobody told me to go and get the maps I just looked upon that as my job type of thing.

Would you be organising these patrols to go and get

- 29:00 **enemy?**

No that was all in the infantry brigade headquarters or battalion headquarters.

The country itself, New Guinea. What can you tell us about what you took away from there from your time in New Guinea?

The actual fighting and conditions were

- 29:30 just as bad and tough as you could expect them to be. Food terrible, monotonous. Permanently wet. Then later on when

- 30:00 the engineering groups came in and they gravelled roads and things like that, it was amazing how quickly they could do that. But those early stages in those Jeeps you were literally wheel deep in mud and so were you. So all you could do is walk into the water on the beach and have a wash. There was plenty of water there. It was so different to the desert.

- 30:30 **How hard was it for yourself and the other blokes to have come from that Middle East campaign and plopped into Papua New Guinea where the conditions are so opposite really?**

Particularly for the infantry, the desert was more open as you could see in those photographs.

- 31:00 You could see for miles. New Guinea you couldn't see what was behind the next tree or the next bush. So there were always bombers coming over. There was one gun crew and literally if that

- 31:30 were the sandbags there, the bomb landed there and they all got deaf the gun was virtually wiped out but none of them were killed because of the sandbagging. Several of them were wounded. It only had to be another 3 feet one way and whole gun crew would have been wiped out. And just accept that and say

- 32:00 bloody lucky, and they were.

You don't have any hearing problems yourself?

Faintly. My wife reckoned I had about 10 years ago. She reckoned I wasn't answering her when she spoke to me and I said, "I am concentrating on my reading and I can't hear," so she took me off to

32:30 have my ears tested. He said, "If you were at work in office work I would say yes, but as you are now retired I don't think it is really necessary but it is up to you."

Does that surprise you that all the time that you spent with the guns that you didn't have a hearing problem?

Most of them do. They all have a 10% pension on hearing, so I believe.

33:00 I had them checked recently and they accepted that the bit of hearing problem I have got and the bit of ringing in the ears is related to war service. It is not pensionable I don't think, that part of it.

What about the nightmares that you had. Has anybody ever talked to you about those? Apart from as you told us earlier about talking to your wife about them?

Not talking to my wife about them.

33:30 Only recently, since my wife died, I was having a few problems and went back into nightmares and I applied for an increase in pension and I was sent to a psychiatrist bloke and he popped me into the special hospital at Buderim Hospital.

34:00 I had a fortnight there and I was the oldest bugger they have ever had. Then I went along to the stress management for the next four weeks as well. Normally I don't have any nightmares

34:30 I had one last week or the week before of the Japs, but it was a totally different one and they had occupied a town and I was in the town with no weapons and sort of frustrated and that type of thing. I get a lot of frustrations. I can't get held up and I can't do what I want to do for some reason

35:00 or other. I relate it back - I think it relates back to the war. Particularly after having a comfortable period when I got rid of my nightmares and was living happily with my wife and now she is gone I miss her terribly.

Did you ever have any problems when you first came home from the war with stress

35:30 **or anger and things like that?**

Not anger, just stress. They diagnosed me with anxiety state after a few years after I had been discharged a few years. And then later on I had a coronary in '71 and they accepted that and I had bypass surgery in '81 and they said it would

36:00 give me 10 years and I have had 20 odd. So I can't complain. I was discharged early when I went back to the Defence Department. So I was there working in the Defence Department when the war ended.

Can you remember where you were when you heard that the atom bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

No I don't but I would have been in the

36:30 Defence Office somewhere I guess. When they were all celebrating the end of the war I was in there working. We even worked Saturday free. The Public Service gave up Saturday free without overtime for the war effort. And there was my wife home pregnant.

37:00 **Do you remember where you were when you heard about victory in Europe?**

No. I can't remember the particular incident, where it was because I was in the Defence Department as PA [personal assistant] to the Senior Policy Secretary

37:30 and things coming through. I had a fair idea of what was happening but of course we didn't know about the atomic explosion. You could see it coming.

Knowing what you know now about the atomic bomb do you think it was a wise decision?

Undoubtedly, otherwise the war would have gone on another two years

38:00 and there would have been a hell of a lot of casualties, far more than were killed by the atomic bombs.

Can you remember where you were when Japan surrendered - the end of the war?

No. I can't remember. I don't remember the moment like when I found out Kennedy had been killed, but I can't recall the exact moment,

38:30 although it should have made a big impression.

And you said that people always ask you what was worst, your time in the Middle East or your time in the Pacific. What do you say to them?

I say the time in the Pacific was far worse. I wasn't affected psychologically or mentally in any way with

the war in
39:00 the Middle East, but it got to me a bit in New Guinea.

Tape 7

00:36 **Going back. Did you tell us about the first contact you had at Buqbuq?**

At Buqbuq? That's up past Sidi Barrani up towards the Egyptian border and we were camped there at Buqbuq at one stage.

01:00 **What happened there?**

It was the base of our battery when the - When Operation Battleaxe attempted to relieve Tobruk, our battery headquarters was stationed at Buqbuq.

Is that where you had your first contact with the enemy?

Yes. When we were swimming there in the Mediterranean, a matter of 4 or 5 miles up the beach

01:30 you could see the Germans and Italians having a swim at the same time, and we were down this end having a swim.

What did you think of Rommel?

Not as good as us. The Australians had never been in a defeat by Rommel. Earlier they had been up to Benghazi and the so called Benghazi Handicap.

02:00 But the 9th Division - when we came up we were fresh, and he wasn't as good as us was mostly our attitude. We realise he was a very capable general and Montgomery - he instilled faith by telling everybody what he was going to do. He would let you know what he was doing. He just refused and said

02:30 I'm not going until I know I'm going to win and before I win I need this amount of equipment and troops and tanks and so on. Pressure was applied to him that he should attack earlier.

You said earlier that you really needed to keep the Germans occupied. What did you mean?

03:00 The Germans occupied, did I say that? Well the idea was that they - particularly from the infantry, there were patrols out every night to keep them alert, not to allow them to be

03:30 placid or complacent, and likewise like with the anti-aircraft, at times we were directed to put up a barrage not knowing you are going to hit a plane, but stopping them from moving in a certain direction or bombing in a certain manner. To keep them up higher

04:00 so they wouldn't be so accurate in their bombing.

You talked about the Stukas. What other aircraft did you see whilst you were there?

Mainly Messerschmitt fighters and Heinkel bombers. There were other kinds but they were the main categories, so you knew your

04:30 identification fairly rapidly.

The Heinkels would have been flying pretty high I should imagine?

Yes.

What was it about the Stukas that really bothered you the most?

The noise when they screamed down. It was horrifying but after you didn't worry, but the first few times it

05:00 scared the daylights out of you. But as I said, when they came down low and they came up and if you were in the right position with your anti-aircraft you couldn't miss.

They had sirens on the undercarriage didn't they?

I don't know where the sirens were but they made a hell of a scream.

Obviously that was intended to have a psychological affect so you think they were successful?

Yes you could imagine if you were underground in a

05:30 funk hole and all you can hear is that scream, it's not very good for the nerves. It's far better when we were above ground and could see it, and we were occupied doing something whereas others were just

sitting there wondering.

That was the up side of being above ground?

Yes.

When you originally went off to war -

06:00 **we have asked a lot of blokes why they went and for some it was 'for King and Country', and some it was for Australia, and others it was purely a job. What was your take on why you went?**

Of course we were at school in those days and we were brainwashed about the British Empire. I had been overseas for the coronation and everybody

06:30 madly waving flags and cheering and things like that. I was in the militia and we were critically tied up with England in all facets of our economy including defence and it was just the logical thing to do.

07:00 Particularly after Dunkirk, England was at war and Australia was at war automatically, as Bob Menzies said. There was no honour or glory. I didn't think I was fighting for England but obviously for Australia.

When you said you were brainwashed into the thinking of the British Empire, what sort of ways do you think they did that?

07:30 At school everything was there. You know, we were the colonial and we were to provide produce for the Mother Country, and it was God Save the Queen and nobody would have thought of a republic in those days.

Did you learn as much at school about Australian history as you did about English history?

08:00 One of my honour subjects was British history and it was the period of 150 years that was the concentrated thing. I found Australian history boring because it was mainly explorers and you had to remember where Leichhardt went and Hume and Hovell went and where Burke and Wills went. Well I knew where Burke and Wills went because they went through Swan Hill.

08:30 I knew where Major Mitchell went because he went through Swan Hill but to fit them all in was a bit difficult. It just wasn't - they didn't progress until you got to university on the economic geography of Australia riding on the sheep's back, the tussles between the squatters and the leaseholders.

09:00 The impact of the mining which you picked up and read it up and become aware of it later on.

You said when the Second World War was declared you spoke to some of the World War I diggers that you knew. What did they tell you? What was their impression?

Nobody ever said don't go.

09:30 Some might have said, think about it, and I can remember one in particular telling me to stay away from those brothels. My father-in-law was in the First [World] War and he had been gassed and evacuated home. As I mentioned, my father was old and had a bit of a deformity

10:00 He wasn't in it but he belonged to a dad's association and he was a very proud Dad. He had two of his sons in the services. I had an uncle in it but they were no great impact.

Did they tell you any stories of what they went through?

No.

10:30 **What about your father-in-law, did he still suffer any health problems from being gassed?**

Yes. Right through and it caused his death with emphysema. He was about 80, right on his 80th birthday.

Were you taught anything at school about Australia's involvement in the First World War?

Yes each day we all used to march down to the town hall for Anzac Day, and each time it was about Simpson and the donkey.

11:00 Anzac Remembrance Day was more a little ceremony at the cenotaph and as I was a senior scout I would go down and change into my scout uniform and lay a wreath and then go back home and change into my school uniform and go back to school.

Was there a great patriotism for Australia back then?

11:30 Well there was certainly nothing negative. Perhaps we were all a bit blasé rather than being emphatic about things. You accepted it was a more docile routine type of livelihood I think.

When you were protecting HMS

12:00 **Phoenix in the Suez Canal, how did you get on with the British there?**

No problem. They were all right. The gun crews would mix with them and they were very rigid in their discipline. They marched smartly while the Australians were a bit more easy going.

Before you left Australia, was there any march through town, a parade

12:30 **or anything like that?**

I don't think so, no not for us.

All hush hush?

We didn't march before we went overseas, our unit. Whether others did I don't know but they certainly made a big spectacle of us when we returned.

How did that make you feel?

13:00 Chest out, but the crowds today at Anzac Day cheer just as loudly.

When you say that Australians generally don't know enough about El Alamein, what is the one thing that they should know?

The casualty list of the infantry.

13:30 As one of the leaders said, "They fought until blood and flesh could stand no more and then they went on fighting." That's the expression that I recall which is of the infantry.

14:00 **When you went to Atherton Tablelands and did jungle training and all that sort of business before you went to New Guinea. When you were finally there in New Guinea fighting, did you feel like the jungle training had been adequate?**

Yes. We felt we were trained fairly well and of course we had previous battle experience that would have probably helped us as well.

14:30 No, our training was adequate for New Guinea. No problems there whatsoever.

In regard to both campaigns do you feel like the equipment and everything was adequate?

Once we got it yes. We had a different sort of towing vehicle. They were called a tractor

15:00 no matter what it was. We had a vehicle called a quad. It was like a big beetle and we were very partial to that. We thought it did a great job because it was small and compact.

Was that in the Middle East?

Yes and then they took them away from us and they gave us two ton trucks or something or other.

15:30 But you got used to it and we were quite happy with it.

You preferred to quad to the two ton truck?

Yes.

Could it carry as much as the truck?

No and they hadn't been finished off very easily and there was plenty of jagged edges for you to scrape on. Everybody had bark off their legs or arms or somewhere.

Where did the quads come from?

Don't know.

16:00 **Did you ever have to man-handle the guns?**

Yes.

Would you know roughly what the gun weighed?

No I don't, but of course it would depend where you were. If you were on wheels and you're in the jungle and getting bogged, you get some others to help you to push to put it into position or else you wait until you can get hold of a

16:30 bull dozer which would come along and tow you. I can remember one time seeing the 2/12th Field Regiment man handling their guns and they were straining and pushing and shoving. Yes you had to man-handle them at times. You couldn't just drive up nicely and say this is it. Other times you could.

What would be harder, man-handling the Bofors or man-handling the field guns?

The field guns I would think. They are heavier.

17:00 I would think they are heavier and also the wider wheels, the four wheels for the Bofors.

Did you have dental sepsis? What was that exactly?

I had the dental problems and the fever, as I said

17:30 no sleep and run down. These two bottom teeth – and they pulled them out and the roots were like the size of a needle.

What causes that? Just lack of not being able to clean your teeth?

I guess so.

18:00 I never had it with any other teeth but the roots were just eaten away and they said that was enough to make me crook.

What sort of morning routine would you have? Was there such a thing?

It's a long time ago to think of a morning routine. You would always be – if you were on a gun you would be up at first light at stand to.

18:30 Depending on the situation – No I can't give you a sort of a routine. It's all a bit haphazard in my mind at the moment.

Would it be fair to say that you wouldn't get to shave every day?

No. In the desert we shaved every second day.

19:00 **What about in the jungle?**

I don't remember but I guess it would have been at least every second day. They didn't want scruffy and nice little beards like the person who is interviewing me.

Did having the water availability in the jungle make it easier

19:30 **to be more hygienic in the field?**

Yes and no, except you were permanently wet. You nearly went mouldy. At least you were clean, although some of the infantry blokes would have had it where they wouldn't get a wash every day and perspiration

20:00 wasn't the best. At least your body was generally clean because of the amount of rain.

Were you able to brush your teeth at all?

Yes that was part of the water was for. Shave, clean your teeth. Yes you would clean your teeth twice a day.

In the desert how did the desert conditions affect the

20:30 **cleaning of the Bofors gun to keep it well maintained and operational?**

You had daily maintenance on your gun like you did on a motor truck and types like that. The breach block, the firing mechanism

21:00 was covered and you really only had to take it apart if there was a stoppage or if something had broken inside it. You oiled your handles and wheels and things, but I don't recall any problem about maintenance.

Sand didn't get in to places where it shouldn't?

21:30 No.

What about in the jungle, any problems there?

Only like when we got swamped. You could keep the gun in action and that was probably one of its advantages. The extremes of temperature and the climate didn't seem to affect it.

What about with the humidity and everything being wet and damp in New Guinea.

22:00 **Did you have problems with ammunition?**

No.

You mentioned that at one stage you didn't take any Japanese prisoners, why was that?

You didn't know what the buggers would be up to. As I said they would have a grenade in their hand and they didn't take prisoners.

22:30 The only good Jap was a dead Jap.

Since the war how do you feel towards Japanese people?

I accept them, except one bloke I didn't when we were in Hong Kong and we were on a night ferry trip going up and down the harbour and there was a Karaoke night and people were getting up singing.

23:00 Two Australian girls came over to my wife and said, "Will you come and sing with us, we want to put on an act." So she went and did it with them. Whilst she was up there a Japanese came over and he had his bottle of Black Label Johnnie Walker and he suggested to me – how would I like to swap wives tonight. I thought –

23:30 he was about my age and I thought I wonder if I ever struck him over in New Guinea. But apart from that, no. The present is nothing to do – I am not responsible for what my grandfather did and I think the whole nation has changed to what the – the whole psychology of the nation has changed and I don't think they would act the same way

24:00 in any future war, whether they were on our side or against our side. So I have learnt to accept them.

The same feeling towards Germans?

I never had any ill feeling against the Germans or Italians.

What about when there was an Italian influx of refugees after the war. Did you ever think some of these guys you might have been fighting against?

Yes.

24:30 You accepted them as human beings. No, there is no worry. My brother-in-law, when he sold his vineyard he made one stipulation to the agent, I am not selling it to Italians who were then all swamping through the area.

How did you see Melbourne had changed from before you left?

25:00 Didn't see any change because we weren't there long enough really. I see a big change now from when it was in those days. The disappointment was of course that taxi drivers and

25:30 and sly grog [illicit alcohol] merchants were out to make an easy dollar at the expense of servicemen, and going from that then likewise the wharfies wouldn't load our ammunition when we were going up to New Guinea. They wanted danger money so we had to load our own – become wharf labourers

26:00 to load our ship.

What was your opinion of them in that regard?

Very low. Low as Japanese.

Did any of your school mates go away and fight?

Yes, I could show you a book that they recorded

26:30 the service for every ex-student from the high school and most of my friends were in. There was only an odd one that wasn't. And I think I mentioned how the group from Boga – year [UNCLEAR] nearly all the people I knew were in the services – my age.

Did you ever find that blokes that you thought would have served

27:00 **didn't serve?**

Yes the odd one.

What did you think about that?

I couldn't understand them. I couldn't understand this one in particular. He was a great mate at school and he felt he was too important in the public service, as a 20 year old.

They had a lot of reserved occupations as well?

Mine was too.

It wasn't

27:30 **steadfast that if you were in a reserved occupation you could still get in?**

Yes, that's right. There were school teachers that was a reserved occupation – they were in our unit. In fact, while my wife – she went through teachers' college and she was posted to a little place called Nariel, near Corryong in north western Victoria and she was the first time they had a female teacher. So she was called 'sir' by all the kids at the school.

28:00 If you really wanted to you could get out of your reserved occupation.

What did you think about those people who didn't contribute to the war movement for their country?

They might have even done more good for the country by not being in the services

28:30 in some cases. I just had a personal – I don't know, not antagonism, not repulsion, it just wasn't easy in my mind. They weren't quite the friend they had been before but I don't see them now. We've all gone our different ways.

29:00 It's long past the time of worrying about them.

When you look back on your war service, is it one chapter or is it two chapters with one being the Middle East and one the Pacific campaign?

I think it is two chapters with the lovely little break in the middle. Sounds like a bit of thunder.

29:30 **Do thunderstorms ever remind you of being at El Alamein?**

Yes – no, not Alamein. The thunderstorms when we were in Syria used to come down each night gradually later and later. There would be a build up and then there was a downpour. But that's New Guinea that thunder, it rained every night.

30:00 **Would the sharp crack of thunder remind you of gunfire or the guns firing?**

No more the lightning and the thunder. You are sopping wet and getting wetter. No, rather than guns firing it is more the planes. I can hear a plane in the distance and that is immediately stand to. Everybody

30:30 trying to locate the plane.

Do you still find yourself when you are out and about that you have to find it if a plane finds over?

No I have given that away.

But you used to?

Yes.

How did you put the war behind you when you came home?

I was working fairly hard. I was at the university part time at night time doing

31:00 university subjects at night. I had a wife and a baby. I played a little bit of tennis but I didn't play any cricket or football, and just our little home unit. We bought a house we couldn't afford because you couldn't get housing and my father-in-law was generous

31:30 and he gave us some healthy help and then we couldn't furnish the house. It was too big so we let two rooms to an ex-serviceman and his wife for a couple of years so that rather than just having two empty rooms – and the ladies had to share the kitchen. This other lass used to get all her dishes and put them all down underneath the sink

32:00 in a cupboard and my lady didn't approve of that. But we got on well and we've been in contact with them right through. In fact they rang me a couple of weeks ago.

Did that mean you used to get the pick out of the best meals of the night?

No we didn't eat together. Yes, I always had the best, I am sure of that.

How much deferred pay did you end up leaving the army with?

32:30 I have no idea.

What did you do with it do you know?

A deposit on the house.

Can you remember what the house was worth?

I paid – the normal price for it – the house I was looking for was 1800 pounds, and I paid 2060 pounds for this one. It was out of my range, but you couldn't get a house, you couldn't get accommodation.

33:00 We were renting a couple of rooms with an old maid and every time my wife did the washing she would go out and rearrange it, because you had to have all underpants together and if you had pyjamas, the pyjama pants and pyjama coat had to be together – so we wanted to get out of that situation.

Sounds very military doesn't it?

Yes and as I say

33:30 going to university at night time and studying at weekends and doing a bit of gardening at weekends, we were fairly restricted. We couldn't afford a holiday anywhere. The only way we could afford a holiday

was to go and visit our parents.

Did your wife want to keep working once you had your first child?

No she had no thought of going to work in those days. I wouldn't have wanted her to.

What did she think about that? Was she happy about it?

34:00 She never even mentioned it, not even contemplated it. But later on, many years later she was the director of the Keep Australia Beautiful Council of New South Wales and the judge who was to do the tidy towns for the first

34:30 year pulled out at the last moment and they were bereft. So they coaxed my wife into doing it but I didn't tell my wife but I didn't want her to do it. She was tickled pink organising it and going out. I was brought up in the school where the husband looked after the lady and the lady had her

35:00 interests and charities. She wasn't paid for that of course but it gave her – it was after she had been State Commissioner for the Girl Guides, so she probably a bit itchy to be still doing something constructive.

Have you kept in contact with many of the blokes that you fought with?

No. We have a unit association here

35:30 and I've said there were very few of them in the same unit or same section who knew me personally, a few yes. You see, I was a Victorian, a 'VX' [Victorian registration number prefix] and so the people I joined up with – both the second regiment and third regiment started up in Victoria. So all of the people are down in Melbourne

36:00 and then of course a few – when we went across they formed the fourth and again some of them I knew. One in particular I see a couple of times a year. I was down in Melbourne recently and had lunch with him and his wife.

Do you feel when you were commissioned and taken away from your original battery put a divide between you

36:30 **and your mates?**

Not really. I would have preferred to stay with the same, but my mate Dudley Gallagher said to me, "Now you have got your commission if the blokes like you, you'll know you are not doing a good job." He had the reputation of being an aggressive bloke as I've indicated, but in action the blokes swore by him.

37:00 He was a good fellow. He has died of course as a lot have.

What are your thoughts on Anzac Day?

I go down and march and lead our group each year since they found me. When I came up here, a bloke, Barney Ross – you'll be interviewing him one of these days.

37:30 He's secretary and grabs people he finds, and we march with the 2/12th Field Regiment people. We don't get a great number but as I've indicated, the response from the people and the kids is really something. My only trouble is

38:00 I had a bypass 20 odd years ago and I have a pacemaker and some days I can't walk 50 yards, and other days I reckon I could climb Mt Everest. I don't know, one of those days it might be that I couldn't walk 50 yards. If it had been last week I certainly couldn't have marched.

38:30 I think they are straggling it out a bit too long down here in Brisbane. They want to compact it somehow or other, but that is their problem not mine. We march after and if any of my grandchildren are down in Brisbane

39:00 I invite them along to the luncheon. Last year two, and the year before three, and this year I will have one if I am lucky. I wasn't a great one until – I've marched in Adelaide, I have marched in Melbourne, I have marched in Sydney, not in Canberra and up here

39:30 for the 10 years or more.

INTERVIEW ENDS