Australians at War Film Archive

Peter Kennedy - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:31 **Okay we're rolling.**

I'm here.

Oh good. Peter can you tell me where you grew up?

South Perth.

What was South Perth like to grow up in?

Magnificent. We had the zoo quite close by. And myself and my brothers found that when the pickets fell off on the eastern side we could get into the zoo whenever we liked. And my father was a great friend of the chap in charge Colonel Eswef, so apart from getting through Colonel Eswef we had an open slather through the picket fence.

01:00 And then we had the south-west foreshore one before the freeway was done, which was the causeway, what was now the freeway bridge down to Como, was our playground. We had canoes, fishing crabbing, Como jetty. I think we all lived at Como jetty. I think we could all swim before we walked. And as we got older we went to school across on the ferry. And I've got a wonderful

01:30 story to tell you about the ferry. Remind me about that, won't you? And then we were playing on the South Perth with the South Perth Cricket Club. We got racing from Royal Perth. I played hockey for CBC [Christian Brothers College] and at Rottnest when occasionally we could get there. We used to sail to Rottnest and that was all centred on the beauty of South Perth. And just of late it's been interesting, we joined up the South Perth Historical Society. So we were

02:00 retracing steps through history of families and shortly this year, sometime this year, I will be giving my exposé of the South Perth ascent from the Kennedy family. Dad built at the top of up behind the zoo in 1915 so our history goes back quite a long way. So there you are that is South Perth for you.

What did your father actually build there?

Build there?

What did your father build there, did you say?

A house. He built his home.

02:30 But he and mother were married and they had to take all the building material across the causeway by you know grace, the horse and cart thing. The house was a bit slow, so she and he and mother moved into the Windsor Hotel, which is in Menn Street. And it is still there. They moved in 1915 and lived there for the six months until the house was built. So there was a bit of story, isn't it?

So the Windsor must have been built

03:00 **around?**

It was built, I had the date, just before the turn of the century I think, 1890 or something. And of course past the Windsor Hotel is where I used to walk down and catch the ferry. So it was history repeating itself.

How much of the Como jetty area was part of the social?

It was much of, oh it was the focal point. Before I talk about the focal point, our families used to meet, and our

03:30 cousins used to meet uncles and aunts and whatnot, and we'd go down onto the South Perth foreshore through the golf links and we'd catch crabs. We used to catch crabs by towing a tub and a bit of scoop net and catch an enormous feed of crabs, and you'd cook them on the beach along the Como, along the

South Beach. And as a little boy I was counting and watching the grownups cook and eat their crabs and drink their beer, it was just wonderful. And then Como jetty as we learnt to

04:00 swim more, and we were swimming in the Como Swimming Club, it was a much bigger jetty than it is now, a big shed up on the end, and wings were built out to it and I suppose it was our playground. We used to take breakfast down as kids and we would be there all day, and our parents would come down with dinner in the evening. We were to play and cook crabs and caught fish and just swam and loved it. So that was Como jetty.

Sounds like quite an idyllic childhood that you

04:30 **had there?**

I think the whole lot, the childhood, it was absolutely idyllic. Going to school over to the CBC going over on the ferry, and with all the friends from Como, from South Perth who were going to different schools all catching to the same ferry. We had heaps of people going across and then they had would go to their separate schools and then meet again in the evening. And there was certainly some wonderful escapades of people falling over in the water and all that sort of thing, but

05:00 it was great.

You also mentioned that you were a bit of a yachtie [liked to sail yachts]?

Yes, yes. See yachting had been in our family forever, because my parents sailed and have photos of them on yachts pulled up on the foreshore in Thomson Bay. But the main yacht on the river then used to be out of Royal Perth, a Plumpton, a cruiser, 21, 22 foot with a centre post, so if you pulled up the centre post you'd go right

05:30 up on the beach. Well I have got photos of mother, I suppose she is 19 or 20, with a great big broad hat on and a soft puffed up shirt sleeves and a tight waist band and she is standing there I suppose she is 18, 19 or something. And then we just took to yachting and we sailed all our lives, it was great.

Where was the actual club that it was based around?

There was no

06:00 yacht club then in South Perth. But Royal Perth Yacht Club used to be at the foot of the city, not around in Matilda Bay where it is now. So we sailed. My uncle sailed from there and we sailed from there, in cadet dinghies. And then much later South Royal Perth and then South Perth Yacht Club was built and moved across to the south side, the east side of the river. And we sailed there forever, I guess, and still sailing and

06:30 loving it. And then I had the chance to sail around the world and race around the world.

Really?

Big deal, loved it. Great stories to tell. When you have got two years I will tell you about it.

Well I'll probably get to that a bit later in the day.

Could come in somewhere.

You mentioned that you had a few brothers. Can you just tell me where you are in the family as well?

Yes, we were five brothers and no sisters. My father used to delight in saying he 'ground the girls', he said. I

07:00 was the middle of the five. And I suppose that in itself was marvellous because, although I often tell the story of how sad it is to be the middle of five because the parents say, "Ah, ah, you can't. He is older. He must have that," or they'd say, "Ah, ah. He is younger. He must have that." I would say in the middle I was deprived. He would say, "Mate, you were never deprived of anything." And I probably wasn't really, but it was fun. And the five of us grew up very closely knit I guess.

07:30 At school, our activities, sailing, cricket and yachting were all the five of us were in it together. And then off we went off to war together. And that is the next part of the story.

Can you tell me about the kind of subjects that you enjoyed at school?

For myself, French, French. I just excelled at French, and while looking at my war story what French did for me was like nobody's

08:00 business. It gave me the… I suppose a chance to enjoy my wartime as probably few others had the chance to enjoy. So French was my speciality.

Did you manage to do any other languages?

Mmmm?

Did you do any other languages?

Subsequently I did Spanish. I was going to be a part-time actor in the

08:30 Spanish movies, so I went to Spain to learn Spanish.

When was this?

In 1970, you see, a lot of the cowboy pictures looked like they come out of California. A lot mostly were filmed in Spain. So I linked up with a man who was a stunt man and he had already been to Spain. He said, “Come down and join me, and if you speak a couple of words you get double

09:00 pay.” So an extra percentage per day. So I learnt Spanish. And I found I learnt Spanish in London and I found having done, Latin, English and French, Spanish was easy and I loved it. So I conversed pretty well in either of those. So I got down to Spain eventually and after much planning I got out to the scene in the desert where outback El Maria was going to film some western – Claudia Cardinale and

09:30 Jack Palance, I think. And I fronted up to the women in charge. They were getting the set ready, and they were putting up horseshoes and old drays and cattle and donkeys and things, and I said to her, “I’ve come here to be here on the film monsieur.” “While you are the ideal material, we are finished. We are only shooting one scene with Palance and Cardinale and then we are going home.” So I said one, that was my chance to be in the film was gone.

That is the extent of your film career?

10:00 Yes, it was short, sour and sweet.

That is extremely disappointing.

But it was great fun learning Spanish, and being in Spain was wonderful.

That is a wonderful thing to do in the ’70s.

I continued with those languages automatically.

So at what point did you actually leave school?

Unfortunately for… I suppose unfortunately, with five of us to be educated to the college it was pretty difficult for my parents and none of us were able to go beyond junior,

10:30 so I left at 16, just turned 16. And I am likely to look back and think that you might have gone on to leaving and finished with a career of some sort. But it wasn’t to be. Dad had come out of the Depression with things being pretty difficult here, and the fact that he got us through college at all was absolutely wonderful. So that is the best we got and that was great.

So that would have been pretty difficult with five boys?

Five boys – very difficult. How he did it,

11:00 he is very clever at scrounging things for us. And he gave us a wonderful time to protect us and train us and some wonderful things happened. We used to all have fair hair, parted in the middle. We used to go down the line down to catch the South Perth ferry and all the locals knew us with our hats perched on the back of our head and our hair parted in the middle, and then three of us had been to the Middle East for three years, which is much,

11:30 much later. And we came back my father said, “And who gave you permission to part your hair on the side?” I had put mine over to the left, and he took notice of that.

What sort of things did your father do actually to get through the Depression? You said he was a good scrounger.

He was in real estate and took on various secretarial jobs and

12:00 eventually, when things were very grim, he and a couple of other couples walked to Three Springs to buy a property, hoping that they might find some income out of the city. I believe they walked there and got there to find the property was useless and they had to come back. But he was attempting to go out into the country and to become a farmer,

12:30 which he probably wouldn’t have been very good. But it indicated his attempt to get by. So it was a failure of a farm at Three Springs.

Where is Three Springs? Is that around near Capel?

No Capel is down south. It is up north-east from here.

Right.

Fairly rough country.

Obviously with three springs?

Three springs – that is where it got the name. So that is the story. He never made it.

13:00 So.

So now I know you told me a little bit about your intentions to work in the movie business, was there any sort of drama things that you did when you were a kid?

Yes, yes. I had a ball actually. By the time I left school at 16 until I went away in the army at 20 I was a… There was a group here called the Plyish Club. They used to have a room here at the bottom of Hart Street. And they were made up of all the girls

13:30 in the colleges who formed this club and they had produced one musical per year. And we'd be invited into the chorus with all these beautiful girls. And it was marvellous stuff to be in the chorus and singing and dancing. And then I went onto do some stage work with Lilly Caravan in what was it called the major club in Perth, Tats or something it was called.

14:00 We had a room somewhere in the St Georges Terrace. That wasn't the name. Anyway I did quite a bit there, and then I walked into the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] and said, "Do you need me?" And they said, "Okay, what?" I said, "I'll sing and dance and whatever you like." I did, and they took me on for a little while and…

What sort of things were you doing with the ABC?

Well a girl in Culcairn died recently. She was in charge of one section at the ABC

14:30 and she said, "You better come in and talk to me," because I had grown up with that family. And she got me to audition for radio plays and it was a most exciting experience, because all the others, Jimmy Conlon, Shirley Getties, were professionals. I was totally an untrained raw amateur.

15:00 And I used to stand up with them around the microphone and try to look like I could do it. And it was frightening, yet fascinating. And then I took a girl in to play a Number 4, and then I sang, and that took me onto singing with 6 men, and 6PR [radio station] doing modern numbers and things. Pretty exciting. But the plays were marvellous. At one stage,

15:30 it must have been just after the war, I came back and joined up again. And then my cousin had me picked out for something pretty special tours to do some play in Perth. That is right after the war. And we would be the only two on stage for the whole of this play, to do an escaped prisoner coming back to frighten people. And she said, "You will have to start training now. It will be four nights a week

16:00 and maybe Saturday and Sunday." And I thought to myself, "Mmmm, I'm playing cricket on Saturday." Where I was playing at South Perth I could look over my shoulder and see the yachts on the Swan River. I said "I am sailing on Sunday and am I going to give all that on my future," and I said, "No, I don't think so." So I pulled out. Sometimes I look back and I regret it. It

16:30 would have been fun to go on to see how far I could have got. But anyway, the call of cricket and the call of hockey and the call of the yachts were there, and off I went.

Because when you were a young man, I mean all the radio dramas, they would have been live wouldn't they?

Yes they were. They used to call the Lux Radio Theatre used to be on Sunday night and everybody had to listen to that. Does that ring a bell with you, the Lux? No? It doesn't?

Strangely enough, it does because I studied radio.

Radio, well there were various sessions

17:00 that were because there was no television and radio commanded the whole thing, I guess. And in those exciting years before I went to war from 16 to 20 there couldn't have been a more marvellous four years for a young man than I had. I was playing hockey, I was swimming, I was sailing, and I had a beautiful girlfriend who was part of the ABC. And I had very little

17:30 money in my pocket, but we didn't need it, I don't think. And the way we moved and the way we enjoyed life, singing and dancing was pretty good. This will lead me to say, you are probably going to ask me how did I then move from there to get caught up in the army, were you going to ask me that later perhaps?

Yes.

Well I will hop in before you. At about, when I was about 18 a friend of mine said that he was having tremendous fun. He had joined the 3rd

18:00 Field Brigade, the militia, and why didn't I come down? And he described it to me and I thought, "Yeah, that sounds a new form of excitement." So I went down and joined the 3rd Field Brigade and it was exciting. I had never considered or thought about the army really, and nor did I think about… It wasn't war thinking then. It was just excitement of horses and guns and being trained in an initial survey party which was…

18:30 They were using trigonometry and maths for the surveying of guns. And I got into the survey party and I

had camps at Rockingham and Northern and yeah, it was very exciting.

Where they weekend camps?

Well no. Sometimes. Mostly no. You did two weeks a year and then you did weekends, did weekends, then as war was declared we then went in for three

19:00 months continuous. And during those three months continuous they said, “Okay it is time to move into the AIF [Australian Imperial Force].” And that is when I will lead you to the story of my two older brothers hadn’t been in the militia, and I would be coming home in my uniform with red braids and buttons and you know, as you had in the militia as a gunner.

19:30 And I said I was going to join up, and they said, “We better come with you.” And I think there was an enormous stroke of luck, that I lead them into the artillery. And a fourth brother later on joined and we all come back. Had I lead them to the air force or the infantry it could have been a vastly different story. So I think that is a bit of stroke of luck.

What attracted you to the artillery?

20:00 The fact that the other boys had been in it and knew about it and described it to me, that was the initial attraction. And going down to the first camp, which was in Rockingham. I was a cadet and I was under the command of a chap named Bombardier Hadley who was a permanent man. And he taught me how to get this bread and cut, and cut this enormous slice of bread for the mess. And I am thinking of this bloke in the sand, and I’m watching them make the tea, throwing the whole condensed milk in the boiling water, that was how they made the

20:30 tea and it was rough and ready, rough as rough as you like. But I enjoyed it. But as I say, I was learning to be… I was just starting to survey in the guns and to be part of the survey party. It was a specialist group with lights and directors and tapes and measuring angles and working out the computations for the various changes of position.

How many folk

21:00 **in the survey party?**

Pardon?

How many of you in the survey?

At that time I suppose the regimental survey would have been about 10 or 12. The officer in charge was named ‘Wad’ Campbell. I met his son the other day, Bruce Campbell. We talked about Wad. We used to call him Wad. His nickname Wad is because when you are going out to do a traverse there is a man giving you a direction, and one man runs out with a 100 foot tape whatever it was, and he takes a

21:30 wad, which is a piece of stick, he sticks that in the ground and that’s sighted by the chappy on the instrument to carry a wad out, who became Wad Campbell. So that we got our initial training in the survey party from him. And I remember being fascinated by looking through a filter light and taking sun shots during the day, or star shots during the day. I was fascinated by it.

How do you do that?

Mmmmm?

22:00 **How do you do that?**

Well the filter has a magnification in it and you can sight off a particular star, and you know its position in the heavens and you can identify where you are if you know what the star is. And the time of the day, and what it is in Greenwich, and know where you are. That was the basis of survey. But now with the GPS [Global Positioning System] you just press a button.

Exactly. I mean it sounds quite sophisticated the training that you went through?

It was. It was. I suppose

22:30 against the rest of the work on the guns, which was fairly physical, whereas the survey party was much more technical. And I enjoyed it.

When you say you joined up with your brothers, was it all five of you that went in together?

No. When I came home and I said to my two older brothers, “I am joining,” I remember sitting down at the table

23:00 with mother and father. They said, “Yes we better come with you,” into the artillery. And my fourth brother, the one younger than myself, he was desperately upset because we then moved into Northern camp for training to go overseas, and he didn’t like that at all being left behind. So, because I had been in the 3rd Brigade I knew most of the people concerned in the

23:30 recruiting depot. One day they called me up and they said, “There is something wrong in your family, you’ve got a brother three months older than you are.” I said, “What are you talking about?” Well my

younger brother had put his age up, hoping to sneak in, and they noticed the discrepancy so he then he had to wait. He waited until we came back from the Middle East and then he joined us. So then the four of us went away to Borneo. So that was the story.

Well it must have been pretty traumatic

24:00 **in the early stages when the three of you, three boys joined up, for your parents?**

Oh, very, I would say. How mother got by – I suppose that is what mothers did then – for the three of us, yes. She would have been desperately sad. And not having a daughter and only having the three boys and they were on there way. An extraordinary episode happened then, we were training in Northern…

Is that the first place you went for training when you joined the AIF?

24:30 The AIF, that was the centre of training for the AIF. And we were there from May until we sailed in October. And pretty intense training. We didn't have proper guns then, we were using old 18 pounders. But we used to get home at the weekend in cars that were pretty dangerous, but got us here and got us back to camp

25:00 in time. And that was a pretty interesting part of our lives. But then an extraordinary episode, we suddenly knew that things were happening and we were close to moving overseas. The preparation of gear and the making of kitbags and all the stuff that goes on, and the great security that's supposed to be put onto everything. And then finally we got on the train. I think we marched from Northern camp to Northern

25:30 in trains, and on the way down we got onto the wharf and there was a ship lined up, the Stratheden one of the Strath boats. And it is hard to describe what you feel at that moment, it is an intensive time, it is intense adventure I guess. And nothing is ever going to, you are never going to get hurt, nothing is going to go wrong. So our parents and our girlfriends are all lined up

26:00 at a barricade, perhaps 100m from the ship's side. So we scramble onboard carrying our big kitbags, whatever we had. We went down down down down, to… We were so low we were under the propeller shaft. They said, "This is where you sleep." We said, "No way. We are getting out of this spot." So we left our gear, shot back upstairs, got to the side of the ship. And we could wave and call out to our parents and all our friends our

26:30 girlfriends. And thinking we would sail instantly we hung onto the side of the ship. And suddenly our parents burst the barricades and burst the MPs [Military Police] aside and shot over to, and we could just about touch their hand. Because that was pretty exciting. We were giving badges and letters and you know all the exchanges. And we eventually got tired of it and they called us to dinner, so we said to our parents, "Well you better go home and have dinner too, and come back

27:00 afterwards." So we went and had dinner and they come back and we were still there. So what, so the next day we went home on leave, we went to fruit markets around Fremantle, had big dinners with our family, met our girlfriends again back to the ship that night. And after the fourth day we thought, "This is going to go on forever," because mother was force feeding us with enough food to last us for the duration in case we ran out of food. So it was sad for her the night

27:30 we said goodbye and went back to the ship. She was saying goodbye. And the last night, the fifth night, coming back in the old car, we were all packed in coming toward the ship and my brother said, "Look, there is a special type of smoke coming out of the funnel. I think something happened." Well the next morning. What had happened was, with the convoy with the ship ready to sail, to pick up some ships outside, there was a scare of a German raider in the Indian Ocean. So they could release the convoy and make sure it was cleared.

28:00 That is why we were bottled up for the five days, so then off we went. And

When you were training in Northern, did you hang out with your brothers?

To a fair… No, not really, because you are off doing different things. I was in the survey party, my older brother Ken was in transport, Dick was a gunner but we were together, not necessarily in the same hut, but in the same vicinity all the time. But then

28:30 I knew that, my girlfriend at the ABC was going to do a special broadcast. So I got permission to go leave my quarters, to go down underground and come up in the ships, in the cruise quarters up for'ard, got to know them and said "Have you got a radio?" And they said, "Come and sit and listen." So I sat in there with the chief, who turned out to be the band, they were members of the band, that hadn't been totally converted to a troopship. So I sat and listened to them. They were going from broadcasting

29:00 the ABC, which was wonderful. By that time we were out beyond Goads Road somewhere. And then I made friends with the crew and they invited me to join a whole heap of blokes in the band on the ship going over.

What sort of band did they have on the ship?

Well they were still partly in peacetime arrangement, and of course they had bands on ships to play for the customers, they used to assemble up on the huge promenade deck at probably midday and the band

would start. And the chap from Sydney

29:30 and myself we received the vocals and it was great fun. And we'd be chuffing slowly, moving away across the Indian Ocean, heading in the other direction. But that was the departure and now you know the story.

So what sort of songs were you doing?

Oh then 'Apples for the Teacher', 'My Prayer'. What is the other one? 'Mexicali Rose'. You wouldn't know about those. 'Mexicali Rose' – "I'll be down to get ya in a

30:00 taxi honey." Dozens of them. And we could reel them off as fast as the band could play them.

So there were actual passengers as far as the ship…?

No, no. There was totally soldiers on board. But the ship's crew…

Were still geared?

Were still, yeah, and so that was the first part of the adventure.

What were the conditions like

30:30 **on the ship?**

Pretty rough, pretty rough. Because we had never learned to live in hammocks, you see. And we had to get up on deck – couldn't sleep on down below deck. Up on hammock area and there'd by thousands, well not thousands, hundreds of hammocks. And they were all hanging and you couldn't tell where your place is. So you'd come into the deck and go and pop up where you'd think you'd get to your hammock and you'd probably hit a foot or a face or somebody's backside and you know, whatever it was, until you could find your way through, identify

31:00 your hammock. And we didn't learn to sleep in hammocks terribly easy. So eventually we would take the hammock and a blanket and lay out on the deck and sleep in the open deck. Because the whole of the interior of the boat was closed off and it was terribly hot and humid. And that was fun. But about 4.30 in the morning, the Alaskan seamen who were on board the ship still would come on deck and say, "Washie ye deck," and hose the salt water to scrub the deck. We were all off in a great flurry pick up our gear and go back below again. They were pretty rough.

31:30 Very rough.

How about the food, what was that like?

I can't barely remember what we… I knew you would ask me what was that like.

You were still full from the four days?

I can't even remember, but it would have been porridge and stews that we had normally in our camps. We weren't on bully beef rations then. It was cooked in the kitchen. And all I know that for all the roughness

32:00 of the army food, they were never unhealthy food. And I came out heavier than when I went in, I think. No the food was okay.

Well it sounds like you had plenty to do?

Well they had to keep troops occupied by training sessions, jogging around the deck, swimming sessions in the pool…

So did you do any training?

32:30 I had a lot of training, strategies, small arms training, not a lot of firing. But all the survey work took a lot of training and continuous training on computations using logarithms and stuff. And I suppose the hardest thing for those in command was to keep troops occupied on the troopship. But they managed it. Up on the deck you'd hear the

33:00 bands playing, practising their tunes, and the drummers playing and the bugles playing, practicing. And we'd be down doing rifle or duty or something on the deck down below. But for me it was my love of the sea, I reckon. I was going to be on a ship that was going to bury its bow to the biggest sea we had ever seen and then come up and go woof. But the ship never bugged. It was as calm from the Swan River, from here to Colombo, and from Colombo up to the Red Sea, and then into

33:30 the first canal. We never saw a wave.

So how long did it take you to get to Colombo?

14 days I think we took, but don't quote me too much. We pulled into Colombo to refuel.

Did you manage to get off the ship at all?

Ah ha ha, now there is a very sad story. While we were training in Northern, I was running in a race, because we were pretty good on our feet. I was running a relay race and hand the baton over to my brother, who was a very good sprinter. And on this fairly rough mud parade ground

34:00 as I ran, and partly there was a great crack, I went down and looked down and one foot had come off the end, it had dislocated and broken, this left foot came off the end of my leg, which wasn't very nice. So they got me into Fernway Hospital and a doctor named Dr Mainland from Narrogin came and I thought it was the end of my army career: "I will be left behind by the mob." And he studied my foot and he studied

34:30 x-rays and it went on, and I felt confident going in, so he started to work on it and fixed it up. And time came when I was able to put a plaster and a metal, a wooden, a wooden, a metal stirrup on it to walk. And I remember I was still in bed and the CO [Commanding Officer] came over, because our regiment was made up of from a battery from South Australia, a battery from WA [Western Australia]

35:00 and the regiment headquarters from South Australia. And the CO would come over every now and then to inspect and to see if we were progressing. And he come to me and he said, "Kennedy, even if we carry you up the gangplank, you are coming with us." And that was the best news I had heard. I didn't want to be left behind. So by the time we had gotten to the ship, I was still on the stirrup, they hadn't taken the plaster off. They had just taken the plaster off, I had to prove I could walk without the plaster and the stirrup.

35:30 So by the time the ship got to Colombo, they said, "Kennedy, you have been off duty for two months with your leg, now you are free on your duty, you are on ship duty, you stay on board." All the other troops go ashore. I thought that was pretty dismal really. So I waited and waited and waited and late in the afternoon I slipped ashore somehow, I don't know how, and went to the Galle place to the Mt Vania Gardens, and generally saw a bit of Colombo. Didn't get up to Kandy. To get

36:00 off the ship was marvellous, exciting stuff.

Before we move on from Colombo, did you do any training in Adelaide?

Yes.

We missed that bit.

What happened was I was selected in Northern camp to go over to special training in gas warfare. And I went over to Adelaide to train

36:30 there in the gas corps they called it. And it was pretty exciting because on the train going over we had a ball with blokes who were going over to other sorts of courses. And the funny thing then was before this happened, another chap and I who worked in the Bacci oil company had decided that we had gone to Rottnest every holiday for a couple of years. We said, "This time we are going to be different. We are going to save

37:00 up the money. If we can save 35 pounds we can get on a ship for a holiday and sail to Adelaide and back." We thought this was going to be very exciting, so we saved up the money but then we went for nothing in the Stratheden for free. We went to the Middle East instead, so I told you that bit.

So what sort of training did you do as part of being a gas…?

Gas training. It was

37:30 training for the use of gas equipment, gas masks and also recognition of the various chemicals that might be used, like mustard gas or whatever, and to train be able to take over training of the regiment in all matters that were to do with preparation for gas warfare.

So, because I know there was a bit of a controversy about mustard gas training in Australia?

Was there then?

Yes, because…

No, there wasn't, because it had been used in the First World War

38:00 and a lot of the fellows were seriously damaging fronts weren't there.

But with the actual training of the mustard gas they were putting soldiers as guinea pigs?

No, not at all, no. We were purely trained in case it was used for recognition and behaviour and drills in case gas was used. Which was use of gas mask. It was all defensive stuff, no offensive. We never saw any Kepper. I tell you

Was there any sort of clothing

38:30 **protection?**

Not then, no. There was a gas seat, a gas seat, it was I was issued at some stage, but mainly it was in use of the gas mask that was the principle. If you had a gas mask and ran through the routine and say

exactly what to do in case.

Can you describe without a gas mask what the routine is?

What the training is? Yes. When you hear the signal

39:00 or the command, “Gas,” hold your breath. Don’t breathe in in case there is gas. Hold the breath. Push the tin hat at the back of the head, with the right hand, open the flaps to the gas mask, no with your left hand open up, with your right hand extract the gas mask, hold it in front, put the two thumbs in the lower rungs, put your chin forward, put it over your head and then breathe out, replace the tin hat, and close it, that was all. But the main thing was

39:30 hold your breath, don’t take in a breath. So, and we never needed it, they were only used as a pillow mainly the whole time we had them. We carried them for a long time in the Middle East until eventually we didn’t require them.

What sort of things did you have in your kitbag?

The kitbag, I had enough clothing to survive on. A pair of socks, pants, underpants enough that you could

40:00 live off and carry, that was the main thing. You also had your toiletries in your kitbag, well mostly. No, that is wrong. The kitbag was mainly if you were going to use if you were bedding down somewhere, the day to day stuff maybe your toilet gear or your utensils would be in packs around you on your back or on the packs at the side. The kitbag was mostly for bedding down for the night somewhere.

40:30 And then when we come into Northern when they said, “Right, get your kitbags ready,” and on the bottom of a paint on ‘not wanted on voyage’, that was the sign that we were going to go on a ship, wasn’t it? Not wanted on because they would be stood down and you wouldn’t need them for your time on ship, so there we are.

Where were you heading from Colombo?

Up to the Red Sea,

41:00 up the Suez Canal and then we disembarked in El Qantara, halfway up the canal on the eastern side, on the Palestinian side. And I remember an incident. We get off the ship. It would be… Your first minute in Palestine was strange. And we were taken into a big hut to have a meal,

41:30 and there were these long sausages that spread across the plate, and they were of course Spinney’s special sausages. And Spinney was one of the most unusual Australians. He was left behind in the First World War and made a fortune in making sausages and meats in Palestine. So that is his story, anyway. Time came, one of the unusual things is to be there and look back and see the desert around you and a ship standing in the middle of the desert.

42:00 You can’t see the water, but you see it moving.

Tape 2

00:31 To wave goodbye to my friends, he would come up to the fore deck, the friend who had been in a band, and they were leaning over the deck and we were shouting and screaming, and suddenly right on the edge of the Suez Canal on the edge of the ship up here there is a bush, there is a bush rustling in the back, “Szzz, szzz, hey George!” There was my first approach by wong, we used to call them wong, selling false jewellery. “You want to buy pretty watch?” or, “You want to buy filthy postcard?”

01:00 And I had only been there five minutes and I was being apprehended by this fellow. Anyhow that is the way it was.

Were you expecting that at all?

Oh no no, I didn’t know what to expect. I knew they would be pretty rough because as the ship came up the canal the wog boys lined up along side the ship in the canal and doing all sorts of things, but not very inviting, but pretty rough as far as I was concerned.

01:30 And so what happened with the fellow starting to sell the postcards was par for the course in the end. It was always on, but it was my first approach, which was a surprise.

So how did you react?

How did, oh, no I wasn’t interested. I think you, I learnt pretty early to just close them off, because if you got involved… I didn’t want to be involved. So I left them to it.

02:00 Then we hopped on the train and all the way across the desert to our camp being prepared in Palestine. But on the way we came up, the train goes right up to the edge and met at Urania and I still have a picture of this great place with white sand, sand hills and palm trees, and I thought, “Oh, I’ve come to

the wrong place. This doesn't look like the desert to me."

02:30 But I can't tell you the name of it.

Was it something of an oasis?

Mmmmm?

Was it something of an oasis?

No it was right, it was a little village on the edge of the Mediterranean and it has a significant name, its name was mentioned in some of the escapades of Lawrence of Arabia, he sometimes called in there. I watched the name for a second and the next minute we were in Palestine.

What was the train ride like?

Dreadful. Well their trains were pretty rough of course and we

03:00 were not first-class passengers, you might say. And to get across the canal then you had to, oh we were across the canal that is right. No across the Sinai was pretty rough. But what they used to do, when you went into, when your unit was coming into a camp you had a group who had been there before and would prepare your camp for you, like a reception committee. And all the tents were made up and the cane beds were ready for us, and

03:30 food was ready in the mess tent when we got there, which was the great part of being received. And we in turn did it for other people later on. So then Palestine started, and that was interesting.

What did you do while you were in Palestine?

Trained hard without any guns. We didn't have anything then but rifles. We had no artillery, no cannons, no guns. The training

04:00 was of route marches, gas training, every training you can devise apart from having your own guns to play on. But we were fortunate, we had a hockey team going. I haven't told you about the hockey team yet, but my brothers and I were A grade players here and with the blokes we gathered around we nearly had an A grade team. And we could bop everybody very easily. We used to play all the other regiments and battalions and we'd bop them 10 and 20 nil, which we thought was pretty good. But a lot of our friends from Perth had

04:30 played hockey here and played hockey in Palestine. And then we got leave into Jerusalem, which was fascinating. Tremendously exciting. We were quite close to Stina. Our camp was probably a couple of hours ride by buses into Jerusalem. And the history place I suppose, biblical history was so fascinating

05:00 and to learn it and be part of it… And I had the fortune, as a Catholic I went down to meet, to look at the Garden of Gesthemane the great church called the Church of All Nations in the Garden of Gesthemane, and I got talking to the priest and he said, "I will invite you down to serve mass with me tomorrow morning at 6 o'clock." So we went down and I served mass as an altar boy at

05:30 20 in the Church of All Nations in the Gardens of Gesthemane. And I found that pretty fascinating.

That is an unusual invitation?

Mmmm?

It is an unusual invitation?

I guess so. Yes I suppose unusual, but if I got along well with him and talked in Latin or French or something, I don't know, but he was quite amenable to the suggestion. And then of course spending time in and around Bethlehem and Jerusalem

06:00 getting down on buses down to the Red Sea, down to Jericho up to Allenby's Bridge was all great history and I guess so reflected in the fact that I was in the presence of so much history. And I felt myself saying, "I wished I had learnt more of it," so I was better prepared to understand what I was seeing. But the ground that I was treading on had been there creating

06:30 history forever, hasn't it?

Do you think that the history of that landscape had the same impression on the other troops that you were with?

Yes. I suppose everybody saw it differently, perhaps on their educational background and their interesting background. I found coming across the first time in the train, coming up through Beersheba, fascinated to see the old Turkish railway line and even the sand hills

07:00 where you could see zigzag set trains that had been taken there during the First World War. And I didn't realise the significance of that until I read this extraordinary exploits of Lawrence of Arabia and how he in incited the Arabs to join and continue to attack that very railway line. The Turks had built the railway line right down through Oman right down to Southern Arabia

07:30 and Lawrence's scheme was to keep attacking the Turks to get them out of Arabia and retake the Masacre. Anyway I shouldn't tell you that story. But I found being there and learning of his story later on was fascinating.

I will just quickly ask you how much later was that you read about that and discovered that information?

Probably my in-depth reading of Lawrence has been in the last three or four years.

08:00 And I suppose it was doubly interesting having been there, for instance after the war, another story, I went down to Aqabah down at the top of the Gulf of Elat. I remembered seeing the story and the picture of Lawrence of Arabia in which the retake of Aqabah was a great, great achievement but I couldn't quite put together how he got there and what he'd done. So I got the books and read the books and realised

08:30 then the enormity of what he had undertaken and what an incredible being he was, what he did. And the retaking of Aqabah and being there makes it doubly fascinating, doesn't it?

It is just amazing that you are able to make these amazing personal discoveries now Peter?

It was, I think, Julian, was wonderful really. More than that recently, I'm now president of ex-members association and it so happened that

09:00 I recently got a friend of mine on the Internet to bring up the story of, no no no. It happened this way. I was catching the bus in here the other morning, only four months ago, and I find it easier to talk to people catching buses. And this, particularly this women standing here at this bus stop was obviously lost and didn't know. And I said, "What are you looking for?" She said, "I want to find London Court." I said, "I am going right to London Court. I will show you."

09:30 Sat along beside her, started chatting and talked to her about my ear being deaf from the war and she said, "Oh yes, my husband, my father had the same thing." I said, "Oh what was he in?" And she said these enormous words, she said, "Oh he was in a group called the Long Range Desert Group." I said, "What did you say?" "Long Range Desert Group." "That is the most exciting piece of the war you can ever, ever hear! What was he doing there? Where was he from?"

10:00 She said, "He was a New Zealander." I said, "Hang on, you tell me a New Zealander was in this very famous Long Range Desert Group?" Wow, that intrigued me. I didn't see how it could happen. So got my friend to research the Internet and came the story on the Long Range Desert Group. I knew about them sort of mystically. They were there when we were there, but never saw them. And how it happened, first of all I found

10:30 in the story that when they wanted to get members to help, cruise along, Long Range Desert Group, they looked around Cairo and nobody had troops to spare, but suddenly somebody said, "Go and see General Freeburg. He has got the New Zealand division. They have just arrived and lost their equipment, got sunk at sea. Go down and he will give you a few men." And this fellow went down and met General Freeburg and he said, "Take some, but I want them back." So the New Zealanders

11:00 got into the Long Range Desert Group. But then, I went further and the story just blows your mind. Because in the First World War the chap in Bogonelb – B O G O N E L B – an engineer in the British army found for fun which is like an old T model Ford, and out back of Cairo, see how far he could get across the desert for fun, and he would get a few

11:30 blokes with him and was an escapade like a picnic. And then he mastered the art of handling vehicles in the desert. Because the centre of Libya was a great sand sea, nobody could get across it, he mastered it, he found how to get these vehicles up these huge sand hills and down the other side, without water, to navigate, to extract themselves from sand which sometimes was relevant, they knew how to perfect it.

12:00 And at the same time, he found, because water was totally unobtainable, they had to carry all their fuel. He worked out a process of securing the whole radiator system so that whatever boiled was condensed again on the side of the car, they never lost any water and that is the system that is currently used on every motor car, that you've got too. You got a motor car, well you've got a car

12:30 that Bogonelb designed the method of pressurising the system of not losing water. So he did many trips backwards and forwards and then he got sent to India and then between the two wars he got back again, he got better vehicles and got further across the sand sea, 26, 27, 29 trips out to

13:00 Siwa to Jola Kufar, all these great oases that were previously unapproachable from the eastern side. World War II came along, he must have been in England and he had been sent out to Kenya to do some work for the army. But the ship had a collision outside

13:30 Alexandria, it was going to be hold up in Alex [Alexandria] for a while, so he said, "Oh I'll hop down to Cairo and see if any of my old friends are there." Listen to this, he gets on the train, goes down to Cairo, he is having a beer in Shepherd's Hotel, which was the drinking spot for the whole of the world. Shepherd and a journalist for one of the newspapers recognised him and said, "Hey Bogonelb what are you doing here?" He said, "I'm on my way to

14:00 Kenya." He said, "What about your sand knowledge?" He said, "Yes." Because in the meantime he had written this story on the blowing of the sand, presented it to the National Geographic and they had taken him on as an associate member, and he gave papers on the handling of the sand. He was a fairly intriguing individual. So this bloke put in the paper 'Desert Veteran Sand Specialist Found In Cairo, What's He Doing

14:30 Here?' Somebody saw it and went up to Wayward and said, "Hey, this bloke is here in Cairo on his way down to Kenya. Get him up here." So the story of how he came up and Wayward said, "Are you still pretty good with sand?" He said, "Yup." He said, "Start, start now." Because over on the western side of this great sand hill, the Italian army, they had control. Gattsiani had an enormous Italian army

15:00 and the English of course didn't know what was there. And they had to be sure. They had to get knowledge of the Italian strength to help them prepare for the work up on the Mediterranean coast. So he said to Bogonelb, "If I get you equipment, how soon would you be ready to get across the sand sea?" He said, "Six weeks." He said, "Do it, whatever you want, tell them I said you've got to have it." Well he sprayed

15:30 around getting vehicles and he got whatever he could collect and scrounge. And he got his old mob together and then started going around the bottom of the sand sea, through the middle. As the Long Range Desert Group report on what was happening, and then along came a bloke called David Sterling, the 'Phantom Major', who suddenly saw that this bloke Bogonelb could get him across to any part of the area below the

16:00 Mediterranean coast. If he could take him with about six blokes he could go and attack any part of the Axis force's line, behind the line coming up the desert and disappearing into the desert. Bogonelb said, "I'll take you." Then became the routine of Sterling and 10 blokes going across parts of the sand sea, above or below or through the middle with Bogonelb. Long Range Desert Group. They would drive northwards,

16:30 they would drop about 40 miles south of Lawrence they'd walk into the enemy camp. Bogonelb would come back in and get in the desert and disappear. That is the most fascinating story. They destroyed altogether 480 aircraft by coming in 5 or 6 little crews of 10 whatever, and that is the way they did it.

It is just purely coincidental that Bogonelb was recruited?

Purely coincidental. Because they found him there on his way to Kenya to be a paymaster

17:00 you know, to be a paymaster. You got to weigh the possibility. And they played a major part and from then on they got bigger and bigger. They trained special crew. They had a special training area down on the south of the canal somewhere by Tewfiq, Bur Said, and they got more and more adventurous. They would take out 10 groups, drop them 10 different places and they would all go in simultaneous attacking. And then they would start to combine with the

17:30 air force. And then somebody in Cairo saw, this is a big deal. They are preparing for El Alamein and at the centre we shatter the Axis supply lines. So Bogonelb said, "If we could use the Long Range Desert Group and Sterling and all his boys and go completely blow up Tobruk, destroy it as a main point to which they could reinforce their

18:00 army for El Alamein." And it got so big, instead of being 10 blokes it got to 500 blokes. And everybody around Cairo and every bartender and every bus driver and every lorry driver knew about it. And the Germans knew about it complete and utterly. And the men in the group said, "This is crazy, this is just suicidal. Before we worked on absolute security, now security is completely blown." But they were obliged to go ahead. So the

18:30 story of how they went in and to take, completely take Tobruk while it was occupied by Rommel, and it failed dismally and utterly, they lost hundreds. They sent in the navy, they sent in the air force, they sent in troops, they sent in commandos and pretty well the whole lot were annihilated because the Germans were sitting waiting. And that was the sad story of what became of that part of the desert activity. Pretty sad isn't it?

Yeah, I mean there were many of those stories where they

19:00 **said men were sent in on suicidal missions knowing so before?**

Yes, they knew before they went. But I just reading a book called Tobruk Commando which they went in and how they fought, fought to the last man. But they were annihilated. I think they lost about three cruisers, four or five motor torpedo boats, 200 commandos were lost, all

19:30 because of a dreadful breach of security. Anyway that is the story of the Long Range Desert Group.

What was the name of the base that you were in in Palestine where you were training?

Castina, Castina.

Can you describe that base for me, Peter?

Yes. Down on the flat of Palestine there is a lot of ploughed fields, gorse bushes, hedges, olive groves

and generally pretty flat countryside and only one or two wadi's where… Waddies are

20:00 valleys where the water flowed down occasionally from the mountains further east. Generally uninspiring country. We were very quickly aware of the great clash between Arabs and Jew. The Jews had the settlements and were very, very industrious with the farming, and the villages were beautiful, the cattle beautiful. And we used to march through these camps, the villages

20:30 of the Jewish settlements, and the kids used to come out and pass beautiful Jaffa oranges. They were beautifully dressed and healthy. Whereas you'd go around the corner and through the Arab settlement was totally dirt and degradation. They had no sanitation, all camels and WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s all lived in the one little area, the place were filthy, the kids were filthy, their eyes were filthy, they were all cross-eyed. And the contrast was so

21:00 marked between two cultures. I guess it is still pretty much the same, isn't it. No not quite the same, not as bad, but the imbalance of the two cultures was so apparent, so there we are.

So where did you move on from for your first engagements?

Well, well well well. I was so fortunate, this lucky streak in my story, just after

21:30 Christmas – we had Christmas in Jerusalem, Bethlehem – just after Christmas I was called up and told I was being sent down to a special gas course in Cairo. And I couldn't believe it because my uncle had been in Cairo. And he used to tell me stories and I thought to think I might ever get there was only a dream. And they said, "On the train. You are going down to Abasia barracks

22:00 in Cairo to do a special course." So down I went and linked up with a fellow. We were the only two Australians in the course.

Who else was in the course?

Mmmm?

Who else was in the course?

Oh South Africans, English, Scottish, Irish, New Zealand, French, Greek, everybody that was in the Middle East part of the Allied forces, and we were the only two Australians. So we went into the barracks at

22:30 Abasia and that was pretty exciting because they were mainly 20, I hadn't even turned 21 and fresh out of South Perth and into Abasia barracks with the big Mustafa serving me tea at 6 in the morning and polishing my boots. Pretty exciting. And the course was wonderful. We used to work until 3 and then have, play hockey and then

23:00 we used to call it tiffin, tiffin, which was late afternoon tea, and then go and play hockey and have dinner later on. But through my friend who had come there before me, he said, "You better come into town. There is a place in Cairo where the civilians entertain soldiers for lunches." And I thought, "Sure, I'll be in that." So in we went and into a particular restaurant where the tourist bureau met, and we were taken off to

23:30 a private home for the most sumptuous food you could believe. And I thought, "I am all for this." And then the next afternoon we were taken down into a nightclub. The band was organised to play of course and the girls came into greet us and I'm at the microphone singing 'Two Sleepy People', and the band was playing

24:00 'Two Sleepy People'. You wouldn't remember that song.

No.

It was long before your time. Okay that then I'm back to the regiment again. I will jump forward quickly and say when we came back a year later I went straight back to find these people and they said, "Yes come, come to lunch immediately Monsieur and Madame Toby, come next Sunday. We will send a car to the camp to come and pick you up." And then we went to find out

24:30 the South Africans had come up then into Cairo from South Africa, having defeated the Italians. And it was mostly for South Africa that we and my brother, one brother and a friend we were three Australians invited to this luncheon and it was Madame Levy's place in [Hotel] Zamalek which was the posh place in Cairo, beautiful home. We went to lunch and then we met at her place for

25:00 the afternoon entertainment. Both these South Africans and we three Australians. And it was all deadly dull and boring. They got us playing billiards and all these lovely girls were sitting around with their parents, playing billiards, and then it came where you have got to twist things and kick this soccer ball on a table. And I walked over and said, "Bet France to Doris Sobeth," to whom I'd met then [speaks in French] it was, "Perhaps you can play the piano."

25:30 He said, "Oui." She got jazzed up, the whole place erupted, songs were coming out and dancing was on and everybody, they said, "You come back next Sunday." We were booked up permanently, just us. The

others would be new soldiers each week, but we were permanently booked for every place. And that became our stay in Cairo. It was just marvellous.

It sounds very civilised?

It was indeed, wasn't it?

26:00 I just can't believe, because I spoke French you see. At the table I would be the interpreter. There would be the mothers and they speak French or Austrian or German, a little English, and became the interpreter. French you know became easy for me. But I jumped ahead a long way to get you to there, haven't I? I've jumped a whole flight to the Middle East.

26:30 **Did you want to tell me about some of the people that you met when you visited there while we are on the subject**

Yes. The families Monsieur and Madame De Bar, Monsieur and Madame Tweeter and their daughters were wonderful, but perchance we met up with a girl Hilda Hefer and her friend Hilda Bard and

27:00 Hilda's husband, they were engaged, with Somi Horari an Egyptian architect. Well they took us over completely and her father had come out from, from where, from Vienna who was a riding master. He was a riding master at this lovely Gaziro riding school. And Gaziro's sporting club is like the

27:30 centre of Cairo. So they would take us out there to ride the horses with Hilda and Somi, have huge bowls of ice cream and strawberries and stuff, and then they used to send their car which was a beautiful Buick Roadster called Neville out to the camp to pick us up, take us into their home. Christmas Eve they'd have parties, singing German holly [speaks in German] whatnot, presents on the tree, we

28:00 were made so welcome it was quite delirious. And then I went away and came back a year later and met up with them again. Once when we were coming through Cairo on convoy I rang them and dodged the convoy, and they took me into town for a big meal, and we picked up the convoy outside Cairo again. All those sorts of things made it. And 30 years later, my wife who has been involved with the Institute of International Affairs,

28:30 and they have people coming from all around the world from delegations and things, and they stop here and they have lunch and they dress for the gathering. And she had to go up into the hills to pick up a Catholic priest who was a journalist on a worldwide undertaking. She picked up, she picked him up in Armidale or somewhere and was driving him about and in the conversation said, "Where were you

29:00 born?" He said, "Cairo." And she said, "Oh my husband often talks, he met some wonderful people there." And he said, "Can you remember any of them?" She said, "The only one I can remember is Hilda Hefer." He said, "Stop the car. What did you say?" "Hilda. I was in love with her. She was the most beautiful women in Cairo." My wife was stunned. He said, "Yes, if I couldn't marry her I would join the church." He has been in the church ever since. And I said, "Well I

29:30 knew Hilda instead." What a coincidence, this is 30 years after it. He said, "Yes, she was an extremely beautiful girl, an Austrian girl." And that was all part of making Cairo pretty good. What I'd missed though is from the time you asked me before, moving from Palestine across the canal back into Egypt for the first time on duty, my training, we

30:00 went up to Alexandria to El Amiriya and the camp there and waiting for equipment to arrive. And it was our first experience of the 'hamsin' [desert storm], out of a 'hamsin' that is five, and the 'hamsin' used to blow for five days. And this

30:30 'hamsin' hit and you read of the dust storms that hit the desert, it was so hideous you can't believe. So hot you couldn't see, you couldn't move, you couldn't get to the cook house, you would just lie on your bunk. I remember we used to lie and drip water up and down with the gas mask on. Lie there for days, you couldn't do anything. And then we got some equipment, we moved up into Mersa Matruh and then we received our first 25 pounders

31:00 who had been left, passed on over to us from a Polish group. So then we started work on these magnificent guns these 25 pounders in Mersa Matruh. We were there for three months.

How were you introduced to the 25 pounders?

How were we?

Yeah.

Oh just delivered to us I suppose with text books and things and a couple of people, probably officers, had been trained in the handling, of the firing. But most people learnt doing practice shoots out of the desert. And Mersa Matruh was the

31:30 fortress at that stage. Tobruk had been surrounded. We were on our way to join them but the Germans cut round, so we stayed in Mersa Matruh to mind that spot and the front line was Sollum just to the west of us. We were minding the next major port, which was Mersa, Tobruk was there and Sollum was there. So in that three months we trained very heavily

32:00 and we were bombed morning, noon and night. I think we were bombed, we were so used to it, it didn't matter in the end. But Mersa Matruh was a famous bombing alley for the Germans and the Italians.

How were you bombed?

Morning, noon and night. By aeroplanes. And we got pretty used to it. I was up on the opip, on the outskirt a lot, and you could sit there and watch the bombs falling across the middle of Mersa Matruh and

32:30 we lost a few blokes were killed with the bombs standing on the backyard. But an incredibly funny episode. Am I allowed to tell funny episodes?

Love to hear them.

Well you know what we swam at Rottnest and we were we belonged in the water here. And we had learnt to do Cottesloe beach, and another bloke and myself named Steady Yermans could wait till a wave come in that would cover about an inch of water, and we'd run and we could fling ourself down, and we could skid about 40 feet, at full bore like

33:00 surfing on flat ground, as long as the water was about two inches of water. So our guns were right along side this beautiful water off Mersa Matruh harbour, crystal white sand and the Mediterranean blue. And just beyond where our guns were on the edge of this lake, on the edge of the bay, the inlet, beach sand and then white beach sand went out about 6 inches, the water and then over the edge and we could

33:30 dive and run and jump and we had it, when we weren't working the guns. Well we used to swim in the nick. And the only ones at the guns who had a hat and boots on would have frightened the Germans if ever they caught us, wouldn't it? This day, and I must tell you something, and our ears were so tightly tuned we could detect a distant bomber before the air raid sirens would sound, that is how, we would wake up we could hear them before the sirens would sound.

34:00 And this day I was with a bloke, I better not say the name, he might shoot me, and just the two of us and suddenly I thought, "Aah ah ah." And then way up above, as far as they could get about 40,000 feet were 12 German bombers. And we could tell by the way they circled and when the bombs had gone. We knew the bombs had gone and we had that time from the bomb falling to get in the nick across this 150 metres of 6 inch sandbank

34:30 and fling ourselves into an English headquarters with the ack-ack troop. And we were screaming. I was a faster runner than this bloke, I will call him Nicky for want of a name. I looked behind and there with his hands over his head. The bombs were already on their way down. So the fear of what a human would do to… Actually, before that, before he put his hands on

35:00 his head this old cartwheel, and he tried to go under the cartwheel because the spokes were wide that didn't protect him. So he ran with his hands over his head. And we burst into this dugout and he came a minute after that. And this poor Englishman on this drawing board trying to control you know ack-ack firing and we burst in and skittled in the nick and they wondered what they had struck. So that was the episode.

I hope they made you welcome?

I can't remember what they said, probably, "Get out of here." We got out pretty

35:30 quickly. And the bombing was continuous. And there is a song written about the three bound bug bound desert. We used to dig into the ground and it was full of sand fleas, and until they got special powder up from Cairo, sand fleas used to get the better of us. No matter what you did, you'd put your hand down and you could never catch them, they were too quick for you. So we lost a few blokes there.

What was procedure during an air raid there

36:00 **Peter?**

If you were on the guns – and remember we weren't on an active firing position, we were a training position, a garrison position – you'd hit the deck into a trench wherever you were, into a slit trench you had a chance. Because bombs could fall all around you and in a slit trench. Unless you were dead unlucky, you were okay. Well one night we were giving a concert for the old barracks on the edge of the lake, had been the Egyptian army barracks and we occupied that. And one night we were giving a concert and my

36:30 brother and another bloke and I were imitating the Mill Brothers – we called ourselves the Dill Brothers – and we were, we were singing 'How am I doing José' with one ukulele between us. And other blokes were giving items. 'When it came time to go, A bright, bright moonlight'. What the bombers used to do they used to go out to sea with great height, flick off the, and glide in and you couldn't see, and the next minute you would hear the bombs coming down in the moonlight. And this night we were sitting in the back of a vehicle, a half

37:00 ton vehicle, and the next thing we heard the whistle and we were out of there, all of us were out of there and underneath before the bombs hit. And they landed and killed a bloke, a South African, 50 feet away. We got sprinkled with stuff. But the point is the speed at which we got out of that vehicle and

underground would have been an Olympic record for getting under, and getting out of danger.

Sounds like a mad scatter?

It was intensive. Underneath I remember I had my head up in the

37:30 work thing and the main thing, I wanted to protect my head and we heard the rattle of the stuff hitting the vehicle, so that finished the concert anyway.

With a bang.

So we then.

While you were based at, sorry to interrupt, while you were based at Mersa Matruh there, what was the daily routine?

We could practice gun drill, which is handling of the

38:00 gun in all sort of situations, practise manoeuvres out in the desert with the whole battery going out and being deployed and transferred and all that sort of thing, practise various regimental manoeuvres out in the desert, because until a regiment has trained in the battle in the desert manoeuvres things go wrong so very easily, people get lost and compasses don't work, so eventually

38:30 the training stands you in good stead. We trained as hard as we could and then they decided to send us up to the very front line, which is Sollum, a place called Bug Bug.

Can I interrupt you now Peter, before we go up to the front line, you mentioned various areas of training that you focused on there and how important they were later for battle, can you go into any more detail?

Yes yes, I suppose they were continually striving for new and quicker methods

39:00 of reserving an enemy situation and bringing fire down onto that situation, because observing from an o-pip at an angle and directing gunfire from another angle took a lot of training. And they were always trying to improve the methods, and a method came in to in Mersa Matruh which made it much, much quicker. I say that was the

39:30 key then in the gun training at Mersa [Matruh]. Was that the question that you asked me?

You mentioned a couple of areas in training that you were focusing on and how they would improve your chances later once you had reached battle circumstances?

I suppose the manoeuvres of getting a battery into position and getting its guns throwing in the right direction, getting the next battery, so then the two are coordinated,

40:00 not firing differently, getting all that done with a minimum of fuss and minimum of people being lost takes a fair amount of training to do it, to perfect it. Because things go wrong.

Can you describe those manoeuvres?

Ah yes. There, we'd march off at dawn. We are heading to, probably orders we had been given for the troop to deploy at a particular map spot. In the

40:30 desert there was very little identification other than a map spot you would be given, like an old tree or a shed or something. To reach that spot by compass bearing, to deploy, to have the ammunition guns running up, to have the survey party running to get the guns in the right position, ready to fire by a certain time, took a lot of coordination. Might sound simple, but it isn't.

41:00 People get lost, the compass is wrong, people go to the wrong place who lose a troop who lose a battery. That took a lot of training, and we put it to good use because it came in, you know, good stead later on, because manoeuvres are nice and easy compared to the actual fact.

Were they, I imagined they were staged as close as possible to the actual scenario?

They were which?

Staged as realistically as possible?

Oh yes they were, they were, but I suppose always in your mind, when,

41:30 you know, you are on manoeuvres they are never the same as when it's actual. No matter what they do to you they can't make it the same. When the stuff is coming back at you and it is actual, that is a different set of circumstances altogether. Then the mind is far more alert than when you are on manoeuvres. Manoeuvres can be deadly, dull and boring.

I will just pause you on that point and we will change tapes.

Tape 3

00:31 We had been in Mersa for some three months and learnt a lot, and then came time to move up further toward the front which was Sollum, and then the escarpment with the big wall coming down was called an escarpal hellfire. It was actually hellfire, was called a Hellfire Pass, and then no-man's land, and then there where a couple of water wells which had been poisoned.

01:00 And we were there for a while, and I remember one night on duty, remember I was telling before how finely tuned our ears were? So fine that it was quite extraordinary, that is before we lost them, that is. And this night I was sitting there on the edge leaning against the edge of some sandbags, and I suddenly heard a bomb dropping in completely, in the middle of this completely

01:30 nowhere. So I hit the deck and it got closer and closer, and a flight of migrating birds went over about 20 feet above me. I thought I was a goner. 30 birds, never mind. And then they used to send to harass the Germans. They used to send a gun called a sniping gun and send it forward into the minefield and dig it in and fire one shot

02:00 at a German vehicle seen up on Hellfire Pass, and thought he would come back. But they were up on the top commanding full view – it was suicidal. We did it for a little while. I remember I didn't go up on a sniping gun, but I remember seeing blokes come back one night and they were totally and utterly bulked out. Their eyes were out here, they were red raw because they fired one round. And as I say they got about 20 back all around them and

02:30 to see the blokes lying in the sun, in the slit trenches for the day, being bombarded, isn't very good for the health. They'd come back looking a bit washed out.

Let me get this straight, so there is a group of blokes who are sent out with a sniper gun that throw one round to harass the Germans.

They would try to send a few, but whatever you got, because as soon as you fired they'd see where you were up on the height, and they would send 20 back at you.

Because it seems like a really incredibly pointless exercise?

03:00 I suppose we were alarming them to the use of, the danger of using Hellfire Pass, which is a mean of nuisance value. A lot of stuff that was done was of nuisance value. Like we used to have harassing fire at night-time because, it might be peace and quite, but the moment you fired your gun the whole of your regiment was awake. And then you might have to fire

03:30 five guns, five rounds an hour. And it would be like intimately, all you'd do would be wake up your own troops. You'd hurt your own troops as much as, but it was called harassing fire, that is another story. But then up at Bug Bug we would wake up. I talk about this escarpment. It is hard to picture, but the whole of the Middle East is covered with escarpments where the old land is that high and it sweeps down these tremendous rocky craggy faces, down to the desert level. And the only way you can get up and down is by

04:00 watercourse that had worn down, called wadi's. And you may get up through the waddies and hide in the waddies. We got up through the waddies and we were up on top of the waddy digging gun positions in case the Germans broke through south of the main effort. And one night they said, "We are going on a particular escapade." We had to muffle the hooks of the guns. Took two

04:30 guns, I think. Went through the wire, which is the Libyan wire, Egypt-Libyan wire, went through there. And then northwards, and then went to some appointed place in the desert where at midnight we were going to start firing for so many minutes. And then the fleet was going to send in aircraft from the fleeter bomb, Sollum, and then do that. And then we were going to fire again and then get out before dawn. And that was great. We had a bodyguard around us of the costume

05:00 guards and we were firing away and then suddenly – occasionally a round gets jammed in the breech and a jammed round is very dangerous because you can't continue firing. Maybe it is a jammed cartridge. So you unscrew the back of that and put in a hook thing that screws in – a bit of teamwork – and you haul it out. But a silent night there is not a

05:30 sound, apart from no, apart from the firing, dead silence around the guns. We had a bloke named – oh, don't want tell you his name because he is still alive – but he got on, and he called out, "Heave, heave ho." It was like he was in a circus or a tug of war and suddenly the thing came free and they all crashed over. There was a diabolical noise and the guards said they were never going out with that mob again, they are stupid. But anyway enough of that.

06:00 I reserve back to Bug Bug and eventually we dug special gun positions up on the escarpment, and that took some doing. We used to be on a water bottle of water a day, and they got it from Bug Bug and they had all been poisoned solid, so the water wasn't too good.

What were they poisoning the water with?

Just… I don't know. They put in salt, or blow them up, try to make the wells unavailable to the

06:30 opposition so everybody finished up with pretty dirty water. But we had a water bottle of water a day. And we were digging the gun positions and eventually we moved back to Bug Bug, and quickly we moved back to Cairo. About a week later, Rommel broke through and the whole regiment that occupied that area was wiped out completely. So there it was,

07:00 like a close shave for me. Just being at the right place at the right time.

How were you getting informed about the movement of Rommel's forces?

That would come through higher command. We wouldn't know that, higher command would, with their intelligence. And also their air reconnaissance would be aware of what he is trying to do or what it was he intended to do. And particularly at that stage, we had cracked the Enigma code.

07:30 You have probably have read it. So while he was sending his message back to Germany, we were reading it in Cairo that night. But all of a sudden we found out that he was reading ours as well. So it worked out both ways. Funnily, you asked me how we keep aware, by our reconnaissance, from knowledge – reports from patrols going out telling us what is happening. You have a picture of what the enemy is doing.

So you've got a pretty good…?

Pretty good idea.

Up to date.

Oh what one intends to do.

08:00 So then we were, the whole of the division with them moving back to Palestine to regroup. And this is interesting. Back into Alexandria, there is a division moving a lot of people, and the long convoy going down the tar road, the desert road from Alex to Cairo, goes through a place called Wadi Natrun. I'll tell you about that later. Into Cairo and we parked outside

08:30 the pyramids at Elmina. And as often the army sit waiting for something to happen and eventually said, you've been pulled out of the division, you've been relegated into Cairo to be the base artillery training regiment, they need an artillery regiment in Cairo as a training ground for officers and troops coming through to go to the Middle East had to learn how to use the guns and how to fire the guns.

09:00 So we'd fire the guns morning, noon and night as a training regiment, that means we had three months in Cairo and that is where life began.

With the firing of the guns what were the conditions in the desert that made it?

They were totally barren, totally desert, totally nothing barren nothing nothing.

How did that affect the operation of the guns?

Not at all, not at all. In that situation we didn't need, because it was only training firing for people observing and controlling the fire,

09:30 we didn't need to dig the guns in so we simply sat on top of the ground and fired and could be dreadfully dreadfully cold winds blowing across the desert, to walk across the desert sometimes pick up chunks of petrified forest, petrified rock and at one stage, we walked, a chap by the name of Jimmy Partner and I walked across and it had been an old mortar range, and Jimmy said to me, "Oh look at that." and

10:00 sticking out of the ground was an old mortar bomb and he picked it up and I said, "Hey Jimmy be careful." he said, "It is quite alright." he walked back with me and then Nolan McDaniel, McDaniel is from Broome who was the sergeant said, "Throw that thing away and don't come any closer." He threw it away and it exploded. Luck of the game again. So we are back in Cairo again aren't we?

Is the first time that you have spent some time in Cairo?

I had been there the year before remember when I was first

10:30 went down there for the gas course and me the people.

Oh right.

So as soon as we got back in I made a beeline back for them and we were welcomed with open arms and for three months we were permanently invited.

Permanently on the social list?

Permanently, well it was rough and tough and dirty during the day but to come into camp at night, wash, and they would send this beautiful Buick Roadster out to pick us up and take us into beautiful homes for dinners, it was delightful, can you imagine.

11:00 So beautiful and then in all the history in Cairo one of the social centres was Groppis G R O P P I. Great restaurant, everyone would have to eat at big Groppis and little Groppis, big Groppis was a dancing

restaurant, little Groppis was for beautiful cakes and afternoon teas in the afternoon. So I had a system I used to use, which worked like a charm

11:30 and when I went into strange cities if I needed to meet any girls I would go to the biggest store and go to the library, to the book department and ask for a French dictionary and then I would get talking French and I would take them out to dinner. So then we used to dance every Saturday night at Groppis with these girls.

How very creative of you?

It was beautiful, the music was magic, and they used to play these tango

12:00 and the lovely dips and dances. And at the same time I met Hilda Hefer and Somi Horari so we had that set of friends too to go to their place and then if you can imagine. And then 22 I am getting old by this time, they would say we are going to pick you up from camp and we are going to have a picnic at in the moonlight under the pyramids. And the moonlight is so bright you could read a paper.

12:30 And the air is so clear. There might be 10 or 20 of their friends and three of us, throw a blanket down on the sand under the sphinx under the sphinx, and food and wine and cheese and talk and chatter in the moonlight. I was, we were so lucky weren't we, it was just magnificent, we made so many friends. And then of course it eventually came time to move, we were then

13:00 regrouping by the time we got out of our training clad and went back to, joined the division in Palestine or up in Syria and there were a lot of vehicles to be moved across the Sinai desert into Palestine, so an order came round one day in the morning "Would anybody would wish to drive a vehicle to Palestine step forward, volunteer." So a few of us stepped forward

13:30 for fun of getting out of the guns and driving our own vehicle across the Sinai might be excitement. So crack of dawn one morning we were taken over to, Tel Quabi was the major supply area for the whole of Cairo, Tel Quabi you always read about Tel Quabi, and we pull up and there was this field with a mass of vehicles, there were tankers and buses and staff guards and they said, "Get whatever you want." So we ran in and

14:00 I got a water cart and it was fun driving across the canal. By that time you had, they never had a bridge over the canal, they only had, they could pull out a floating barge, and you could drive across the floating barge system across the other side. One bloke from Perth, who was a bank manager from Perth, hadn't driven and he got himself a staff car. Now he confessed after he didn't know how to change gear,

14:30 he got into second, he went hang on and he stayed in second the whole way across the Sinai Desert to deliver his car his staff car. But going across the Sinai at night the convoy was pretty exciting because you are only driving or watching the tail light, or the hidden tail light of the vehicle in front, no lights at all. Theirs is just a black road with white stones and then the sand of the desert. And then your eyes become unfocused by knowing how far the light is in front of you or behind you, you can't tell.

15:00 You are dazzled in the end, the next moment you hit the vehicle in front, or run straight off by leaning over the side and watching the rocks you could drive and if you didn't watch those you'd run into the sand. So the convoy was probably a bit of a shambles for an untrained convoy. So we got into Beersheba the next morning and that must have been the worst convoy that has ever been across the Sinai desert. So there we are.

How many were in the convoy?

I suppose about 30 vehicles. Beersheba was

15:30 the great, have you heard about Beersheba the great, down below Gaza. So we pulled in there and then we went on up into Syria because in the strategy then of the Middle East because they were still fighting in the desert with the Germans trying to take the canal. To take the canal meant the complete control of India, the oil wells, Australia. But they suspected

16:00 despite Turkey being neutral up on the northeastern corner of the Mediterranean, hit them by coming straight down and try and take the canal by coming down from the eastern side. So we were sent up to the top of Syria to dig in defences in case he broke through Turkey and came down on the eastern side of the Mediterranean. So they are digging into a

16:30 mountain called Mt Tabor and that was pretty hard digging into solid rock. And we used to get down, we were living near Tripoli we would go down on leave to Beirut, which was quite fun. And I met some friends in Beirut, well actually we were swimming at the American University and we rescued a girl who was drowning. So we became friends and she said, "Come and visit me at home." Which is up near Tripoli, not far from our

17:00 camp. So I made it my business to get permission leave to go over to visit the house to see these friends but they hadn't come back. And then suddenly from a quite and peaceful I was digging in Northern Syria a bomber had broken through taken Tobruk and it was on his way down, screaming ready to take the Syria canal and Cairo. The whole

17:30 lot, there was a diabolical mess, which the whole of the army looked like being defeated. And they sent

troops to other parts of the world, we were short of troops to resist Rommel's forces. But because we were a completely fresh division up on the top of Syria they said, "Quick, hurry up down through Palestine across the canal up into outside Alexandria and straight up into the desert,"

18:00 which was the start of the El Alamein thing. That is how quick we got out of Syria across to El Alamein. As we were going up to Syria a couple of months before the 6th or 7th Division, I think was, coming back from Syria ready to go home. And we were going, we passed them just across, after we'd crossed the canal they said, "You nong nongs Australia is that way." We said, "Oh, we thought so too."

18:30 They were heading home and we were heading north.

How surprised were you of this development in the war?

Perhaps very surprised and very disappointed, but having taken command of the desert once Rommel built up his forces, he could say quickly better to leg again. So quickly was frightening really. But if he took the canal, we were back where we started. We would have lost everything. We lost the

19:00 complete Middle East. But as we came down out of Syria across the Sinai, across the canal, we were refuelling in the dark outside a big refuelling dump right outside the pyramids near Elmina and they said we had to go the coast road to go from there straight up to Alexandria. There was a straight strip of road right through the desert. He had broken through and was trying to get to the canal so they said,

19:30 "After you refuel, if you take off your gun muzzles and be prepared to drop down to open sights in case you have open sights firing at tanks getting through." So we knew that things were pretty serious, so be prepared for, but then, probably for all of us, we saw one of the worst sights you could possibly see in the army. As we attempted to go up north, up the coast, up the desert

20:00 road towards Alex [Alexandria], the whole defeated army was coming back, men who had fought themselves to death, they had fought Knights Bridge, El Aden, everything, the whole defeat was pouring back. And it is so gross and so – what is the word? – terrifying. Every vehicle took a move with men hanging

20:30 on shot to pieces. They hadn't slept, they hadn't fed. Getting out and getting back to Cairo, hoping they could save the canal. But getting out of the desert and we were trying to force our way up against it, and every vehicle that could move was across the road and out into the desert, on the desert, and for us trying to get up against it, it was formidable. It took us all night, 24 hours to get up. And just as dawn broke out we heard one

21:00 bomber. We thought, "What a target he will have with the vehicles massed for 60 miles thick." We shot into the desert with only one of our planes coming home out of fuel or out of something. So seeing the defeated army was very, very sad, and we saw it at its worst. So it was when we got up to Alexandria and then west into the desert, ready to take up our position. They called it the El Alamein box because it was the only place we had a chance of

21:30 holding the German army or the Axis army before they got through to Cairo between the sea and the Qattara Depression. You have probably read about that. With the 60 mile width, they can't get across the Qattara Depression. It's just deep mud and you can't go through the ocean. So there was to be our battle line, that was called the El Alamein box. So therefore we had, that could stand up and shoot was pushed into the box to form the El Alamein box they called it.

22:00 We came down as a fresh division to do that and that was an enormous amount of strength for the army, while he hit us with everything he had. It was now or never to break through. The whole realisation of what he had, he was out of fuel, he was out of men and the further you go across the desert your vehicles take a tremendous bashing. But I know he got there, he could see the canal only 60 miles away. He said, "Well if I don't get it now," and he gave it everything. So we had to do whatever we had

22:30 to resist that, give give give, bash bash bash, day after day after day, just holding out, both sides in a mess in effect, but fighting to hold the El Alamein box.

How was your morale by this stage?

I suppose for us morale didn't come into it. We were young, we were there to fight, and we were fighting for dear life and you fought with tremendous

23:00 excitement and intensity. No way were you going to let him get through. I remember even little things that were so playful, not playful, fanciful. If you were roaming around up the spout, roaming around a 25 pounder shell, "If I hit it harder, I'll hit them harder. Maybe if I ram it harder, maybe it will hit them harder." So that doesn't make any difference, but you say, "I'll get you, if you get us."

23:30 And they were throwing everything about us and we were fighting with everything that we had. So from July the 4th it was just touch and go as to who would hold out. And for me that was pretty exciting. Anyway I was wounded on the 22nd – I got the telegram there. Actually not that the wound was not a piece of cake,

24:00 but everything you got in the desert was bad. By the time they filled the hole in the leg up with iodine the next morning it had blown up and the leg was going bad, and the doctor said, "If you don't get out

of here we'll have to amputate." So the wound was nothing, but the poison was severe.

Just before we have a chat about the wound, can you tell me when you were in the El Alamein box what you could actually see in front of you and what was going on?

Nothing, nothing. You might see, you might have a sandy slope, a grey desert slope, no buildings, no trees no nothing.

24:30 And into the simmering desert nothingness. Dust from moving vehicles, dust from falling shells, but absolutely nothing. Nothingness.

How would you know where your target was?

Because all our artillery control is by having observation posts, OP's up front with the infantry. A spot might be only 10 feet high,

25:00 a sand hill, but that would be an observation post. But from there with binoculars trying to observe enemy movement and that is all you had for your observation. And our air force wasn't too strong at that stage. But really by observation and by signal lines coming back to the guns and giving you line range and where you had to fire for and bringing down as much fire as you could on that target as quickly as you could. And that was touch

25:30 and go. I suppose for a gunner the most exciting command a gunner could ever receive we got on about the night of July the 10th, when we were perhaps we'd been firing night and day sort of thing. And let's say we were firing at 6000 yards, it is hard to recollect,

26:00 and the order came through, "Drop 100, drop 100 yards every two minutes." That meant the tanks were coming in and you were dropping, dropping, dropping and we dropped down to about 3000 yards. And then came the order to prepare for open sights. That means that they are firing indirect fire, you are going to fire a big gun like a rifle a direct sight with a telescope. That means tanks are coming in, prepare for open sight, means the tanks are going to engulf you

26:30 and then you are firing point blank. And in the middle of that came an order, "Lift 100 every two minutes." So we lifted 100 and we knew that they were retreating and that to see them come in and then, and then the order came, continuous gun fire until ordered to stop. Now that is a gunner's dream, as fast as you could ram the shells in and ram in and there is chaos everywhere. And you are ramming and shooting and firing as fast as the gun and you can stand

27:00 up to it. And he is retreating and you send him on his way. Now that is when the order came through, "Continuous bombardment until ordered to stop." Now to end that we were totally stone deaf and totally knocked out. But whatever I may say to you in this discussion, from a gunner's point of view never ever touches what the infantry had to do up front. What they did and how they did it,

27:30 the Australian infantry, I've read their story, never ceases to complete mistaken me about the ability to fight and fight and fight under the worst possible circumstances. Back on the guns we had a chance to survive, stuff coming back yeah that was dangerous, etc., etc., etc., but not like being hand to hand bayonet in with the enemy is another deal altogether. For them I have nothing

28:00 but utmost admiration. We were just plain lucky, it wasn't as bad. So there is the story of El Alamein box.

How were they shipping in?

Reinforcements?

Yes and artillery, because if you are going through so many.

Rounds.

Yeah that's the word I'm looking for.

The whole supply line of food and ammunition is an enormous undertaking. I think for every one bloke up front there is eight blokes behind him.

28:30 Stuff coming from Australia, stuff from El Alamein around the Cape through the canal, unloaded into the desert and got up to the front and then sent out to the various requirements, areas requirements. It is a tremendous undertaking. We had blokes running out from the echelon running up supplies of ammunition and that was continuous, they had to get the stuff there no matter

29:00 what. So that was all sorts of stories there, things that happened.

How were you getting fed, was it just supplies that you brought with you?

Certain stage you had it was called vehicle supply, vehicle rations, whatever you had in your ration tin, whatever you had tin meat anything, and you always had a Primus [stove] every vehicle. We had a Primus we could, like tea

29:30 or heat a stew or something. But if possible the ration vehicle would come up at night-time behind the

guns and serve hot food, would be a stew or, the eternal stew, or tea. And at a time the Salvation Army would come up and serve tea and biscuits late at night. It is hard to reflect now what we actually ate but we survived pretty well.

What did you think of the Salvation Army?

30:00 Oh it was wonderful. They were particularly good up round the front with their tea and biscuits, coffee and biscuits at night-time and if you were able to move from your gun and go back 100 metres and have a coffee and a talk, that was great. That was wonderful, they did a wonderful job. Why hadn't I told you about that part of the works, where am I?

Well we are basically at the point where you managed

30:30 **to get yourself hit with a piece of shrapnel.**

Oh yes.

So you can just step me through the process of what happened, how did you actually get hit for a start?

Yes I can. I can. I must tell you one thing before though, a little bit before that. I've told this all around the world, I think. In the middle of firing when there is dust and dirt and a complete shambles, occasionally you get a jammed round, I told you about the jammed round, that

31:00 was a jammed cartridge, but a jammed round is where the pojical won't come up and you can't get the cartridge in behind it because it's jammed in the wrong place. So to repress the gun they have got a thing, a tool removing jam round which is a long pole with a cup over, a soft cup, and you put that down the muzzle over the shoulder of the vessel and belt it out with a hammer if you can to get it out. And then in the middle of all this, great I'd say it is the 10th or 11th of July, a great mess, we have a jammed round.

31:30 And bloke named Charlie lost from injury it was then, ran over across the ground and we were being shattered with fire. He didn't want to go but he said he knew he had to go so he ran across and got down to the labot came back and with the jam with the tool you put it down the gun and we couldn't get it out. It wouldn't budge, it was too thick with muck and goo. And he said, "Hang on I've got this." And with a searchlight

32:00 we got a cartridge case that long and he cut it off with a hacksaw on the seat, we all held it. So the cartridge case is about that high and it has bundles of cordite in it. If all the bundles of cordite are charged three, take another charge two take another charge one, and you can reduce the charges. By the time it was charge one it would have a reduced size. You slap that up behind into the breech, close it off, put it up in the air

32:30 and off it went. Now up in the German lines a bloke by the name of Helman Klarter in the slit trench and there is a bit of stuff falling around, then suddenly Klarter got up and sees this broom handle go right through his mate and he says, "These filthy Australians are out of ammunition. They are shooting us with broom handles." We had forgotten to take it out. We had shot, we charged one away with the, I don't know how many other gunners have done it, I suppose it must have been done a dozen times. But

33:00 anyway you can picture this poor old seal bobbing around with this huge broom handle, that is what I imagined, "They are shooting us with broom handles."

That is quite bizarre.

Bizarre, so anyway.

So what happened to you when you managed to get this shrapnel in your leg?

Ah well we were firing all that night Charlie who is the RAP [Regimental Aid Post], he poured iodine in it and filled it up and slapped a dressing around it. And we fired on all night

33:30 and then we stopped about midnight and we laid on the sand outside the gun. And when I got up in the morning I could barely get up because it.

Why is it that it has that?

Everything you touch every scratch goes bad immediately.

Why is that, do you know?

The dirt of the desert, the dirt of the sand, perhaps rations we were on, but everything in the desert had desert sores immediately. If you touch a hand on the gun it would be sore the next morning. You got to scale off and try and clean it.

34:00 Blokes had, you were covered in desert sores immediately. And that went bad. I remember picking up my little haversack saying goodbye to my bother who was on the next gun, walk across, I had to walk about 200 metres to where I knew the regimental, there was an ambulance dug down into a half into a trench. And a doc named Doc Sevey, he said, "Give us a look." He said, "Out of here or I'll cut your leg off. Go immediately." Not the wound, piece of cake, but the infection.

34:30 So…

Was it a painful thing getting this piece of shrapnel?

No. Because I was lying on the gun pit floor between rounds, between firing, and Germans were firing 105 millimetre air bursts and suddenly it hit me. And Dick Fryer, he was a hockey player, and I said, "Dick pull it out." He said "I can't, its hot." And he said it burnt his fingers. He went to pick it up and pull it out, it burnt.

35:00 I said, "Go on pull it out." Unfortunately he threw it away. I should have kept it as a… Anyway that was the fun in him saying, "No, I can't. It's hot." Actually I think it being hot it probably cauterised it, wouldn't it. But then into the ambulance van.

What sort of facilities have they got in the ambulance?

In the ambulance? Not much in the ambulance. They get you down to CCS – Casualty Clearing Station – which might be about 5 miles. And all the wounds would come in for first treatment, and first diagnosis, into there and onto a stretcher on the floor

35:30 and they were just starting on sulphur drugs before penicillin and I remember they gave me 42 tablets of sulphur drugs to stop the infection. And

How effective is that?

Mmmm?

How effective is that?

I think the infection started to, it held it, it held it. Then by, then by ambulance back to Alexandria into a British hospital in Alexandria and

What sorry before we go there

36:00 **what was the actual clearing station like?**

It is a big tent, a big tent with doctors and nurses and whatnot rushing around and the blokes lined up being diagnosed, preliminary treatment before they are sent back, the first look at what the damage is. And they worked like dragons to cope with the mob pouring in, because they pour in. And to cope with them, clean them, disinfect them and get them ready for the next trip back is a big undertaking. Vital work to get them,

36:30 the first look at the damage and see how it is going to be handled, big stuff, big stuff.

So the clearing station how long were you there for?

I remember having a meal and a couple of hours, as soon as you are ready, ambulances were running further down back into Alexandria.

That sounds like a pretty well-oiled operation if you are only there for a couple of hours?

Very well, very well as soon as

37:00 I, they wouldn't let me walk, but they could see what, they could see what the diagnosis was. "Get out of here fast and they will fix you down the hospital. We can't do more for you. We don't need to do more for you here." But got down to, beautiful hospital, English hospital, with the lovely nurse with the red capes on and things. And they sent some bloke over to take a blood sample, and this bloke hadn't done one before. I found out afterwards. You know how you take a blood sample, just pressing like that and the blood pops out. He was digging

37:30 through the soft flesh like this. I said, "Hey hey that is not too good." And a nurse came over and busted him aside and went like that. So then

Is this in Alexandria that you finally got to hospital?

In Alexandria yes.

And this is the English hospital?

The English hospital. And as soon as they had dressed me and poured stuff into me to stop the infection onto a hospital train and down to Cairo, ready to go back to the Australian hospital in Palestine. And on the way down they were calling out the roll of the people in the carriage

38:00 and I heard them call out Eric Eastman, a bloke I knew well from Perth, in the bunk above me from the 2nd 28th so we chatted. And then we got down to Cairo station on the stretcher. They lifted me out and put me on the station and I expected to be picked up by the Australians.

Are you on a truck in the stretchers?

No, just lying on the railway platform.

Oh I mean when you are actually getting transported?

No, not yet. No we were to be but first of all they have to lay you down on the railway

38:30 station in lines on your stretchers and they pick you up and take you depending on where you're destined to go. And I think they made a mistake and the New Zealanders picked me up and took me to the New Zealand hospital in Helman. And I just read a piece in my diary and only two Australians in the hospital, they treated us as long lost friends, we were special. And so I was there for a couple of days being treated. I had time to ring my friends in Cairo and they came out to see me and they brought bundles of fruit and cold

39:00 chicken and the whole lot.

When you say you were treated like kings in the New Zealand hospital…

They made us so welcome, so welcome, treated us as friends. And we felt the same about the New Zealanders. And then back into the hospital, across that long trip back to Palestine, and there a wonderful thing happened. Talk about this ear sensitivity. I had just been moved into bed, remember getting into bed with white sheets, a pillowcase is like

39:30 heaven five times over. I hadn't long been in the bed, when suddenly I heard a bomb falling, and I was out under the bed, and the nurse had to come and get me out, but my ears had told me. It was the boiler next door for the steam laundry, it was letting off steam and it had me under the bed in two seconds. She said, "Get out of there, back into bed." So then.

What do you think of the nurses?

They were

40:00 wonderful. Fell in love with the whole bang lot of them. Because they were all girls from Western Australia which made it so wonderful. That we would have… What was I going to tell you? Oh yes, oh yes. We would have little picnics out onto the beach at Gaza and they would bring a bottle of wine and there would be a sandwich from the mess, and we would sit on the white beach

40:30 recuperating and have a pleasant party at the back of the Gaza, at the back of the hospital. And that was very wonderful. Then I was sent onto a place called El Barige to do more fitness, to get fit again. A lovely beach and I found a surf ski, I got permission to do my training on the surf ski, not training by marching.

Well done.

41:00 So I would take the surf ski out and the Mediterranean was so beautiful, white sand a little bit of a sea rolling in. And I thought, "One day I will get a bit more adventurous." So I go northwards along the coast to where there is a waddy, where the water runs down towards Jerusalem – it is in the Bible, this particular wadi. And I got there with a bit of breeze behind me, got inshore and rested for a while but then the sea breeze built up and then I found I couldn't get this confounded thing out against the breakers to

41:30 get out. So I finally got out and had probably three miles I guess to row against the breeze, and I found it was leaking. And I was gradually getting deeper and deeper in the water, and I thought, "I am going to be battling," because I was getting tired. Came in until I got opposite the camp at El Barige. And I could see the roll, they were too big for me to handle in the surf ski. They were rolling in and I thought, "I can't stay out here." Next wave came along, I gave the thing a thrust with the paddles, put my head down and hit the beach

42:00 in one flash, dragged the thing up, collapsed on the beach, and thought, "That was a bit lucky, cut a bit fine."

Tape 4

00:31 **Well you just lobbed [landed] on the beach and then?**

And then I was getting fitter, lovely sunshine, lovely beach and I remember I used to come… I didn't drink much. I used to come up and in the mess I would have a thing called an eggnog and ginger ale, icy cold and then play table tennis, so that was my preparation

01:00 for lunch. Eggnog, I don't know what it was like, but it was pretty good to me.

Had one lately?

And then I started to feel a bit yucky and then I got news that on the following weeks time I was on the draft going back to the regiment. Next yucky, third day super yucky, fourth day don't like this, fifth day bleeding from the backside. I thought, "Oh oh oh. I'll shut up about it. I'll get back to the regiment and then we will have a look at what it is."

01:30 And it came time to move onto the vehicles feeling very yucky, got onto the train and a bloke named Jim Stark – Jim Stark had been the famous name in Rottnest because his father had been in Rottnest all our lives. Colonel Stark or Major Stark or something. And Jimmy Stark was his son, and Jimmy I knew well from Rottnest. He was going back to the 28th Battalion. And I was lying on the floor under the seats,

02:00 wiped out, not feeling too bright. He had a bottle of scotch and orange juice and he fed me that all the way back to Alex. By then I was pretty sick, so they hauled me out, hauled me out at Alexandria, into a hospital there they said, "You are out of here fast." That was an Australian hospital, yes. And Australian hospital they filled me with emetine with or something. They said, "You have got very severe

02:30 amoebic dysentery." Amoebic dysentery is one like shigella [bacteria that causes gastroenteritis] that kills you and makes you feel pretty awful. So they said, "Right we will start you the treatment on emetine." So many jabs there was no place left for a needle to go in that hadn't been jabbed. But that stabilised me to get me onto a hospital ship and then go from Alexandria to Haifa back to the hospital from where I'd come. I'd done the full circuit.

03:00 **A complete U turn?**

A complete U turn. So onto this hospital ship with full lights on going across the Mediterranean hoping a sub wouldn't get us. A bloke, Len Kerr from Perth, was standing alongside me. He said, "I got you a new song that you used to know about." I said, "What is it?" He said, 'Ciria Sue'. You've never heard of it have you? Well it was an old song. An incident will come back to your mind, just one incident, so I said, "Sing it." He said, "I can't sing." So I said, "Tell me the words."

03:30 Anyway back into Haifa, back to the sick cove and back to my friends in Cairo. And then the treatment for amoebic dysentery takes a fair time.

How long were you there being treated?

I suppose three weeks, a month or something then came time to get back, cured, back in the routine again back to Cairo back up to the regiment, just at the finish of the major El Alamein battle.

Well what happened during that time while you were

04:00 **recovering or convalescing?**

Well the major battle of the Middle East then took place from the July battle was called the first El Alamein battle. And then the two sides stabilised with both pouring in equipment to see who would be ready to make the breakthrough. Change in command when Montgomery was giving command, and the training, the type of which we had never seen before

04:30 in the desert anyway to prepare for El Alamein. Rommel was getting plenty of supplies through, we were getting plenty of supplies, who could build up more quickly and who would have the greater strength. And then the time came for the 23rd of October for the major battle to start. The story of that is, I wasn't there, but the story was one of which we are so intensely proud because the 9th Division was

05:00 given the right of the line up on the coast, and Montgomery's plan was to draw the German army onto the top section and eventually gradually wear it out and defeat it until they could make a breakthrough further down south. So from the 23rd of October to early November the 9th Division infantry fought, as it is hard to believe

05:30 in extreme difficulty, and I've said before, for whom I have the greatest admiration. But another thing that happened at that stage to help us. Our artillery strength was pretty strong and one of the plans they had conceived was in registering various areas of the enemy desert, the enemy area, they

06:00 called it in 100 yard squares and called each square a name, Melbourne, Sydney, Perth, Geelong, Ballarat, whatever, with 400 guns lined up. They could be, with one order from the commander of artillery, CRS [Company Sergeant Major] he was called, they could fire from 400 guns on one square because every square was registered with every gun. The moment he said, "Continuous gun fire on Melbourne,"

06:30 they'd have the coordinates and straight away all guns would be firing on Melbourne. And they could pour down fire at great strength on any attack that might be developing. And the use of artillery there was very significant, but nevertheless the Germans were still getting supplies in through Tobruk and Rommel was determined he had to do it now or never. He failed in July so he and the Italians fought with

07:00 all their strength until eventually into early November they broke and the battle was over. And some of our troops went through as far as Derna. But the Australian government had said to [Winston] Churchill [Prime Minister of England], "Don't go over, we don't want the troops going any further, we want them back here because the Japanese are advancing." So after the end of battle of El Alamein about a week later, all Australians were pulled out.

During that battle were you able to, were you

07:30 **well enough to follow the…?**

Very much so. Well what support you could get yes. It was so fluid and so flexible. All you would be aware of. My blokes from the regiment coming in wounded, some shattered by getting parts of stories from them back in the hospital. But also the news would tell you as much as they wanted you to know about the fact that we had seized a certain ground called Trig 29 from Mater Ridge,

08:00 or Thompson's Patch, or Trig 29, had been taken at enormous losses. To take a piece of desert with a 10 foot, 20 foot high heap of sand on it was a big undertaking. Yes, we'd get that sort of, you never really knew, never really knew. But I think what Montgomery achieved was the training and coordination deception plans that he'd built up. Taking

08:30 supplies at night-time and digging them into the mine field, that would have food and ration supplies and ammunition. Building vehicles made out of plywood. Building guns made out of plywood, making vehicles look as if they are going down south when they are coming back at night. All to indicate to the enemy that the main attack was going to take down south or whatever. Plus we had use of air force. The air force

09:00 had great strength and we had night-time. And we had, in night-time entering into watch, 18 Bostons used to go over every morning, we used to call them the football team, they would you know go get them, etc. The air force was very strong and were used, the navy couldn't do us much from the Mediterranean as the others could. But finally the Germans broke on

09:30 I think November the 4th. It was the end of the battle of El Alamein, that was the end of Australians in Europe.

I just want to ask you in a little bit more detail what you were doing during that time in hospital?

Hospital can be, once you have been treated, there is nothing you can do except play drafts, play cards, walk if you can walk. There is nothing you can achieve in your bed other than getting along with other people alongside of you.

10:00 That is all, as you are recuperating.

Did you have any special relationships with anyone while you were there?

Yes. The second time. Yes a girl who taught me to sing 'Trestes', which was an

10:30 annotation of 'So deep in the night'. Zorice Zobong [?] used to sing it over the hospital wireless [radio]. And she used to sing it to me and I used to think that was pretty good, and it would make me get better more quickly.

Was romance ever on the cards while you were in hospital?

Yes as much as possible. Well I think if you are lucky enough to know the girls from your own home, yes you had romances as best as you could. It was

11:00 best as you could from being ill. I remember saying to me, "You have to build up. You have to drink Guinness stout every day." And a bloke said, "You've got to be made to drink Guinness stout, how fortunate you are?" I said, "I don't even like the stuff." So I had eggnog or something instead. Anyway yes you did, you made friends, friends with the blokes and the girls.

Do you remember how you felt when you heard news

11:30 **that Rommel had been defeated in the desert?**

Ah it was a delirious feeling because it had gone on for so long, and we had made so many mistakes, and suddenly from looking like being annihilated with one shoe being kicked right out of Africa was extraordinary excitement. Although we still had to chase them all the way back to back to Tripoli, they had a long way to go. By then the

12:00 yanks were coming in from Operation Torch, coming in through Algiers, from the western coast, so he was going to be caught. It still took a long time to do it. But Christ that feeling was enormous, enormous excitement.

What was the atmosphere?

Excitement. But also tempered with the fact that the Japs were creeping down getting closer to home so that was alarming. Darwin had been bombed.

12:30 We knew then we had to get home. As a matter of fact before we got to El Alamein we had said, "We have got to get home smartly." But then because of the requirement for fresh troops we had to stay in the eastern command, but get back as soon as possible afterwards. So as soon as we pulled out of the line, as soon as we pulled out of the line, back to Palestine to get our gear ready, we knew we were heading home.

13:00 And that is when I talked French again for something to do in the camp. I forget what camp we were in.

But then a lovely incident to tell you is that at the beginning I told you how we boys from South Perth used to go across, we boys and girls used to go across the ferry to school and after so many years we knew the boats Val Darna, Val Frieda, Val Kye, Val Meda, Val Hala, Mayflower and Fame. We knew the sound of their engines after six or seven years

13:30 travelling. We came down out of Palestine back on the train and we were down on trucks taken to down by Suez on the southern end of the Suez Canal. We knew we were heading home. We were then taken by trucks and dumped on the edge of the wharf. Hot sitting in the sunshine and all the blokes, there were 10 blokes from South Perth and suddenly we heard chug chug chug

14:00 and there was our school ferry going right past us being used as a work boat in the Suez. A bloke, Bill Toburn from Perth, said, “You’d think the army would send something better than the school ferry to take us home wouldn’t you?” It was our school ferry in…

Did she voyage all the way there or was she transferred?

Did she which?

Did she have to voyage all the way there or was she transported there another way?

Oh she would have been transported

14:30 she was a 60 feet, probably a double-decker, but a beautiful ship for us as a school ferry, but used for lighter, just used for lighter work in the Suez. And we could see this great monster ship out in the distance and we knew it was ours, it was the New Amsterdam. What they had done to transfer this whole division they had these big ships the Queen Mary, El France, Aquitania, New Amsterdam

15:00 hidden down in the Red Sea, send them up for filling and they’d send them back down again. So we went aboard the New Amsterdam for the trip home. And…

Where did you board her?

Mmmm?

Where did you board the New Amsterdam?

At Suez, from Suez and then off to Fremantle. And an incredible incident happened on the way back. We were used to the signals they gave

15:30 on the hooters for different warnings between the fleets and different manoeuvres, they made all sorts of strange sounds. I used to try and follow the map up on the deck somewhere and by our direction and by zigzagging across the Indian Ocean try and have some sort of reckoning of where we were. But we were going further and further south, and there I was up on the bow urging this bloke to put bow on to give me some sort of excitement. I always longed for and I never got one.

16:00 Pretty big sea, but not one wave over the bow. Anyway suddenly in the middle of this hot dead sea one day all the hooters are going flat out and all these ships put on full bore and take off to the horizon. So I thought, “Sub scare,” or something happened. And to see the a ship the size of a Queen Mary at 30 knots going into a deep port turn into a left-hand turn

16:30 with the boat leaning over, excited. They all scattered and then suddenly we saw the Queen Mary go straight towards, and on the horizon there was a tiny white bit of white and some palm trees. What on earth is happening? She is going to run onto a reef. She went right and disappeared and when we came closer she was superimposed behind the sand hills, there was an enormous lagoon called Addu Atoll.

17:00 it was the lowest atoll in the chain of the whole Maldives Islands. And they had a submarine open a gate, let a ship in and open and close the gate again. We all went in and then there was this enormous amphitheatre of lagoon of ships – battle, cruisers, air, the whole bit, the whole Indian fleet was there refuelling. It was a secret refuelling depot for the whole of the Indian fleet.

17:30 And we were there with all these enormous ships refuelling in this little…

Sounds like an amazing spectacle?

It was amazing because you couldn’t dream, the islands themselves on the atoll were only beach and a few coconut palms. This enormous expanse of water completely enclosed in this atoll. And I have read a lot of it since and met a bloke recently who was from there

18:00 and talked about it. So it was baking hot, I have forgotten what latitude we were in but we could barely walk on the deck. So we refuelled got out and headed home to Fremantle and they said, “Stand by at 12 o’clock. We will actually sail through the great Indian fleet.” Indian fleet, so 12 o’clock up to and we sailed straight down this line of

18:30 battleships and the Indian fleet going back from somewhere to somewhere, but all pretty exciting that the navy could do it dead on time. Next minute there was Rottnest and there was Fremantle and we were home. After three years.

I can’t imagine what that would be like to suddenly see your home there in front of you after

not seeing it for three years?

I will never explain it. I was so dead flat, I thought there was something wrong with me. I expected excitement and grouping and anticipation. I climbed up on a bit of the rigging

19:00 and thought, "I am going to see my home," and I felt nothing, flat as a pancake. So I thought, "Oh well, I will see Rottnest where I spent most of my life, then I will feel excited." Rottnest came up and I thought, "Oh well, I didn't have any sense of excitement." And then I looked at the mainland and I thought, "There is something wrong, somebody has got a flat iron and pressed it all flat." There was one flat

19:30 horizon. I said, "There is not a hill. There is nothing." Because anything there is a Darling Range. I thought, "Surely there has got to be a hill somewhere?" It looked flat and I felt flat even when we came up into Fremantle Harbour. I think there had been so much action there I had no reaction. It wasn't important. I

20:00 wasn't weeping with joy.

You couldn't smell the gum leaves?

Not until we got into our camp, a dreadful camp somewhere in Melville. They put it together hastily. It was on black sand and khaki tents on black sand and a few gum trees and I only smelt the black, I didn't smell the gum trees much at all. But we were home. We had two weeks disembarkation leave, which

20:30 was fun to be home with family and friends.

How did you spend those two weeks, Peter?

I suppose seeing as many, renewing as many acquaintances as I could. Finding out what blokes had gone and who had died and who hadn't. And my father was so proud of us coming home, he took us round to meet all of his old friends. We were on display as being something to look at, which tired us a bit in the end.

21:00 He was so proud of us being there and girlfriends had gone, friends had died; it was a different situation altogether. And then a great old friend of mine, and then when it came time to leave we got on the train at Fremantle. We didn't leave the train for keeps. Got the furtherest end of the train along at the Atherton Tableland at Kirra. Can you imagine how far that is?

21:30 **Too far to be?**

From Fremantle right up across up through the Holy Sea through Brisbane, Townsville, Cairns up on the Tablelands to the end of the railway line. And on the way I noticed here a little incident I should tell you. The train was pretty rough travelling and you were covered in black soot and stuff and you were black and smelly after a while. But on the way we were going across the, across the border between South Australia and Victoria,

22:00 I have forgotten the name of the place for a second. And you either slept on the floor or tried to sleep up on a luggage rack – that would nearly kill you. But my brother conceived the idea of making a hammock out of a bit of rope, and he had his blanket and swinging it between the luggage rack and the window. I had something to do and I got up expecting to find him, the hammock was empty and the window was completely shuttered.

22:30 And I panicked. I thought in the swinging he had bolted himself, catapulted himself straight out the window. So the next stop was the place where you cross the border, service town in Border Town. I ran up and down the train calling for him and I found him having coffee sitting over a brazier down in the guard's van, with the guard back with the guard having the time of his life. And I thought he had been tossed out the window. Anyway.

23:00 And then up to the Tablelands.

If we just stop there for a moment Peter, I wanted to ask you if there was any other things you should mention about your voyage home?

Yes. Yes. The New Amsterdam was 36,000 pound, a lovely ship. I sang with the band again.

How were those performances organised or arranged?

Oh pretty close control

23:30 of troops on board. They had a pretty big mob, there might have been 3 or 4,000 blokes on that ship and to keep them all occupied and needed tight control. And then one night I was standing, leaning over the port rail. We had long been out of the Red Sea, we'd come round the Straits of Bab Al Mandab, which is the Horn of Africa. We'd get out of the Red Sea into the Indian Ocean, the Straits of Bab Al Mandab. And I

24:00 was standing with a bloke and I said, "Hey did you see that?" I said, there was a flash of light on the horizon. He said, "No I didn't." so we looked and there was another flash, must be a fight at sea or something because we are out in the middle, there is no flashlights out here. And then there were more

flashlights, we said, “We must be, by mistake, we must be going into Aden.”

24:30 That is the only port I could think of on the southern area there. And not heading out into the Indian Ocean. And then there were more flashes and suddenly we went through a sea of phosphorus so bright that the whole side of the ship was alight. And what we thought was you know flashlights was this cascade of light flying up into the air. It was a phosphorous of sea. It went up the other side and was gone, but it was interesting wasn’t it, but it happens to a lot of people on long voyages.

25:00 **How long did that last?**

I suppose in my mind, seeing it approach, see it would be a matter of minutes, we were probably travelling at about 25 knots and then as we were amongst it probably three or four minutes at the most and up the other side and gone. But I have read of it since. There can be areas of huge density phosphorous and light up like a searchlight or from a distance.

Sounds magical?

25:30 Yes and then we had the, I didn’t drink much at all but in our mess the bloke was mixing, what do you call them, Dutch Dive Bombers. It was a drink and I had a couple of these and in our bunks in the cabin where there is normally one bunk and then four. We had probably three bunks, there was probably only a foot between yourself and the bunk up above you. And I remember waking up and with a splitting headache hitting my head straight on the bunk above me.

26:00 I had survived all of the Middle East and I was drowning at sea, I’ll admit it to you. But yeah they were tightly compressed the bunks.

Had they installed extra bunks in the cabins?

Pardon?

Had they installed extra bunks?

Extra bunks yes as a troopship, a troopship completely transformed to the normal culture of the ship and they just had to pack… I heard of a bloke recently who said, we talked about the Queen Mary and he said, “Yes I travelled on the Queen

26:30 Mary but I never saw it.” I said, “What do you mean you travelled on the Queen Mary?” He said, “Later on in my life I was in the air force, being taken from New York to England in the air force, and because they only took about… They used to travel at 30 knots. It only took three days. We’d batten down. We never saw the tail of our bunks. We were served food in the bunks. I had sailed on the Queen Mary and I never seen it.” That is his story.

That would have been claustrophobic.

27:00 Yeah claustrophobic yep.

Can you tell me about the ensemble you performed with and your repertoire?

The funniest one was when we called ourselves the Dill Brothers, and we had a bloke named Ken Dunn from up on the hills here. And my brother and myself and we just sang Mill Brothers numbers with the ukulele with introductions with trumpets and things and a bit of rehearsal, didn’t have much time for rehearsing. But it was fun to contribute something and we all enjoyed

27:30 singing and entertaining, I guess. We all sang about four or five numbers. Then on the boats we had pretty well full ship’s band, you could sing with a proper orchestration behind you, that was easy to handle, and then the singing ‘Blue Hawaii’ was the favourite number on the way back. Because Bing Crosby [singer] had made it famous some time or another. So life aboard the ships, because I loved the sea

28:00 and loved ships, for me it was always exciting. But on the New Amsterdam in my determination to see a big line bury its nose right under a huge sea, I stood up on the bow for days into this very strong southerly, and the sea built up to a fair size but no way could I urge that blessed ship to puts its nose under. It got close a few times. I used to look behind me and see

28:30 this massive structure, probably 25 knots, see the size of the seas you were hitting and once you hit them and burst them apart. I thought, “That is enormous power,” and in a ship that size, but no way did I get myself saturated with salt water. Which was my ambition.

Excuse me, can you describe the space where you performed on board?

Yes. Most of the ships having come from civilian time

29:00 had an enormous, not a promenade deck, not a promenade deck, but a central area where the band can entertain and people dance. All the tables can be laid out in civilian life. Well the band would perform still from the dais, on a stage or raised platform, and the whole area would be troops sitting on their Mae West [life jacket], you know their life jackets, sitting on the deck, lined up as many as could be fitted

29:30 in, and a couple of thousand watching the concert for something to do. I remember distinctly as you would look back on the group, these boats would get up a slow sea roll, there is not enough sea to rock them, but they gradually get up a roll, you could watch the sea disappearing and coming back again in some orderly manner. And that is the way they entertained the troops. On the Stratheden was an open stage, on the New Amsterdam

30:00 was quite a big stage with curtains which had been used for picture shows and vaudeville I suppose in peacetime. So the band played up on the stage there, so.

How was the actual concert itself organised from the performers' perspective, sorry?

They would find… They'd search amongst the groups for volunteers, for anyone who entertained.

30:30 They were probably no instrumentalists, but there would probably be quite a few vocalists. And it was mainly that sort of entertainment. And the band would be able to perform whatever we put up with them. We had a few blokes went away with musical instruments. But I can't remember any coming back. I remember a clarinet and a saxophone, but they weren't used – the band had their own instruments. And the point you made is that the entertainment

31:00 was from the ship's command as to see who could perform. One funny story. Oh can I tell you another funny story on another ship?

Yes please.

Later on when we trained in Queensland we were ready to go to, we were being trained to go up to Borneo or to the islands. I will jump forward a bit there was sort of an episode on a ship. We had gone onto an American ship in Townsville called

31:30 the General USS Butner. And we had never travelled on an American ship. But the first thing I told them they only had two meals a day, and we didn't like that too much. But if you volunteered for a job on the ship doing anything like ack-ack wash or anything you'd get three meals. So I was a bit late in getting in for volunteering for three meals, so eventually I said, "Okay." "Come with us." So led me down in a lift down into the bows of the

32:00 ship. And I thought, "What on earth is this going to be?" They flung open the doors and there was this steamed laundry with four big American Negroes working over this huge vat of clothing, and I went straight back up top and had two meals. It looked pretty, it looked like an inferno. It was hideous, I got out. But on that trip we got news that Roosevelt [President of America] had died I remember that, on board the General USS Butner.

I will just return you again to

32:30 **the New Haven in the Strathfield, when you say we, as in the entertainers, did you become familiar with a group of entertainers?**

No, anybody who could entertain and volunteered in his unit whatever it might be could do something. It might be some bloke could recite. Basically it hinged around singing mainly, it might go on for

33:00 two hours, say from 2, or 1 to 3 after a midday meal and then they would disperse, go back to whatever duties they were on, but it was mostly volunteers from within the units that supplied the entertainment.

So there wasn't necessarily a camaraderie that developed between you and other entertainers?

On the way over there was, on the way coming back not so much.

33:30 I think it was a much bigger ship and many more people. I don't remember linking up with them that much. I suppose on the way over there was the novelty too, and the fact that I had linked up with the band on the first day out from Fremantle and they were my friends from then on. I had a link with them and that was interesting. On the way back I didn't do that. It was much bigger ship and many more people.

You mentioned that you weren't much of a drinker, what about the other troops on board?

Yes

34:00 you could see it at its worse going over. I had been used to seeing young blokes drinking pretty heavily, and I suppose at Rottnest my job was to put them to bed and make sure they were all right or they didn't drink at all. That was pretty rare. And the more I didn't drink the more they tried to entice me, the more I would refuse. But on the way over in a closed ship

34:30 where there is grog available at the canteen and sea breaks into successive heat and humidity, drinking to excess and then being ill was pretty nauseating, and they'd be lying along the corridors and you had to step over them, because they were all locked in down below, they had no place to go. Whereas they'd be playing housie down the corridors, but generally it could be pretty unkind.

35:00 **Any fights broke out because of excessive drinking?**

Yep, always always yep, like any fights at a pub or wherever. You would hope they were not too drunk to do any damage to themselves, but there would always be a fight, there would always be a fight on something.

Did fighting ever interrupt a performance?

Did who, no never, once you are up on the deck sitting in their rows listening never. They were always too pleased to be entertained I think.

35:30 Do you know what I mean by the Mae West thing that you tie for and aft, the old cape thing? Everyone had to carry those full time so they became your pillow and your seat wherever you went. So they would be lined up on the hard deck sitting on their Mae West.

So they made a pretty good audience?

Oh good audience, oh yes. Extremely. Because they that was there own kind entertaining them and they appreciated what was being given to them. Yeah they were all

36:00 appreciative.

What about gambling on board?

Yep. Plenty of gambling, any time you'd get blokes sitting there with a pack of cards there'd be gambling. Housie [bingo] or poker or whatever. Yep. That would be non stop, and the two-up was going on.

Are you partial to a bit of two-up at all?

I wasn't even vaguely interested. If I had money in my pocket I could spend it somewhere else. I didn't have to give it to somebody else. No I wasn't a gambler.

36:30 **Just wanted to return to fighting in the desert. I don't know if I established with you earlier just how the 25 pounders were manned and operated?**

Could I show you the back of a book and explain, or is that difficult to do?

Well in terms of this exercise it is better if you can describe to me.

37:00 I could hold it up in front of you, would that do it?

How about you just describe it and I'll have to visualise it?

Well okay. The sea people around the gunner right down at the end of the trail in command is sergeant Number 1, he'd have a Number 2 on this right-hand side who might be operating the bridge, Number 3 at the manor he is the layer, sitting in the layer seat and that probably

37:30 is the exact job of the whole thing. He has got to keep the line of sight, telescope, his aiming points he has got the wheels to balance the bubbles, because every time you fire you get bumped off balance, he repositions for elevation and traverse. And that is essential for you to fire accurately. So the layer shoot a whole routine of aiming at his aiming point, and he might slap his bottom and say,

38:00 "Ready." And when he is ready on a time clock the sergeant might say, "Fire." Then the routine of unloading it is interesting because when the gun fires the recoil pulls the whole barrel way back into the middle of the gun before it shoots forward again. In that time that it shoots back the Number 2 slaps the breech handle if you can and throws out, ejects the empty cartridge, and in the meantime Number 4

38:30 is standing with the next round to go in, if he can on the way back, put in the round, that is how quick it can be, and he gets the round into the breech beside that rod over the ram rod, puts it behind the centre and rams it until it engages in the copper band, engages in the rifling. And then the next bloke shows him, opens the cartridge and shows the sergeant what cartridges are there. He says, "Okay," and claps it in and loads it and closes the breech. The routine

39:00 is very strict and very coordinated when you are firing under difficult conditions. The main man is Number 3, the layer, the sergeant in control of the gun giving the roar to fire at the right time. And that is the routine. Between rounds the gun digs in, the wheels are sitting on a metal platform. If after prolonged firing

39:30 the platform starts to bend or if the sand gets on, he has got to shovel sand away from behind the tyres so it is free to be rotated for a new target. And one dreadful incident happened in July. There is four guns of the troop might be 30 metres apart firing different angles. I was on Number 1 and my brother was on Number 2. And in between rounds it was my turn to

40:00 go and take the place of Number 3. This is in July, El Alamein. So I got into the seat at Number 3 and you must go through checking the data, that the clamp is right the sight hasn't jumped free and everything is in position, ready for your next orders whatever they might be. And what we had then on the axle of the 25 pounder was a foot pedal which had been introduced in case you're

40:30 firing on tanks, you had one hand on elevation and traversing and you kicked the pedal when you

wanted to fire. It is called a foot pedal. And I in the Number 3 seat ran through routine and just kicked the foot pedal, and it was loaded, and fired over the top of my brother about 2 feet over his head. And I just collapsed with fear and horror of what might have happened.

41:00 Certain things must be done, a sergeant can never ever leave a gun loaded, put on a make safe, a little, so it can't fire or unload cartridge, but you cannot leave a gun loaded. And it was a dreadful mistake. Although I went out to the back of the pit and probably white with what is the word, not fear of what I had nearly done. He was responsible.

41:30 He had been an ex footballer for South Fremantle, shhh. And he was aghast at what had happened. We could have nearly killed the whole gun crew. Luckily we were down on fairly low elevation – it probably just went over their heads. But the fact that the gun went off when we were stand to and no firing to be done because I kicked the foot pedal. Bit horrifying.

42:00 Actually when a round takes off…

Tape 5

00:31 **When you were in the desert how often would mail arrive?**

Irregularly, once a fortnight maybe, and then it would go for a while without any at all. Actually my little diary will tell you every date that they arrived. Irregularly which was, in camps in Palestine when we had only been there for a few months, a chap

01:00 named Circus Womsley he had been a circus performer a hard little man with one glass eye and often in the middle of dead silence in the lines in Palestine he would call out, "Duntroop mail." And everybody would come pouring out, he only made it up, then he would run like steam to avoid being bashed by the mob. But it was wonderful getting mail of course.

How important was mail?

Very important. I suppose reading my letters

01:30 which I have done today, yesterday the link with my parents and my brother, my younger brother who was home and it was intensely strong and I really found myself discussing…

02:00 You okay? In Spanish where are we (SPANISH) – Start again.

We were basically just talking about how important mail was?

Oh it was very, very. We were a pretty close family and I suppose with the three boys away our letters to home were vitally important to them.

02:30 And then when the fourth brother joined us it became more important still – when we went to Borneo.

Were you in contact with your two other brothers when you were?

Yes pretty well all the time. We were in the same battery, my brother and I were on different guns and Ken was a driver in the transport, we were on or about the same area the whole time.

03:00 In action Ken would be on the vehicles bringing the ammunition up and Dick and I were on, he'd be 40 metres away on the next gun. So we were pretty close. And although you had your own gun crew you spent most of your off duty hours when you were around the gun, we linked up very regularly anyway to see what was going on.

Did it make for a more supportive

03:30 **experience for you?**

I think yes, very much and also having the friends around you who you had been to school with and grown up with the group I refer to were the group from South Perth, through Val Darna you know the ferry they were all from South Perth, and two of them were on the next two guns from South Perth. One was a sergeant major in the battery, yes they were all around us and that gave us a wonderful

04:00 esprit de corps I think in the battery, in the regiment, to have people to whom you were so closely associated. It was a wonderful factor. I talk to many of my friends now who were in the navy, in the air force, they said yes they would be moved on to another airport or moved onto another ship and they lost track of their friends. Whereas we were together for the whole war, and people went and disappeared and came back but fundamentally

04:30 the regiment was the same from beginning to end, and that was important, and wonderful, wonderful esprit de corps.

How well did you get to know the other folk?

The other?

The other people?

Oh very well, there is no other way to get to know other folk than being in action. Because you rely so very much upon each other and the fact that you have endured and done things brings an extraordinary bonding. At the moment

05:00 I am president of the ex members association and we have a meeting in a couple of weeks time, but when I get there, there are probably only 14 of us turn up to a meeting. And you know ten years ago it was 40, so they are moving on fairly quickly. And I think that I must say that the authorities in the Department of Veterans' Affairs who look after

05:30 us have really in the past 10 or 15 years bent over backwards to be kind and lenient with us. I suggest because we are sort of disappearing a bit. I made a statement at a meeting a couple of months ago. We had had 8 deaths during the year in our group. And I said, "I am going to move a motion that anybody else who falls off the perch in the next few years, we won't speak to them again."

06:00 So nobody died the next week. But that is par for the course. But you are appointed, the esprit de corps is very strong and still is.

You mentioned earlier that you got a case of amoebic dysentery, how do you actually attract that?

Simply dirt. Particularly in the desert, the Western Desert after the battles, the flies were there in millions, flying around amongst

06:30 the dead and whatnot. You would try and get a plate of food to your mouth and the flies would be, you couldn't get the flies away to get the food into your mouth, they would get into your mouth too. They were dreadful. And of course they carried that much disease that dysentery was a pushover for dysentery, and I suppose if you looked at the statistics the desert, the desert

07:00 sores and dysentery would have been a very, very high percentage. Because the flies weren't too good. And in the middle of, not hamsin ,but another desert storm we might be lying off duty, we would put coats, we used to call them groundsheets, over the gun, put our heads in under the tail of the gun to make a little tent and our bodies outside, just to escape the flies and dust.

07:30 But the flies would be bewildered by the dust. They wouldn't fly, they would crawl, and you could pick them off and they'd crawl all over you because they couldn't fly. They were affected, they didn't like the dust either I don't think, they didn't, they didn't make it pleasant and but that is why I got the amoebic dysentery. But it is pretty severe because it eats out the lining of the stomach very quickly and if they get it quickly, which they did in my case, but it takes a fair while to get over it, all sorts of strange

08:00 treatments.

Like what?

Oh ah, scopes and things going up your backside to look into your entrails and pinching off pieces to take away for testing, and you can feel the tweezers going. I suppose it is much more modern now, they do something different. That is what they did, I can't say it was pleasant. But it was simple compared to what others suffered, mine was simple.

Flies must have driven you mad?

08:30 At the end of El Alamein or right through El Alamein, because they often could remove the dead, etc. from the battle, there were millions, millions, and there is no escape. Scorpions always, I would still tip out my boots here before I put boots on after living in the desert because scorpions hide in your boots. And there would be a big black thing that would make a noise, like a

09:00 you could hear them scuttling across the floor, anyway still that is minor, that is minor.

Just with the living conditions when you were in your trucks and out in places like El Alamein box, what were the living conditions, like were you just in tents?

In tents. Oh not in tents in El Alamein you were on the ground. You slept in the gun pit. Or on the surface on the sand

09:30 around the gun pit, there were no tents, etc. there whatsoever. Even when you went back for those, you might go, we were pulled out of line once, we went back about 5 kilometres, we just stopped we just got out and I think slept for 24 hours non stop just on the sand. Because when you were away from the front you were relieved from the tension; you just slept. But no, there were no tents

10:00 until we got back into Cairo or back into Palestine.

So how did you actually wash under those conditions?

Ah, on the water bottle a day; it was very difficult. Up on the escarpment above Bug Bug you'd get a bottle a day and from that you learnt not to drink from it during daylight hours. You'd have a mouthful

in the morning, and with that you'd have to have a tobacco tin and I could

10:30 clean my teeth in that and then shave in that and you'd tip it onto a flannel and with the other side wash my face. On the second day my flannel would be as stiff as a board. And then at night probably they'd send up a billy of tea, up from the wagon lines. But during the day you learnt not to drink anyway. If you drank, you know, you couldn't stop.

Well how does that work, because I find it extraordinary

11:00 **that you weren't' falling over from heat stroke with drinking no water?**

I suppose our hats khaki were pretty good protection from the sun. Or if you were in action you had a tin hat on for no time for feeling tired or thirsty. If you are back behind the lines then the heat was pretty severe but you just learnt to handle it.

11:30 I think we were able to handle the desert far more readily than we were able to handle the jungle. Because that was the nature of the country we were born and bred in. It was easy for us to handle. But as I said getting back and going to the jungle that was nobody's business. It was for the birds. I thought, "I better go home to mother."

You mentioned earlier that you were going to tell us something about Wadi Nat…?

12:00 Wadi Natrin yes. Interesting, it was mentioned in the book they were reading about the Long Range Desert Group. They spent time there. It was a place called halfway house on the tar road from Alex to Cairo. Waddy Natrin was halfway down and we went through it quite a few times. We'd grab a chocolate or grab a cup of coffee or something if you could buy it. Well one day we were coming back out of the desert, when we were coming back and going to go through Cairo into Palestine,

12:30 it was the last time when we had been pulled out to come home and I got out of the gun tractor and quickly rang up Wadi, rang through to Hilda Hifer and Sami and said, "I'm in a convoy on the way down. Drive up to Cairo and I'll drop off the truck and pick me up." So along came this beautiful Buick Roadster. I dropped off the back of the tractor. I hoped in and they were straight up down past the convoy into Cairo and had a slap up meal, everything they could lay on me.

13:00 Drove out the other side of the, picked up the convoy on the way out. That was the last time I saw them. That was Wadi Natrin, halfway house.

What sort of things are we hearing in relation to propaganda when you are in North Africa?

What did we hear?

Yeah?

Nothing very much. If we were up in the desert we had a troop wireless, we could gather round and lie in the sand

13:30 and listen to and listen to the BBC [British Broadcasting Commission] and heard the reports from the BBC sometimes good and sometimes bad. The only propaganda we saw was during El Alamein when they got some of the leaflets that Rommel had dropped on our troops, "Why you are here when the Yanks are with your friends at home? Why don't you go home," and you know that sort of nonsense, which we treated as a piece of cake.

Did you treat it as complete nonsense?

14:00 Nonsense, nonsense, yep, not much propaganda really. We had incidents where we listened to the BBC at night, there was a girl Doreen Villier that used to sing for us 'A date with the boys in the desert'. Can you imagine? You finished your evening meal and you are lying about on the sand and you gather around the troop wireless, you are lying there and I remember lying there,

14:30 the night was so still, just gazing at the stars, we were listening to music from the BBC and one night she came on to say and she said, "A song for the boys in the 14th Battalion troop." One of the boys had written in and asked for a song. And she used to sing 'Yours truly end of September'. Do you know that one? It was a lovely song, it was a theme song. But no you asked me about propaganda, very little.

15:00 **Just rewinding a little bit more, we didn't really talk about the fact that you were playing hockey back in the days of, hang on I've got it written down here, at Castina?**

Castina, yes well not long after we got to Palestine and my leg was nearly better. We formed a hockey. The regiment has to find

15:30 amusement for the men to keep them amused and to keep them fit, so we had football, cricket, hockey, athletic events in Castina, which was a training area. And with the hockey team, because my brothers and I we were A grade, the three of us, we had nearly an A grade side with the other blokes from Perth, and a couple from South Australia and we could wop everybody all over the place. It was brilliant

16:00 because when I got back to playing. I don't know how long it took me to get my foot back. But anyway we were playing away there and we'd go to different battalions to play and you'd meet people from Perth that you knew from hockey before you went away, and that was great.

Would you get any sort of prize if you managed to win?

Prizes, no, you just played for the fun of playing and thrashing them or having a beer with them after. But, but once we were in Cairo we used to play at Gazira, as I told you Gazira Sporting Club was

16:30 the Taj Mahal of Cairo and we played there quite a lot, played against a couple of blokes that played in the same team as us back here, and then we would. One day we were taken down, I was going to the Helon, it wasn't the Helon, it was a British Air Force place and we got there and they played on hard dirt, hard dirt like we did in India. And out came this mob and we thought, "Oh, what a mob," big long handlebar moustaches and long Bombay bloomers

17:00 we used to call them. And they looked like a mob of sooks, like Hitler's. We wondered what we struck, but then they beat us 3–1. We never forgave them, they were good, they were a trained hockey team, they played together a lot, the base team, and they took us apart.

And where were they from?

An English air force group, at some aerodrome in Cairo, I can't remember the name, not Helon, it was the Helon was where we played when I was in hospital with the New Zealanders, somewhere or other. And they looked, they looked

17:30 different but they were very good. They wopped us and outsmarted us.

The old lesson of don't judge a book by its cover.

But in Gazira we played golf. I remember playing golf with New Zealand nurses being our caddies or whatever. And then we had rowing races. The regiment won the rowing 8 on the Nile.

You are doing rowing races down the Nile?

It was pretty wide, pretty wide, plenty of room there. And also they

18:00 played cricket there, I think the Australian cricket team played with Hassett and some of those boys were in our team, AIF team, and it was pretty high class. But for us, because we were stationed there for the three or four months, it was wonderful.

That is pretty nice of them to actually to give you the equipment because I mean you need hockey sticks and you also need…

Oh yes well the, the regiment supplied all those to make sure that every facility was sporting arrangement made by the regiment. And you had

18:30 whatever was needed they would get, where possible that is. But hockey was important because we, the Kennedys, led it. And we made it a pretty famous game in the regiment, because nobody was allowed to beat us. My brother had been in the state team before the war and my other brother and I got into the state team immediately after the war. And I was fortunate enough to go into the Australian team in 48. So we had a wonderful career. And out of Aquinus

19:00 there is a hockey field there, Kennedy's Hill.

Oh I didn't know that.

Well you've got to live and learn haven't you?

Well I am glad I asked the question about hockey, that is for sure.

Well you got the lot there.

Well now fast forwarding it a little bit there Peter, we are about to get to the Atherton Tablelands, so you just basically arrived back in back in Australia and you mentioned that you were a bit disappointed.

I felt no

19:30 surge of excitement that I should have experienced. And I have never really explained why, still can't. I should have been brimming with joy and jumping and kicking. And I remember another… My brother and I took two girls out and I remember, although I had moved with girls from the Middle East, suddenly at home, in a home situation, I was dead scared. And I couldn't explain that

20:00 either. It is not like me I can assure you. And then…

Did your brothers actually come back at the same time as you?

Yes same ship, yes, we were together for the whole time.

Well that must have been a wonderful thing for your parents?

Tremendous thing for them to see us come back. When the ship sailed in I'm sure my poor mother must have been, she couldn't have believed it would be true, because so many had lost their lives. And the

three of us came back and we'd eat her out of house and home again. Yes it must have been

20:30 thrilling for she and for mother and Dad. And my younger brother was home, he was 10 years younger than myself, he just finished college I think so it was pretty exciting. It should have been exciting but I wasn't really. And I can't tell you why. Then the long trip across the Nullarbor to get to the Tablelands.

Well how long were you actually on leave?

About two weeks' disembarkation leave. And then got together again to start the long train

21:00 trip to the Tablelands. And the Tablelands were exciting and infuriating because it was a beautiful piece of territory. The Atherton Tablelands is so scrumptious you can nearly eat it. With the jungle and the volcanic lakes and the thick pasture, it was beautiful stuff. But because all our regiments had been required with the spread of people in the Middle

21:30 East, the islands couldn't fit that many people on. So not many regiments could go, we couldn't get away, we had to stay. There was only room for one regiment. There would have been three before. So we fell to pieces pretty badly on the Tableland with boredom.

When you say fell to pieces?

Things militated against our esprit de corps because boredom set in, because other people were getting somewhere and we weren't.

22:00 And secondly, the extraordinary thing that happened was the they had panicked and formed so many militia who were conscripts, they started to feed them into us and they were volunteers. They were accepted conscripts, coming in with rank over them. So we used to say some of them hadn't seen a gun fired, and we had been through the whole bit, and it hurt. And the blokes were pretty bitter. And I feel sorry for the chappies

22:30 who were forced to come in. Even sergeants over our troops who didn't like them at all. And I think there was a… I suppose they had to do something with them, the authorities, but for us it was most unpleasant. And very severe. And that was the destruction of the esprit de corps. Who were beaten to a pulp by it really. And training on the Tableland for nearly 18 months I think until we knew it backwards.

23:00 We were lucky. We holidayed in Innisfail and Cairns and Townsville and got over to some of the islands that we should have bought then. You know the little islands that are now worth multi millions – nobody wanted when we were there.

Were there a lot of skirmishes between the conscripts and yourselves?

Yes, it was very bitter. There was no way, I mean I felt sorry for them. They had, well they had been conscripted so they were a different class as far as we were concerned, and you were brought into a mob

23:30 of AIF back from three years of you know severe stuff, and expect them to make friends with us and vice versa was impossible. Virtually impossible, and that was a great destroyer of morale. At one stage a bloke named Brigadier General Wharton, big fat bloke, because we used to call him 'custard guts' because we didn't like him at all. He rarely went on a manoeuvre. And he said,

24:00 "And you are not fit to be in front of our troops. If we get near you we'll knock your block off. We've done what we needed to do. Don't tell us what we can and can't do, but we don't like doing it here." We were moving around the Atherton Tablelands for a long while and going out for shoots out beyond Mt Gone, in dreadful country, and practising firing, which we had done plenty – we had fired about 20,000 rounds each.

24:30 So until the time came to go it was difficult. As a matter of fact there is a photo of the type of the entertainment. That is Christmas in '44, Christmas '44 in the Tableland. And they are dressed up and they had a chariot race between the batteries, and the bloke dressed up as women pulling a sig cart with a bloke, and he died just the other day, we had a salute for him in Shenton Park. And all these blokes were around the place

25:00 from Perth and whatnot. And of course they took off and everybody had been drinking pretty heavily and somebody tripped and the whole lot went crashing down, and there were broken arms and broken legs and a complete disaster. That is the beginning when they are ready to take off.

That is an interesting sort of entertainment that you've got there.

Very interesting yes, well there wasn't much else.

Can you describe an average day in the Tablelands?

Yes, yes I can. So reveille

25:30 would be, I have to put it together, 6. You would have an immediate parade, sometimes certain types of drill were required or march or something, general muster. And on that day you'd probably have an Atebrin parade. We'd take the Atebrin for the malaria and that had to be taken under command, and then back for breakfast, and then breakfast back on deck at

26:00 8.30 or whatever and then, depending on whether you were going out on manoeuvres, going out on a route march. And a route march was pretty awful because they were trying to get us fit. And you'd march 10 or 20 miles or whatever, very hot – it was very unpleasant. Two things I remember we learnt, because it saved washing we used to walk without socks. We used to have the big army boots which were comfortable, so you didn't wear socks, some of us didn't. But a little trick that I enjoyed was to get back from the

26:30 route march, pretty tired and hot and dusty. Out at the back of my tent into the jungle, no not jungle it was forest there. I found a tiny little stream that flowed non stop. I only seemed to know where it was and there was a waterfall of about a foot or two feet of fresh most beautiful cool water. And I dug away a few rocks and I could lay there with my head under the waterfall and let the whole world get lost. It ran over me like, oh,

27:00 balmy treatment. And I think it was my own stream, I called it my own stream anyway. And that was a great relief from the boredom of route marching. So then to have a regiment like that in a base camp, the command have to work very hard to keep them employed at doing things – new manoeuvres, new instruction, whatever can be conceived. Not far from that camp used to be the brilliant Baron River, and we used to get

27:30 permission on days off to walk through the jungle down to the Baron River and most of us were swimmers from Perth. And the Baron is a beautiful river and it flowed fairly quickly. So we used to have swimming races. You would stand up all in a line and they'd say, "Go." There was a current flowing, mostly you'd go backwards and you'd be swimming standing still. And the winner would be the one that was still in the same spot at the end of the race. And that was fun and because the water was crystal clear and beautiful. But to get there going through that jungle, it was made up of wild

28:00 lantana which was a noxious weed in North Queensland. And with the sun beating down with very strong, strong humidity it would bake the atmosphere around this lantana and we would nearly suffocate as we got past it. They called it a noxious weed. We have it here in the garden as something nice. Wasn't too good up there. And also on the edge of the Baron we had a huge tree where we used to get up the tree and swing down and do huge somersaults on the end into the river.

28:30 That was all because we were base camps. But until time came to go our holidays to Cairns and a long time in Innisfail. It would take us a long time to get up 18 months that we were there.

What was Cairns like?

Cairns, let me see. Rough and ready like a frontier village. There were no Americans there so we had it all to ourselves,

29:00 and the civilians were wonderful to us. We met up with civilians. We went to private homes and they took us home for the weekend into Innisfail, the sugar country. Generally the people were wonderful to us. I was fortunate. One day we were going down, my brothers and I and a friend from Perth, to stay at Mosman, a little sugar town up north of – you probably know it, do you? – Mosman, north up the track. And we went in to get

29:30 showered and cleaned and I was a bit late and when I came down the dinner table was filled and there was no place for me with my mates. But there was a table just alongside with two elderly women and a lovely blonde. And I went and sat there, had a wow of a time, we went to the dance that night. And that made the table then wonderful, because she was a girl from Brisbane. She was part of the ABC stores on

30:00 on an accountant, what do you call it a checker upperer, an auditor. And so she was in the middle of the Tableland, I was in the middle of the Tableland and she was auditing all the way round. So we would get together every weekend and have picnics and whatnot, and I used to stay with her parents down in Brisbane later on, then each of the family would go down and stay at her place at Brisbane on the way through and it was all because I was last at the table. So things were lucky, weren't they?

They certainly were.

30:30 **You mentioned that you did have a girlfriend before you left for Africa, what happened to the girlfriend?**

I guess that 3 years was too long and I guess that fundamentally her parents might have hoped that we wouldn't marry. I was Catholic and she wasn't. And I think that opportunity came to meet a couple of others, a very, very handsome fellow from Cosgrove

31:00 who was a pilot. I think she was engaged to somebody first of all and moved out of the state. And I remember, I came home once and we had a beer, had a drink together and she was engaged to somebody else, so I thought, "Too bad." And then not long after the war, he was killed in a dive bomber

31:30 crash at Amberley, I think, Queensland. So I had kept in touch with her and she subsequently told me that she rebounded to his best friend, and he was a pilot who turned out to be actually a chronic alcoholic. And that was a dreadful time for her. He threw her out and there was a dreadful scene. And then I met her 30 years later in Newcastle.

32:00 She had a husband who was a retired orthodontist. I only read her letter again yesterday, getting through my letters, she said, “I stayed up in Newcastle,” and that was 1980, 40 years since we had been together. And she played some of the old music and we danced, her husband he got the shock of his life, he never, because we used to dance,

32:30 we had rhythm dances of our own, rock and whatnot, he had never seen anything so barbaric, that was 40 years after. And then I had a letter the other day where he is still alive at 90, and I still have great respect and love for her at a distance and she for me, but it is all in the past, that is what it was. It was a lovely, lovely era.

So this lovely blonde you met at the table with two elderly ladies, was she a girlfriend?

On the Tableland, yes. And

33:00 for a while I went backwards and forwards, I guess. Oh as a matter of fact, oh yes. Yes two things happened. When we finally, the war was over and the theory was those that had been there longest came home first, so we had longest service by a mile so we were on the first boat out, and so we came up the Brisbane River. And I’m going to tell you something now because it is going into the records,

33:30 and tell you how bitter we were that the wars were controlled by the communists. And at one stage our people were short of ammunition and grenades, etc., etc. because the wharfies [wharf worker] were on strike for danger money because it was raining. It was communists controlled trying to defeat the war effort. When we came up the Brisbane River there were 3000 men on that ship. There were about 200 wharfies standing

34:00 alongside their sheds up the Brisbane River. If they could have got off, I tell you they would have killed them, torn them limb for limb. For us, the hatred that Australians could do that to Australians in a war effort was totally unacceptable, and the hatred was bitter. Luckily they didn’t let them off the boat. Do you understand that?

Is that how you saw them, as communists?

Yes, absolutely. Totally, the maritime union was controlled by communists.

34:30 And whatever they could do to bring the system down, they would bring down. If that helped Russia it would, wouldn’t it? That is certainly what I saw. But anyway besides that on the other side of the shed was my girl standing with a lovely broad hat on. Somehow she got information that I was on that ship, so I got permission to get off. I couldn’t take the unions on on my own. But I could take her on, and I talked to her and she said, “Are you going to stay?” and I said,

35:00 “No, no, after nearly six years I didn’t know beef from a bull’s foot really.” And I said, “No, I’m heading home.” We kept in touch for a while but that is the way it is. I wasn’t going to stay in sunny Brisbane then.

We are just rewinding now. I know we have jumped a little bit ahead, but with the jungle training that you did in the Tablelands, did you find that to be vastly different from the kinds of training you received in the

35:30 **desert?**

Absolutely vastly different. The jungle training was kind of a tracks with heavy, very heavy impenetrable undergrowth. There were two things. There was the gympie bush, if you fell into the gympie bush, it would burn you. It is as though you had a hot iron and planted it on you because it has poison needles underneath and everything festered and burnt immediately. I’ve still got dead fingers there from being in the gympie bush.

36:00 But blokes who fell into it and got it into their face were immediately hospitalised. On top, the leeches were instantaneous. They’d come up from under the undergrowth. You’d stand there and you’d see them appear, next minute they’d would walk, they’d smell you and work, you know, work their way towards you. They were pretty hideous. So the… And another thing we called the calamus vine. And stanner is short… You know stannish wire? Stannish wire

36:30 means ‘wait a while’. Now, wait a while vine means, as you go through it hang down a vine that fine like the edge of a fine hacksaw blade, but long fronds, and as you go through it rips you, it rips into you, and you and you have to wait a while, stannish wire, and go backwards and peel it off. That is why it is called a stannish wire vine. So the jungle was virtually impenetrable, and to work your way through it and practise ambushes,

37:00 you could hide in a track, have your face covered up a bit and watch a bloke come down the track and him peering and looking for you, and his face could be one foot from you and he couldn’t see you, as long as you didn’t move. I mainly look at the training, which was so different from desert training. And so continually coupled with rain and humidity

37:30 and every other blessed thing they could throw at you in the jungle would be there. But to see the men do it in action, and went forward as an infantry, and being the lead patrol man in a patrol going down a track, knowing they were facing uncertain death. So I sat one day, what we used to do in Hurricane, in

fighting for each knoll, the infantry would go through and take a knoll and

38:00 then have to fight the next one, it might be 100 yards away, so bring up a group of artillery to observe and bring down firepower, so we'd go through them to the various observation posts. And one day I was sitting talking to a ginger-haired bloke from Sydney who was going to be lead patrol going out when they were called up. And I talked to him for half an hour and the patrol went off and I heard the rush of the Japanese

38:30 machine gun. What do they call it? A woodpecker. And they pulled him back and he was shot, he was dead, he was shot down the middle. And he was the one I had been talking to about the ammunition supplies from… And when I saw him dead and saw how inevitable his death was for the way the patrol had to operate. Again, I say, nothing but incredible admiration for their bravery and determination to fight, no matter what.

39:00 But at the same time, I didn't like the ammo, sending up the ammo too much, when I saw him dead.

With the training that you got in the Tablelands, did you feel that that was appropriate training for what you were about to face?

I will start by saying we knew we couldn't take a big 25 pounder into the jungle, so the

39:30 Australian government designed a scaled-down 25 pounder, a short 25 pounder, the same ammunition, the same power etc., etc., but a scaled-down chassis, no shield, smaller wheels that could be dissembled and carried as a 25 pounder. So to be trained on those was difficult to disassemble them. The gun crew could

40:00 carry all the parts, and put it altogether was a big, big job. And also they were hideous because with the lower smaller chassis, the smaller wheels, everything, the concussion of firing was the same, and the impact on the chassis was such that it jumped up from the ground and rattled and shook and the sides fell off , the wheels fell off. And you had to put it together again before the next round. And in the end, Rees said, "We don't take the responsibility of

40:30 firing over our own people because it is so, so, so what, it falls apart when you fire it." So our training, when you say what was our training like, drastically different and drastically unpleasant. We didn't like it. But to take those onto Tarakan when firing was extremely difficult over hill and down dale, with these short 25 pounders was unpleasant. It rained

41:00 non stop, the mud was unpleasant. The only thing that saved us on Tarakan was there was no malaria because the island was floating in oil, and all the streams you put your hand in would come out with oil on them. It was a great Dutch oil island, oil producer. So the oil… I finished. There were no mosquitoes, which was great.

41:30 But while I talk with my time on Tarakan, I just have to salute the blokes who fought through New Guinea and fought Kokoda, far worse conditions than what I saw. What I saw was bad enough. So against the Middle East it was awful. I said, "Mum, take me home."

I think before we get onto the next section we will just change a tape because we are just almost at the end.

Tape 6

00:31 Training was we used to, if we could organise dances in Aset or Kuri either with the locals or the girls from hospital from the 6th 88, which was up at Rocky Gully, which was great. And one day we had a dreadful incident in that we'd taken over the golf club at Atherton, which is the main, the biggest town in

01:00 the centre of the Tablelands. And we had all our guests there and the party was in full swing, and we had one particular bloke who was a bit of a drunk, and the girls came to us and complained that they couldn't get into the toilet because he had passed out on the seat in the girls' toilet with his feet jammed in against the door and nobody could get in or get out. So the blokes went through the whole area. They were pretty upset when they couldn't get in.

01:30 No, I think he eventually woke up and we got him out. That is another incident. That is what war is really like – passed out in the toilets.

Did you entertain while you were there?

Training?

Entertain.

Entertain, yes, yes, we were, yes, you go down to the pictures once or twice a week, open air pictures and there as soon as you got to the pictures they'd start. The blokes had the housie

02:00 housie game organised and that would take over, the housie housie people. If it was further in the outback you would take your gas coat and a block of wood because the rain would come down and pour down whether you liked it or not, and you'd sit on the block of wood with your gas on and your dustcoat around you and hope to stay down while the avalanche ran down the hill, and watch the pictures. And at one stage, there was a little Indian boy, Sabu, who became quite famous,

02:30 or Sabu Sabu, famous in the American film world, and we must have seen this picture 10 times, and he would say at the beginning, "And my life is much better for me sitting in a B52 bomber than an on a back of an elephant." So by the end of the picture we hated him bitterly. We would recite this with him. We couldn't hear it but… And then

03:00 also we had great entertainment. The camp entertainment people put on wonderful shows And brought you Gracie Fields and entertainers and trumpeters and singers and dancers. And they were open air entertainment, fresh entertainers; it was great, great. Sometimes we would ask them into the mess after and have them promptly sing songs in the mess. But the entertainment was pretty good in the static base

03:30 camp.

What about yourself, Peter, did you do anymore performing or…?

Not really, no. Simply on our own mess nights, a certain song, and I had to sing Jacques on Ray, the French song, because that was taught to me by Stella Dearco Yani and it is, still is my song of what to sing for the regiment, called a little French song about if you fly away from the nest you will get lost, etc., etc.

04:00 Yes I still had to sing that, but that is not entertaining, that is just contributing to the gathering. And I didn't do any more officially then. I can't think why the opportunity wasn't there, I never tried hard enough. I can't remember, too busy playing hockey or football.

Fair enough. Whereabouts did you depart from on your way to Borneo?

Townsville.

Can you describe the harbour or?

Too far gone now.

04:30 I went back afterwards about 10 or 15 years ago and sailed on various boats but I can't remember the ship except it was the General USS Butner where we only got these two meals a day. I can't recall seeing her in the harbour, certain things have disappeared into the mist and that was one of them.

What was the voyage like?

Voyage,

05:00 uneventful. I think it was on the Manoora. Does that name ring a bell with you? There were interstate ships called the Manoora and the Manunda, and I think it was Manoora we went up on. We went up to Morotai and then something happened. While we were parked in the harbour at Morotai waiting to land, we were told to stay at our quarters. They said there was an air raid warning. So I crept up on deck and found a porthole I could look out

05:30 just to see what sort of, after all the air raids we'd seen I wanted to see what sort of an air raid they could put on to entertain us. When I got back to the place, the whole battery had gone. I was left behind. I got into big trouble. So I was made LOB, which is left out of battle. So when they went across to the landing at Tarakan I was LOB'ed and stayed on Morotai until I was ready to go over. And unbeknown to myself, my two brothers

06:00 went to Morotai, went to Tarakan. Both came back. They were on Morotai the same time as I was but I never knew they were there. I was working in a camp and they were in hospital, I think. That was an extraordinary coincidence.

Was LOB a fairly major offence?

Was which?

Was LOB a fairly major offence?

It had to happen every time. No, it wasn't really. They would always pick on a victim, if they could find somebody they could blame for something, you are LOB.

06:30 But everywhere you went a certain group had to be left LOB, around which they could be a new regiment, if the regiment got wiped out, that was standard procedure. That didn't matter.

So you weren't punished?

No, no, no, no, that was really punishment to miss on going in with your own gun in your own landing. But one thing, I stayed alive as well as, which was lucky, wasn't it?

One small consolation.

One small consolation,

07:00 yep. Surviving on Tarakan. Or she is… I remember going up with the infantry and as an observation party and digging in with them at night on a little knoll, clearing undergrowth around in front of you so if anybody moved at

07:30 night you would know it was a Jap and not a tree or anything. Going through the procedure of digging and protecting ourselves when darkness fell. You couldn't talk on the phone, you could only whisper, you could blow yes or no or whatever, no sound whatsoever. And you'd sit in the stillness of the night on guard with your feet over the trench looking into the inky blackness, and a leaf would fall on your head and you'd jump about 45 feet because in dead silence, dead inky black silence,

08:00 one leaf falling on your head sounded like a great thump. And that wasn't easy. One night I was up from a group from 43rd Battalion and I had to hand over at midnight. And we were warned that there was to be a banzai attack, which means the Japs go mad just running with bells and hooters and whistles and charge up the undergrowth charge into your lines. We had been warned by intelligence that there'd be banzai attacks.

08:30 We were being particularly, particularly careful. So it happened to a bloke named Kennedy with the same major of this group up on the 2nd 48th I think, and I had to had over to him or somebody near him, say it was midnight, so I crept down from my area, not breathing or making a sound and touched him on the shoulder in a way he wasn't used to, and his gun was out of his holster and straight into my belly, and he nearly put his pistol right through my, right through my middle

09:00 before I could say, "Kennedy." He said, "Gee, you're lucky. We normally shoot first and ask questions later." But I've still got imprinted the muzzle of his rifle right on my backbone, it was that close. He was not prepared for me to touch him the way I did in the dark.

How long was it before you made contact with the Japanese?

In Tarakan, immediately. As soon

09:30 as they as soon as they landed the Japs were very, very tightly defending the beachhead and also, what we didn't really know, we thought the Japanese would be the small relatively inferior Japanese soldier. These were most their navy group, about 800 of them, and they were certainly a superior physique of Japanese. And they

10:00 fought bitterly to prevent the island being retaken. So the fear is that every time we took a knoll like we took this knoll, they fortified that one. It was a complete battle to take that one. Then they'd do the next one, then you went back, hopping, hopping back, gradually pulling them back, but suffering pretty heavy casualties at the same time. At one place, there was… Each feature would get a name, and one

10:30 feature in particular was called there was Snake and then there was Margie. And they had built a big tunnel and they had a naval gun. They used to track over the tunnel and blaze away at us over here on Margie. And in the end, and I think I saw a photo of it recently, oh in one of the war books, we had a couple of Japanese guns captured, a 20 pounder, a tank and an anti, all lined up on Margie like a ship broadside.

11:00 When they fired they used to blast the whole hillside. But they still resisted; they'd go back into the tunnel. So we had a couple killed on Margie with shrapnel, but it was like broadside from a ship. Can you imagine them all lined up across the hillside firing about 200 metres into the next cliff face? That was Margie.

What sort of return fire were you receiving?

What sort of?

Return fire.

Machine gun and their… This naval gun they had in the

11:30 tunnel, I couldn't tell you what it was, a 75mm or something, but enough to make your head come back. They'd shoot and go straight back in. And more fire from the mouth of the tunnel, and machine gun fire. But we had to take it. So what would happen, if resistance was too great and we'd sent a patrol in and they got cut to pieces they then, we might say at 12 o'clock tomorrow, pull back 50 yards or 100 yards, and Japanese and the Yanks would send in 12 Flying

12:00 Fortresses and try and bomb them out of existence. And that could be pretty frightening, because when you come back here, you go back there and you watch the 12 [Flying] Fortresses coming in through the trees, you see the bomb doors open and you see the bombs falling, and they are coming straight at you, and just over the top and land another 200 metres up the track, and you are hoping that their aiming is good, aren't you? Well I would be anyway. But

12:30 again the infantry who could go forward against that resistance with not so much a bayonet but hand grenades and sometimes flamethrowers to get them out was pretty big stuff. They had to be pushed out

of every hill.

So how long were you involved in engagement with the Japanese there?

Gee I should know off by heart.

13:00 I suppose four months altogether from beginning to end. One particular night that has been in evidence recently, because a widow rang me from the east wanting to know what had happened to her husband. I said, “I knew. He was on my gun.” And she told about an incident of where he was blown up on an o-pip on Tarakan. I said, “No. I was there that night. I’ll tell you what happened.” And it turned out it wasn’t her husband, it was another fellow.

13:30 But when you would clear your sights and your slit trenches around the perimeter for the night, and you’d know your field of fire, and you’d know who would be on duty. There’d be two of you changing over every couple of hours. And the Japs had a system of they were trying to see where we were, sometimes they would roll a ball of mud and throw it in. If you went, “Oh,” it hit you, then they would throw a grenade at you. They were pretty good at that. And this bloke had been in my gun,

14:00 felt a couple of drops of mud hit him and he didn’t tell anybody, unfortunately. This is in the moment of greatest fear in my life. Again, nothing compared with the other blokes did to what I did. We didn’t know about the balls of mud falling in, but I knew with my sounding and my hearing that I heard a pin being pulling out of a grenade, and I knew on instinct a grenade was coming in.

14:30 I heard it hit the tree and then I heard it on the ground. And then in the blackness of night it could be one inch from your head or 20 feet from your head, you had no idea. In that minute you died. You knew if it went off alongside your head you were obliterated. I reckon I shook that much I shook myself down a foot into the ground – that is absolute fear. So it went off with a great flash,

15:00 and it went off and a bloke was laying back on a stretcher went off right between his knees. Lucky it was a Japanese grenade and shot his legs to pieces – it didn’t kill him. But immediately we had to ignore the Japanese and turn the lights on, the torches on, and strap him up as best we could until dawn, and then make a…get a stretcher made up and get him out and way back down through the jungle and to the hospital. But had the little bloke warned us of the mud balls, people could have got into the trenches.

15:30 I was able to tell the woman in Adelaide recently, it wasn’t her husband that was there, he was still in hospital in Morotai where I saw him afterwards. But nasty minute, that one crucial second.

In that incident where the little bloke didn’t alert you to the mud, and as you mentioned earlier with the incident with the guns at El Alamein where the sergeant

16:00 **had left the gun loaded, do you show animosity in those situations whatsoever?**

No, no, par for the course – mistakes are made.

So you forgive and forget pretty quickly?

You forgive and forget pretty quickly. Yep, because you are fighting on the next day. You’ve got to be together, you can’t be apart. No, mistakes are made all over the place by a wrong fuse being put on, by a wrong movement of the dial sight, something in around or amongst our

16:30 troops. The luck of the game in that light and so, and no – what is the word you used? – no animosity it happened.

So you are just trying to avoid mistakes and support each other?

Yes of course, but mistakes were numerous in the middle of battle, especially in the Middle East in the middle of battle, especially where there is so much confusion and dust and dirt and

17:00 there is confusion in the middle of a battle. There is so much going on, shots and shells coming in every direction. I am amazed often at times they could retain control. Because of the confusion on the ground. You imagine it – dust and dirt and rumble and shells – and you can’t really tell what is going on 100 metres away. But somehow it worked out in the end. But as for the

17:30 jungle.

Different story?

Different story yep, different story. Sitting on the edge of your pit on guard at night and it is actually dead sick black, dead silent, and you either hear a leaf hit your hat, or at about midnight or 1 o’clock you would hear a great roar and it was the night rainfall coming across

18:00 like a huge train coming across, and it would hit you and you’d just sit there, you couldn’t move, and the water dropping off whatever. It didn’t make for a very pleasant situation.

How would you support and comfort your mates?

How would?

How would you support or comfort your mates in those situations or in that environment?

In that situation it was 50/50.

18:30 You shared what they shared, and you touch a bloke on the shoulder and he would lay back and he would try to get his rest – that was total sharing. Sometimes preparing a spot in the late afternoon, you are in bed there for the night, when we are desperately trying to find any twig that we could light to make a cup of tea became a big demand.

19:00 But everything was rotten. You'd pick up a log and put your hand and it was all rotten with the dampness of jungle. Blokes on each other's back trying to get up a tree to try and knock off a couple of dry twigs, and then they used to send us jellied tins and you'd light it with jelly petrol, and you could put a billy over that and make a cup of tea. And one day I watched, I got firelight and somehow it caught on a bandolier

19:30 full of ammunition, and shots started to go off in all directions. I ducked. I went down. The infantry officer bent down and picked it up and threw it away, total disregard for anything. That is what they were trained. He walked straight in and picked up the band and threw it out into the open. All I'd done, I'd ducked my head for cover for that was a better deal as far as I was concerned. He was trained. That was his property. He was trained to do it. So there we are.

20:00 **What was morale like in the jungle?**

Dreadful, none. Back at the gun position, which might be a few miles back, you'd probably get back there if you had been up… You might get back there two or three days time, and hope that mail had been delivered in through from Morotai to Tarakan, but very irregular. But nevertheless they tried to get it through to us as best they could.

20:30 And then suddenly we went to a place called Joata, oil fields, with the guns down in a little valley, and one day we looked up and you know how they talk about the wild men of Borneo the orang-outang, there were about 10 big orang-outangs swinging around the trees, about 200 metres away from where we were, so we rushed up to see if we could see them but they had gone. And then alongside us where these old oil derricks.

21:00 And one day we were told there is going to be a bombing raid and jelly, what do you call the jellied fuel?

What they used in Vietnam, you mean?

Yeah that is right, well there was going to be a raid.

Napalm.

There was going to be a napalm raid on the road by the Fortress on an area. So another bloke and I said, "What we we'll do?"

21:30 We were off duty. "We will climb up the oil well and get a firsthand, you know bird's eye view, a grandstand view." So we climbed up this hill, I suppose it was about 100 feet high perhaps, got onto to the platform up the top, saw the bombers come in and woof down came down the whole lot. What we completely overlooked, the blasted air that came across and nearly knocked us off the top of the oil derricks.

22:00 We had completely overlooked the concussion that came from all the bombs and that was only a minor point. Apart from that, the jungle was marvellous.

Were there advantages to jungle fighting as opposed to desert fighting?

Was there any?

Advantages?

None. None. Twice as difficult, twice as dangerous and twice as messy. The blokes in the front line

22:30 in the infantry in the desert say in Tobruk facing tanks and stokers and whatnot was pretty harsh, but I don't feel it was as harsh as the jungle fighting which was pretty well certain death for them. I haven't described to you what it is like to see a stoker raid.

No.

Have I? I have to touch on them.

23:00 To watch them come in, there might be 20 of them and to be in a position so you could stand by and watch, say from a mile away while they are going for another target, watch them scream down one after the other. They do a virtually vertical dive, and they had hailers in the wings to make this tremendous screaming sound. And as they flattened out you could see the bomb, and they could bomb from about 4 or 500 feet. To watch them come in to hit hit hit and I used to think, "Surely the whole earth is going to split apart.

23:30 Nothing can stand that continuos violence and concussion." It seemed to be so destructive. It is nice to be able to watch and not be in it at times. But those on the ground would nevertheless if you were in a slit trench your chances were not bad. But pretty devastating stuff. And then when they are on their way down to watch on, or our fighter planes came and chased them through it with a mass of ack-ack going up, ack-ack bursting up say 2 or

24:00 3000 feet and watch the stoker flight and watch our blokes fly through it and chase them to get them out the other end. Good luck to them. What brave men can do.

Sounds like an incredible display.

An incredible displays of bravery. Because at times when we had the ack-ack group around us and they would set up their pom pom and

24:30 Oerlikons and things, pom pom, yeah Oerlikons, and see the massive… Every third one would be an air burst, a complete mass of black, and they'd fly straight through it.

Just fearless.

How they did it, I don't know. But they would come out the other end sometimes.

You mentioned before that in the desert you endured the ticks and scorpions. What kind of creepy-crawlies [insects] were in the

25:00 **jungle?**

Oh the leeches were number one, and I guess just the gympie bush. But the gympie bush, there was no gympie bush that I recall on Tarakan. That was simply leeches. But in Queensland, gympie bushes and leeches were hideous. The creepy-crawlies, we had pretty big

25:30 pythons up in north Queensland. Snowy Kings was our chief cook and he had to, about 15 to 20 pythons as pets curled around the top of this bush shelter which was our cookhouse. And we used to learn to put our hand, if one came along, never move your hand. When it gets closer a big python would come along and sniff your hand and crawl up over the other side and

26:00 you didn't move, because if you moved it would frighten him. So we learnt to do that. And then one day he was told the AIF News, was the newspaper for the army, was coming to take his photo with these pythons. So snowy was bare-chested and blonde hair, got the two pythons draped around him and he had to have one coming up from each armpit to face the camera. And one kept so he gave it a belt, like you belt a child and

26:30 it went snap and two great big puncture wounds appeared. So he said, "Sit there when I tell you," and they took the photo with these two pythons around him. That is another way of entertaining.

What about snakes and mosquitoes in Tarakan?

No mosquitoes because it was all oil, and all the oil was filtered through all the streams and there wasn't a mosquito on the place, or fly, I don't think. Snakes aplenty

27:00 but not that we ever caught any around the gun area. Occasionally the Dyaks [tribesmen] used to walk around us, they were the headhunters, you know the Dyaks from Borneo but they were our friends. But we had to make sure that they were our friends because they were paid so much with Japanese head, we had to make sure they could recognise which was which and not batter the wrong people. They were pretty good. And they taught us to fish. And one of our fellows from South Perth named Tedler,

27:30 a little boat called Ruffen, a little boat, and he would go fishing with the Dyaks and catch the fish for the regiment between Borneo, between Tarakan and the mainland of Borneo.

What was the makeshift boat made out of?

Whatever timber you could get up there, there was tons of timber. I hesitate to suggest what there would have been on the island.

So it looked like a fairly conventional little…

About 10 foot. And they got a little

28:00 motor organised somehow and my brother would go with them a few times, and Ted Luck from South Perth, and they helped them set up fish nets. One of them would have fresh fish caught for the regiment's food. And he went on and came back here and built a boat called Argosy, totally jarrah [type of wood], a beautiful ship and she won the first brumby race, but that is another story.

28:30 **So he knew what he was doing when it came to building a boat?**

Oh yes he was good, he was wonderful with his hands, a wonderful gunner and totally careless about not getting anywhere in life. He loved Omar Khayyam in poetry and loved his boat, loved sailing and didn't really worry much about anything else. And anyway the fact that he built, what did I say it was Ruffen or something, what did I call him.

29:00 **The first one, Ruffen?**

Ruffen to catch the fish that was his story that was great.

That is a good tale.

I think I have covered as most as I can on Tarakan. Have you got any other things you can ask?

I was going to ask you actually if you manned or crewed these 25 pound guns any differently to the ones that you had used before, because you said they were smaller?

Yeah they were called 'baby 25 pounder'.

29:30 I think the crews were the same, but the duty around the gun were the same, loading, ramming setting the sights, trimming up the ammunition. The same gun numbers were handled, yet it would be the same procedure. But having no shield, see the shield used to protect us from a lot of the blast, this had no shield, you would cop the full blast. That is why if we weren't deaf after the Middle East we were deaf after Tarakan.

30:00 **I wanted to know, you mentioned how quickly the whole time, the loading, the unloading and firing the gun, was there much of a risk of being injured by the recoil?**

Yes there was. If you got your hand in the way you would have your wrist broken in two seconds. Because you are going back with an awful thud. So it rammed back about four feet and it was a wonderful recoil system. It meant as the concussion, started there

30:30 was an oil base controller, recoil control. And the further it went back the more a couple of ports twisted and gradually closed off the flow of oil between the two chambers. If it was dead stopped it was a gradual process of gradually closing the ports. But in the initial impetus of the first two feet, that was very vicious you would be back like a vomp, and if you had your hand go, if you had your hand you would break your arm in two seconds. But the lever was so that

31:00 it was up and you had to hit it to eject, but if you were lucky enough and you got out and hit it at full recoil, it would eject the cartridge while it was at full recoil, and that took some timing because it was all done in a flash. And then the other chap would get the next round up the spout while it was on its way out, ready to ram as soon as it stabilised. It was good timing and good fun. Remember, "Continued bombardment until ordered to stop." That was your dream.

31:30 **But wouldn't you tire or would stress make a mistake and be injured in those situations?**

Yes, yes, you could. Anywhere around the gun with the concussion and the recoil was always a danger or a mistake somebody, not that I ever saw it happen. I think the concussion was that great that and the recoil was that great that you just never got in the way of that or you'd be knocked out, no I never saw a mistake, I never saw any damage.

32:00 **I think whenever I've seen you know vision of those sort of guns being fired myself, or whoever I had been with have said, you know I'd hate to get caught by one of those, I am surprised it wasn't common?**

Yes, yes, yes, see the recoil went down the middle. It was a split trail that joined up, joined up to the end and the recoil went down the middle of the trail, nobody stood there at all, they were all to the side of the gun. But

32:30 generally they were in the only safe position to be, which was to be on the side operating the gun from the side, not in front of it.

What ended your activity in Tarakan?

What which?

What led to the end of your time in Tarakan?

The war ended. Yes the Japs on the island were gradually giving in.

33:00 And just as we cleaned out the last of them, well some of them hid, although some of them didn't know the war was over and came out months later out of rubbish tips and all sorts of things, but fundamentally as war finished, they finished. And then we were told to stand to, we had heard that some of our friends, army friends were in a lawful prison camp in Sandakan,

33:30 the Japanese prison camp. And we thought that our cousin, Merv Kennedy, was there. So they called for volunteers to see who would go through on a rescuing mission and everybody steeped forward as a volunteer, and then it was cancelled. And then we heard that MacArthur wasn't happy about lending us the planes to fly and get it done. And secondly, we learnt after that the Japs had killed them all anyway, that dreadful death march where they killed

34:00 2000. Whether we could have got there in time we don't know. But that was just as war was finishing.

I think Blamey was to blame as well for the cancellation of that rescue?

I think so. We will never know the true story but [General Thomas] Blamey or [General Douglas] MacArthur or whatever, whether they could have saved any of the blokes, because the situation was nearly

34:30 unsolvable, wasn't it? Have you read the story about…?

Well, we had the fortune of interviewing Jack Sue who did all the reconnaissance, yeah. He is still very upset that the…

Did you really? How long ago did you see Jackie Sue?

Oh, it would be in the last month or two.

He is not too well is he?

No.

But what a character.

Yes he is quite an enigmatic character.

Well when you hear his story. It makes my little story seem pale and

35:00 insignificant.

No, I don't think so.

A day in submarines and into Singapore Harbour blowing up ships. That's another world, isn't it? Yeah, a great character.

So what was your reaction when you knew the war was over?

Incredible relief to have lived,

35:30 incredible relief that we had seen Hitler defeated, that we had seen the Japs defeated. When I say incredible relief, I had to believe in my life time I had seen what the Germans had done to people, what they would do to anyone who got in their way. To have seen them beaten was enormous satisfaction. To see what the Japanese did to our prisoners of war,

36:00 to see what they could mete out, to see what civilisation they were to beat them, brilliant stuff. To think that it was all over, it is very hard to drink it all in. You couldn't drink it in immediately. Actually you had been in it for so long it was nearly permanent, that is a point of issue I will talk to you about, to have been in it that long. If you can imagine you never had to think

36:30 of clothing or food or transport, you were taken, everything was done. You were in a cocoon. And for six years you had been in that situation, suddenly to come out of it, it is a great shock to the system. That is why a lot of men couldn't handle it. The sudden break away to think for yourself to do things, to live

37:00 again. Oh, blokes couldn't handle that. I remember four or five of us coming back to WA, we had a few days' leave in Sydney on the way back. And I had close friends in Sydney and I remember they said, "Well you ring up and arrange how we can go out to their place for a meal." I remember talking to the person,

37:30 putting the phone down and one of them said, "You don't remember anything." And I said, "No." I couldn't remember a thing. Ask me why, I can't tell you why. It was in the middle of a change from there to then. It was too dramatic and too quick. And some sort of apprehension. I took a girl to dinner. I met Peter Burg and his family, a great cricketer.

38:00 So she came to dinner and it was hideous because it was different, because suddenly I was free to do what I wanted. I didn't know which fork to pick up or how to eat my soup. Everything was topsy-turvy. Before I had been in the system, and the system carried me along very nicely. And at the same time a very close friend disappeared, he was a close friend

38:30 of mine in the unit. And he was wearing my best clothes. He borrowed them to go out that night and the man I was staying with, his name was Horace Bacon, he had been the manager of International Harvester at the outbreak – we are in Sydney. And then he took over the command of the whole of Australian war production. He was a big, big boy. And to stay at his place was marvellous. I told him what had happened and he said, "Well you better go and find him."

39:00 He had people searching the whole of Sydney and they found him in Concord Hospital, still in my gear, which was fun. Well, but he had broken down because he couldn't take the transition from being in the automatic system to being in a new world. And that happened to a lot, didn't it? Uncertainty, apprehension, out of the frying pan and

39:30 into the fire or something.

Just before you leapt out of the frying pan into the fire, was there jubilation while you were still in Borneo?

Yes yes, yes, jubilation. We were issued with a bottle of beer each per week. I remember walking up from the sergeants' lines up through the jungle up to where the guns were, to the gun crew, and we had a party with a bottle of beer each. And sometime if you could,

40:00 you could save it up for the week and you might have two bottles. And I remember walking back on my own through this dense black jungle thinking, "I've had a party and it is all over." And I was screaming out, I was screaming out and all the monkeys are screaming back at me. I was trying to say to myself, apart from the grog that I'd drunk, which I wasn't very good, that a new era, a new era had arisen and I was part of it. I was letting off steam as best I could, on my own in the jungle, which wasn't

40:30 very exciting at all. So then it was back to civilian life.

I think we will just pause there Peter we are ready to change tapes.

Tape 7

00:31 **Right while I was otherwise entertained, you were talking about Bob and the Beau Fighters?**

Well Bob Jones pre war he played in the state team and it became part of our family group. Flew a Tiger Moth and took me up flying before war broke out and he was diving at 60 or 70 miles an hour and, wow, an open cockpit, this is really living. So we went off into the Middle East

01:00 and he disappeared into the air force. And two years later Dick, Ken and I were walking down the street in Cairo and Ken said, "That looks like Bob Jones." And I said, "It couldn't be." Yes it was Bob Jones and we had a few beers and dinner and he was down to get a new Kittyhawk I think in Cairo, and he was going back the next morning. So he learnt where we were and came back the next morning at breakfast time and

01:30 shocked the camp to pieces. He didn't shoot but he zoomed down and he could do what he liked. He flattened the tent. And I said, "You ruined the porridge and the fires went out," and the cook said, "Get out of here Jonesy." He shot up the camp peacefully. A barrel-roll out and said, "Oh Kennedy I'll see you later." Well off he went and it was great to say, "See you later Jonesy, we will catch up with you." And he was shot down in his second flight, ran out of ammo and came screaming,

02:00 "I better get out of this," and he could see a flat mud plane and then the sand hills, "I better… I will shoot across with the wheels up, skid across the sand plan, hit the sand, and hope I get out." He hit the sand and he got out, but they captured him and he went off to camp. Finished up in Italy somewhere but he escaped and got over the hills into Switzerland. And there, Switzerland was neutral.

02:30 He could walk and do what he liked. He learnt skiing, got his gold medal skiing and then he said, "I better get out of this." He contacted the Maquis, who are the French underground. And by the way, getting into Switzerland he had gone in in shorts, walking along the snow drift. He burnt all his leg with snow, you know, with what do you call it? It burnt his leg anyway. And they are still taking bits out of his leg now, this is 40 or 50 years later.

03:00 But when he got out he got in with the Maquis and they got him out, and shepherded him across through the middle of France out through the south of France and back to England, and started flying again. And now I see him quite often – we have a few beers. But that is the story. The other one was, when I was waiting on Morotai the Australians were flying Beau Fighters. And I met an Australian bloke and I said, "You better take me up." And he said, "Well come down tomorrow morning at 5.30 and we will take you up for a zip." So I got a lift down to the new airstrip, which was crushed

03:30 coral, completely white like marble. And I am waiting by the Beau Fighters, I was supposed to be a little bit surreptitious, so along came a kid and climbed up the ladder. I said, "Where is the pilot?" and he said, "It is me." He looked about 12, he hadn't shaven, and I am sure he hadn't left school. So I thought, "Oh well, here we go." And along came an air gunner and he closed the door and off we went, took of two of us, two planes, and we were flying from the top, due westward

04:00 to the top of the Helm are you with an old barge. And they were going to do rocket firing for practice, so he went down a few times and he aimed at this, and I was holding onto the handles behind the pilot looking at these rockets. And instead of hitting one rocket, he hit the whole lot at once. The whole plane shuddered and all the rockets went down. And he pulled up in this great sweeping lift right up and up, and stalled at the top and came down, and I loved it.

04:30 I looked behind. The air gunner was being sick all over the floor and the pilot opened up a tiny little thing in the perspex of his plane. I said, "What are you doing?" He said, "I am seasick also." He was letting fresh wind blow in his face. I said, "What do you know? Here am I, a gunner from down there, loving it." But that was my flight in the Beau Fighter. What have I got to tell you about that Bob Jones, and that is all I think.

While we are on little bits of stories, we did miss talking about Suma

05:00 **Kumar romance in the desert?**

Suma Kumar, yes. Well not many men wrote a love letter in a slit trench with a blanket over lighting matches. But a letter came through to me from her after we had left Syria, some time after, and the letter was delivered, and I remember thinking, "Well, I've got read this." Because it had a Beirut postmark on it. And I was sitting, I had a blanket over my head, in a slit trench, lighting matches with one hand, trying to read a letter from Suma. Now that's real love, isn't it?

05:30 That was the end of that. But it was interesting. Interesting comment.

Romance in the desert.

Mmmm. Romance with a match.

Just wanted to also ask you, what were your feelings of getting sent on to Borneo at the time?

Being sent to Borneo. I suppose we thought the Japanese threat had been so great, that any

06:00 hand we could have as we were trained to resist them had to be done. But I must say I also felt, having endured that long, I was sticking my neck out to go into another lot. It was just a passing thought. You went and you did it and that was it. I don't think any of us could ever vaguely accept the fact that the Japanese could take over and run Australia and do what they did to you people

06:30 what they did to everyone else. Unacceptable. I guess I had the same feeling about the Nazis. You just killed them, and I know, everybody, we didn't want them here. And if we could help that we would do something. But I must say by the end of the Tarakan thing we probably weren't worth two bob really. I think we were a bit worn.

Do you think that there really was a legitimate threat to the security of Australia by the

07:00 **Japanese?**

There was. Do you think there was?

That they really were going to settle here?

We believed there was, but the Japs have said subsequently they couldn't have got across to Australia because that little bit of sea around the top is like an enormous, what do you call it, around a castle the…

A moat.

A moat, a pretty big moat. But it looked as though they were. They bombed Darwin. They had nearly sunk my uncle in the Colac. That is another story I've got to tell you about.

07:30 They had bombed Sydney, from they sent submarines into Sydney. And they had come down that fast, a great tide, that nothing seemed to be able to resist. Yes we fully expected that they would take Australia. I suppose fortunately at that time the Americans had started to go through a bit north in the Pacific and were gradually fighting back. But at that stage we got to Tarakan, yes

08:00 it looked as though they would. And we believed they could and would. And I can think of no worse fate for my civilisation than the Japanese taking over as they were then. They might be different now, they might be nice now, but as they were then, they weren't terribly nice. Their value of life differed vastly from ours.

What were you told about the Japanese as to what to expect before you headed off to Borneo?

Plenty.

08:30 We, when I say plenty I must be careful there. By the time we got to Tarakan, yes enough stories had come through from atrocity, the treatment of civilians. I had a friend whom I used to sail with in this river. He was in the air force as a ground crew. He fought like

09:00 mad to get into aircrew, got into aircrew, was shot down on the first flight and was one of the first beheaded. That is what we thought, that is what I thought of them. Yes, I didn't like them too much.

How did you find out that your friend was beheaded?

Got the news from Perth somehow. He had been a very close friend, we would sail on this river in his father's launch in '37, '38, '39

09:30 with that girlfriend. Was all wonderful stuff. And he fought so hard to get into aircrew and then to be beheaded is not really the traditional way of handling prisoners, is it? It was their way. That is what we thought of them.

What were the conditions like on the ship going over there to Borneo?

On the General USS Butner, with the two meals a day? Pretty awful. They were very good with the PA [public address] system playing music

10:00 and stories from home. I went down and found myself in that inferno which was to be the ship's laundry and I got out of that. I suppose on any troopship conditions are pretty much the same. It ain't no happy place to be. Training, minimum meals, confined, dark at night, confined inside. There were better ways to spend your life than being on a troopship.

10:30 It was more fun at the pictures at Perth.

Were you given any specialist training when you were on the ship, you know like last minute things to be aware of?

Just survival. What is the word I'm after? Not survival, recapitulation of what you had been trained in. Do your best. You can in confined quarters, to keep thinking and keep training, whatever it might be.

11:00 I suppose the trip up, wasn't terribly long. When I got to Morotai I was LOB. There was an incident on the way back, coming back on the Manoora. We pulled in at Finschhafen to refuel. And at Finschhafen one of our friends had been killed,

11:30 one of the brothers of one of our friends had been killed. We are waiting on the wharf at Finschhafen and we heard a vehicle in the distance coming down this long hillside, and we thought, "Who on the earth is this?" Because nobody knew we were in Finschhafen refuelling. Next minute a hearse came across the opening in the wharf, or what was a wharf, turned around and came back to us, and the doors opened at the back and there were two Australians setting up a shop, flogging off American gear

12:00 like a mobile shop in the hearse. So we bought a few shirts and shorts and things and that was it. Initiative was very great.

That is quite extraordinary really.

Quite a story.

What were your first impressions when you arrived on Tarakan, because you know even just looking at it, it is very different to Australia?

Totally different.

12:30 Palms but mostly a very dreadful looking harbourside of banks and mud and dirty oil coloured sludgy stuff. Not entertaining at all. Not like a lovely tropical island that you might read about but palms, dirty looking all in sludge. And by the time I had gotten there it had been beaten up a bit; I was about a week late. Very unimpressive

13:00 sight. It had been a Dutch township, with the bulk of the billings were wiped out. And there was, it was not very exciting at all, and inland it got worse and worse.

Were there any structures left, as in like could you have a shower?

Not then you couldn't. The boys going over with their guns

13:30 on the American ships said to the American boys, "Is there any showers?" "You can't shower here." They said, "We have to shower once a day, or else." They didn't shower, we did. We had to fight to get showers on the boats going over, and nobody showered as much as we did, I don't think. And then on the island of course there were no showers. If you were lucky, you might get a billy can and tip it over yourself wherever the guns were. We had some

14:00 tents too at the back of Tarakan behind the gun pit, the gun positions, but very rough, as a matter of fact very rough, showers were a bit distant.

What sort of food were you eating there?

I find food very, very hard to remember. I do, I am pretty good on the tooth I must admit. I remember an incident lined up waiting for a meal to come up into the

14:30 escarpment and the waddies up outside saloon, we might line up for a meal. And myself and my two brothers might be up the front, or I might be up the front and the bloke named Ken Spar, he used to drive a bus in Perth, he would shout out, "Kill another sheep, the Kennedy's are here." We were big eaters so they reckoned, but we weren't. But food, I can't remember much of what we ate. In the vehicle travelling we ate bully beef and biscuits as much

15:00 as you could. If you stopped you might have a tin of pineapple or a tin of apricots. Or a tin of sausages you'd boil up and they'd call it curry sausages. But in an action like Tarakan I find it hard to remember. I know we had something because we existed, but I have no vision of meals being served or what it might have been. But those dreadful metal mess tins, somebody

15:30 probably came and put something in it, which we devoured, which we existed. I have no picture of what it was.

Was water a bit easier to come by?

No, the water had to be carted in. All the water dams had been broken up in the fighting and I think, I don't know what the Dutch had for their water. Most of the water was carted in and then had to be treated. The water we had in the desert,

16:00 but not enough to be rushing around with showers and whatnot. In the end, as we got to the end of facilities, they opened up the Dutch swimming pool so we used to go down and have swimming competitions while we were waiting to go home. In the Dutch swimming baths, but you couldn't drink that either.

True. When you were in various bits of action in Tarakan, what were the maps like in the survey area?

Poor, poor.

16:30 Very little, because the, the inland of Tarakan was a sea, just a bit like all jungle. The Dutch didn't need any identification out away from the oil fields down at the front, up at the back there was virtually nothing. Maps were mostly made up ourselves as we went along.

17:00 It was pretty poor, as a matter of fact pretty much the same as the desert. The desert had nothing and maps were pretty useless you made your own as you went along. The jungle was pretty much the same.

Because that has got to make it pretty difficult?

Does it make it difficult?

Yeah.

Very. Very you only went on identification of spots by patrolling. You got to here, the depth there, you could tell the bearing distance of that spot, so you knew what it was so you

17:30 could put it on your map. If you hadn't been there and there was no identification, it was 200 metres across the valley. Actually the valleys were dreadful; they were called razorbacks. You might get between here and there, it would dip down, and the trail would be just wide enough for a man to walk on, and it would fall straight down either side, down into a stream or a riverbed down below. So to get there you had to go across that track or bomb them out.

18:00 That is why it was pretty hideous.

How many Japanese were there in the vicinity?

Oh about 700, 7 or 800. I've got the figures in my book somewhere. 7 or 800. But well trained navy men who were not happy about being removed, and they mined and dug in and used the tunnels very well indeed.

Now tell me a bit about the tunnels?

The tunnel was that one in Marjory I told you about where we

18:30 had that, that was one tunnel they used the 75mm naval gun hidden in the tunnel. They used to run it out firing and go back in again, which is very good. we eventually built up half a dozen guns, which was called our battleship broadside, and try and blast the tunnel to pieces. But it took a lot of doing. It took a couple of days to blast them out. So the countryside, we used to call them

19:00 razorbacks, which was the high ground between two hills. Was only a couple of feet wide and you'd have to traverse that to get there, or the infantry would have to fight through it. And at night sometimes you would stop on a razorback, might be as wide as this room, and you would try and build up a perimeter and dig your trenches round the outside.

19:30 There wasn't much room at all. Awful country. But those poor blokes at Kokoda were a 100 times worse, weren't they? We were better off than they were.

How did you keep yourself dry under all these conditions?

How do I which?

Keep yourself dry?

You were never dry. You were never dry. You were wet for the whole month you were there. It would either rain or perspiration or mud and slush, there was no dryness. And the interesting thing is living in those conditions

20:00 of continuous mud and slush and dampness, I was fit as a flea. When we walked down the wharf and got on the Manunda and dropped our gear down below and the dust of the civilisation hit me, and I went up on deck and I sneezed until I nearly suicided, because I react pretty quickly to dust, house dust. Well the jungle meant nothing, that ship meant, I must have sneezed 40 times or I jumped overboard to go

20:30 back into the jungle.

That is extraordinary, being wet all the time has got to cause some health issues?

It cause skin problems, but health, no. We didn't, we, I think the humidity, you were hot while you were wet, and it rained every night as far as I can remember. It bucketed down, but I think I read in my note in my diary

21:00 today that I think I got a bit of a sore throat from it. It was only minor and I don't recall any illness, either malaria or flu, cold. And yet you were permanently wet. It didn't seem to matter.

Kind of extraordinary, really.

The more I talk about it the more I am lucky to be here, aren't I? I don't know what I'm doing here.

How would folk be

21:30 **evacuated out of any area if they were injured?**

Very difficult, you've seen pictures of blokes in the jungle being rescued on Kokoda on stretches, when a grenade landed between Harry Port's legs, to get him out we made up a stretcher. I don't think, I think we made it up from blankets and sticks. But to carry him out and down in those sort of situations and keep him balanced when you are going down that way

22:00 it is extremely difficult. I think later on when the Americans developed jungle war they flew them out on helicopters, but we walked ours out. And you've seen photos of, the photo became famous of the fuzzy wuzzies [New Guinean natives that helped the allies] in New Guinea, helping our blokes out, blokes blinded and whatever, you had to walk out or be carried out.

22:30 So that was difficult.

Where would they go after they were carried out?

Back to, always you had at the closest place you had was the casualty clearing station, that I told you before, behind the lines, where they were first examined and some decision was made as to the type of treatment they required and where they were to go to, what hospital. But we were pretty limited. In Tarakan we had a makeshift hospital anyway for those who were badly wounded

23:00 there I guess. I was going to say they were flown out, but we couldn't fly them out because the essence of taking Tarakan was to take the airstrip to give us a fighter airstrip for which we could help retake Singapore. But two things, the airstrips were built on a swamp. And the land used to float up and down and disappear. It was very, very fragile sort of airstrip and in the end they could

23:30 fly in. They flew in some DC3s and eventually they were flying them back to Morotai in DC3s until they got the airstrip going, which took a long time, so they would have been trying to get them out by ship to Morotai. Not an easy situation for anywhere with casualties. It made it pretty awful.

What was the thing you feared the most when you were out there

24:00 **in the wilds of the jungle?**

Getting shot, yep, purely and simply. They were around all the place. They were pretty good at climbing trees and sniping. That, or if you were back on the guns you were relatively safe because they had no air force, but you went forward to their pit you were with the infantry and then you had

24:30 the normal danger of being up in the forward position, and that meant machine gun or mortar or whatever. Generally I got away with murder. I didn't have much trouble on the o-pips. But if you went forward from their pit, from there to there, then you struck trouble if they were defending – generally not very pleasant.

Did they seem to you like they were pretty well trained?

The Japs? Very, fought very well, very well. And I remember one day looking over

25:00 the edge of these tracks that I could see some Japs running down at a stream and I thought, "Gee, they are a bit too far away to get a shot." The next minute bullets came, bullets came whizzing back over us. They were seeing us from somewhere else. Never show your head over a ridge. Didn't I learn that? And I forgot. So a few shots came back and I thought, no, I didn't want to be shot, I had got away with it so far and I think I was better alive than dead.

You mentioned before the Dyaks.

Dyaks.

25:30 **Yeah what sort of contact did you have with them?**

Not a great deal. It was their island, their land, and they fished and fought and lived there and they were totally native, they were undressed and things. And all we know is they had been taught to behead the Japanese when they could get them, and we had hoped they recognise us and not do us in at the same time. You'd see them dead through the camp. I think Ted Luxor saw more of them down with his

boat and Billy Ruffen going fishing,

26:00 we saw them from time to time. But they meant no harm to us and we meant no harm to them. But interesting thing, the group called the Dyaks because they were pretty famous, the headhunters of Borneo, and they were our friend, which is a nice side to be on. Wasn't it?

That is a pretty extraordinary thing to have contact with that sort of culture?

Yes. We were in the wilds, in the wilds of Borneo, I told you about the wild men of Borneo turned out to be a group of orang-outangs came down.

26:30 That is what we used to talk about the wild men of Borneo. Yes we got out of it pretty well.

Any other sort of wildlife that you might have come across while you were out there?

No, no. Butterflies, yes, enormous butterflies, but nothing much on the ground, leeches, orang-utans, that is not bad for a start, is it?

Leeches, butterflies

27:00 **and a orang-utans.**

Yeah, take your pick. And Japanese.

Creatures of the jungle. Was there much souveniring going on between men?

From their own, from their own people?

From Japanese.

Yes if they could. They were always keen to get a Japanese sword was the keen thing. I never saw one.

27:30 They must have been there. I think the infantry must have got what they could from the Japs as they pushed them back and killed them. Actually I can't remember. I have got that picture of the Japanese wearing swords, that I saw. They were dead anyway. The swords had gone by the time I saw them. People could souvenir what they could. They had German helmets and German guns

28:00 and revolvers and whatnot. And just going back for a little while, when we came back after the jungle and came back up the Brisbane River and knew we had to, everybody knew they had to carry ashore what they could carry, the porthole, booty, everything was going out the porthole, there was beds and stretchers and camp beds and helmets. They couldn't carry it, so it went out. The ship was aground on booty by the time we got up the Brisbane River.

28:30 It couldn't carry it, so it got rid of it. In the desert they had, everybody was riding around on a German bike or a German staff car, but when we reached the end of coming back, every foreign vehicle stays in the desert, you couldn't bring them with you. A bit hard to get home from the ship.

Sure. When you were actually in the desert and driving around what was the risk with unexploded ordnance or bombs?

29:00 Oh, plenty, plenty. You know by training, you could not pick up anything on the ground, and I'm still the same now. Like a matchbox or thermos flask or fan pin or cigarette lighter, because they could take your hand off. There were plenty of those scattered around, mining, mines out in front of the position were prevalent. As soon as you got position you put out

29:30 a minefield out in front of you to stop the tanker coming in. Matter of fact I don't know how they got through them and in and out of them because the mines were everywhere. But the booby traps were wired to a body or wired to a helmet. You put this thing off and it would go off. So you learnt, I still don't pick up anything suspicious on the ground. And that has just so long been trained not to.

30:00 **How about booby traps in Tarakan?**

None. I don't think they every had time to do so, I think we were being pushed back that quickly from knoll to knoll. Yes we used to, now let me recollect. Sometimes we would clear an area in front of us, we would go forward about 30 or 40 metres and put a trip wire across with a grenade on, as extra, like a minefield defence

30:30 for our own position. We were setting them for them you know. I never saw them set them up themselves. They probably did have them. I never saw them.

I am just wondering if you are walking around looking for these wires?

You took good care every time, everywhere. An incident I haven't told you. May I revert?

Sure.

Back in the Middle East again and the first theatre St Albans theatre, I think it was the Gody theatre in South Perth

31:00 set up in Dudley, whatever street it was, by a bloke named Styles. And you had a young man who was his projection – what do you call them? You know assistant. His name is Ken San, we got on quite well, Roy San, scene changes, we are in Mersa Matruh, El Alamein, I've forgotten, but Ken was down at the broken lines kicking a footy and we were

31:30 burnt black, remember we were burnt black just in all shorts, boots and a hat kicking a footy. Roy Sans had been playing at Blenheim and had been shot, had been shot down and crashed into the water out from the shore, his crew were killed except he got ashore wounded, no food, and very thirsty, he hid in the rocks for a day,

32:00 and he was convinced he was amongst the, he saw these black blokes running thought he was amongst the Italians or Germans, hid all day wondering how he was going to get out of it. And suddenly he heard somebody say, "Hey, Kennedy, kick that footy over here or I'll beat you up," or something. And he walked out and here was Ken. We had known him from the Gody Theatre. He thought, "Thank God, I'm not amongst the Germans." And he was rescued and safe. An extraordinary coincidence from the Gody Theatre to the Blenheim bomber.

That is amazing.

And he's safe.

32:30 **When was it that your other brothers that were younger, did they join the war effort?**

One younger yes.

When did that happen?

He waited until we came back from the Middle East and then he succeeded in getting approval to join us on the Atherton Tablelands. I remember the night he walked up. I was sitting by the troop wireless, sitting, and up come my brother Neil. It was wonderful. He was, he is two years younger than I am and his birthday

33:00 was yesterday, and he walked up and I thought, "Wow." What a thrill that was. So I went and dug up Ken and Dick, so we had the four of us there for the first time together in the war. And then they deliberately put him in the 57th Battery away from us in the 14th Battery to separate us just a little bit. And then when we went into take Tarakan, he and 57th went up through up a channel, alongside Tarakan, a little island called Sado.

33:30 And there was no, they put their guns on Sado in which if they could get them off the cliff face they could shell behind the Jap lines and the Japs wouldn't know they were there. And Neil and his mate got a couple of guns, got onto Sado and they said, "We'll never get up that cliff face." And Neil told me of a bloke named Henry McCavna and said, "Yep I'll get them up there for you." Somehow he got the tractor, no he got a

34:00 system of manhandling, up the cliff face, got up on top of the hill and they fired on the Japs who didn't know they were behind the line. That was a great escapade and that is how Neil became to be in the 57th on Sado Island. Then I never saw him again until… I don't remember seeing him at all on Tarakan. No I can't. I have no recollection.

Was there a way for you to

34:30 **keep in contact?**

No, not really, not at that stage. Dick and I, as a matter of fact, the three of us were there before Neil, I had been on Morotai, Ken and Dick came back sick from Tarakan after the first few days with a fever and Ken was being transferred and came up later, so we were all were together on Morotai while Neil was already

35:00 on his way to Sado, so we didn't see him at all. And I can't remember when we saw him again, because once we got the news that under the system, under the point system we were the first to go home. We were up and gone pretty quickly by the time hostilities ended. And at the moment I have no recollection of seeing him, maybe until we got home. Because he being late up there was the last to come out.

35:30 **So it was just the three of you?**

Three got home first, yep. I can't remember when we caught up with him. But it would have been some time after because they were quite a long while getting rid of all the troops off the island and getting them shipping, as their sequence was correct, as their points system was right, so then we were all back home here eventually.

What did you think about

36:00 **being the first to get out of there?**

Lovely, the first out best dressed. Yes they reckoned that once the point system was discussed, we knew we were first out and we liked that very much.

I just wanted to find out what you think about the Americans?

The Americans. During that war? Great, great. They had the firepower

36:30 and I know they made dramatic mistakes in that war. The fact that they had the firepower to saturate before they went into land was pretty good thinking. They had the resources and how to use them, and I like the way they say. Although the first time we saw them I couldn't believe, we went through the camp and they had washing machines on

37:00 power and they had ice cream machines. And we thought, "Wow, this is…" We couldn't believe that. But nevertheless, that is what they were able to do, so they did it. And the fact that they could say, "We'll put an airstrip there." Bang. The people called the SeaBees [US Naval Construction Force] I think they were called which was the labour force, that air strip would be down in about 24 hours flat. They had the equipment, they pumped it in, they planted the coral blew it up, pressed it. And they could get things done that quickly

37:30 that for us, the Australian forces, not nearly with the same resources it seemed such a disadvantage. And we admire them for the ability to make the resources that they were able to get the job done and they went and that was great. What do I think of them now? Marvellous. And what a short story of the situation. Does that matter?

No not at all. Did you actually get to work with the Americans?

38:00 No I didn't. By the time we had finished on Tarakan and come back we hadn't joined them at all. But some of our people had. One chap that I rang today, the fellow who is the secretary here, I rang him this morning, he was seconded from us to a group called naval bombardment to teach people how to bombard because he was a well trained artillery man, so he went aboard one of their battle ships and sailed. I've forgotten which ship, but

38:30 for us it seemed like a world apart for us still in our guns in the dirt and damp and he is off on a big ship with, you know, three meals a day and lovely quarters, but good luck to him. But then once some years ago I had a girl, a friend in our group here, she married an American and they were flying Catalinas out of Matilda Bay. And I went and stayed with them in Virginia,

39:00 some years back. And there was Joan McLeod, her father had been chief of McLeod Stewart Accountants in Perth, and he married Brownie. Went and stayed with them and learnt his story of how he had been flying Catalinas here, had been shot down and got back by canoes and flying on, you know, canoeing on logs and got back here. When I showed him a photo of where I lived then

39:30 he said they were his quarters. Which were right at the end in Crawley, yeah in Crawley, just by the boatshed where he lived, and I lived there subsequently. But then he said, "Come with me." He is a retired captain, this is 10 years ago, and he said, "Come down to the naval base at Virginia." And he still had

40:00 his credentials on the front of his, and he was waved in and saluted and the whole bit. I went in with him and there I saw the might of what they had in the naval port at Virginia. It was so massive, it could blow your mind. We might have one battleship and one cruiser, they had 20 of those and 10 of those, and that was one port only. And the, you

40:30 won't remember, there was an accident aboard a battle ship called the Iowa some years ago and an explosion took place in a gun turret and she was there with a blackened gun. We had just come into port. And I'm sure when miles and miles of aircraft were explained to me, when aircraft are carriers are coming in they fly all their aircraft carriers for shore maintenance, they were lined up so deep we couldn't believe it and that was just one port.

41:00 When you take the rest of their strength it is mind boggling. Mind boggling. What we are seeing now, if you are about to say to Saddam Husssein, "Out," [Colonel] Gadaffi has taped them out hasn't he? Have you read this? Chief terrorist, he says, "Okay hands up I give in." Iran is talking, so Arabia

41:30 is talking, we are suddenly realising there is no place to go except get rid of your tourists and form a society that people can enjoy. that is tremendous stuff.

It is amazing what you can do when you have got that kind of resource behind you.

So any criticism I hear about weapons of mass destruction I say forget it, pull your head in. We have gone way beyond

42:00 that. That was part of the deal then. It doesn't matter

Tape 8

00:31 **So when did you delist?**

When did which?

You delist?

Could you lean over and pass me my discharge certificate please? Just behind you, Denise. The big discharge right on the table there. Oh look at that, oh look at the piece of paper, it says a total of 2000 days active service

01:00 13th of December 1945, I think it says there, yep, that's what it says, 816 days outside Australia, 1032 days in Australia and discharged on the 13th day of December

01:30 '45.

Would you like to hold it out for us so we can see it in front of the camera?

In front of the camera.

A bit higher.

So how is it placed?

So whereabouts were you discharged?

At Karrakatta.

Yeah, would you like to tell us what happened during that process?

Oh well yes an extraordinary thing happened. To cope with it all suddenly to be emptied out was a bit hard to take because you didn't know

02:00 what was going to happen next. But I had spent time in the 3rd Troop Brigade at Karrakatta, so I knew the place very well before the war. When it came to discharge, they medically examined you to make sure they were sending you out reasonably fit and well. And they asked you certain questions. "Would you like, sergeant?" "Would you like, sergeant?" "Would you like, sergeant?" And I knew from the army, I said, "Yes," to everything, "Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes." Whatever it was, I said, "Yes." In 1948 we were

02:30 married and I said, "I better put in for a home loan under war service. It will take two to three years, so I needn't hurry." About a month later a letter came saying, "You are on top of the list. You can have the money immediately because you said yes on discharge, you wanted the loan." So I had made up my mind immediately and built a home in 1950, but I was totally unaware that I was going to get, to my surprise.

03:00 But it was good training, wasn't it?

Very pleasant surprise.

Say yes to everything, whatever they ask you.

Whereabouts did you build?

At the Upper Cross. It was pretty much in McLeod Road. There was no road and we had to walk through the jungle to find the building pegs and an extraordinary situation which I'm going to tell you whether you like it or not.

Okay.

In the Middle East I had been promoted from bombardier to sergeant over a bloke who hadn't been terribly bright. He had been a good

03:30 gunner, but not too bright. So I thought he resented me getting promoted to the top. When I was back here, he had been discharged and sent home. When I came back I thought, "I pretty better find a block of land." So I started to look for a block of land and they were 200 pounds, 190 pounds. That is a fortune. We didn't have that sort of money at all. Suddenly eventually I thought, "I better go down to war service. They've got a bloke down there who

04:00 allocates blokes of land for returned servicemen. His name is Joe." I said, "What? The bloke I was promoted over? Oh he will give me a rough old spin." So I went down and met him and after making sure we were still friends he said, "Where would you like to build?" And I said, "Oh south of the river if I could. I had been born in South Perth, so South Perth." He said, "What about Appin?" "Oh great, what have you got?" So he brought out this little bunch of cards and

04:30 I said, "How much?" He said, "59 pounds, 68 pounds." I said, "What are you talking about? Are they in a swamp alongside the glue factory?" "No." He said, "We got all this land ready for ex-servicemen for when they came back." So from 200 pounds I got a beautiful block at 57 pound, a half acre, a lovely slope and beautiful trees and all that sort of thing. So he was my friend after all.

So you got yourself a bargain?

Really

05:00 a bargain, in cash dividends, against what I had to do to warrant it, for six years was the other part of

the bargain, but nevertheless I got it. So we built it and it took a year to build because you couldn't get bricks until you had cleared your block, you couldn't get limestone, you couldn't get bricks, you couldn't get timber until you finished that, you couldn't get tiles, you had to do it in stages and it took a year. But I suppose that was because, timber, everything was short. So it finished in

05:30 1951. And he was my friend forever.

And you were married or?

Yes married in '48 and sold the house in 1981 because the children had gone. It was too big then and here we are. Other places. It served its purpose over and done with.

Have we established how you met Dulcie?

We never mentioned

06:00 it. I think we better start talking about it now.

I think we better, yeah. She won't be pleased at all.

Wow, wow here is a story. This is, oh yeah, you want some romance with this lot, don't you?

Yes please.

Well before the war, two friends, Bill Moss and Bill Potter, were from the navy, and as soon as we got back from the war we were friends again. But during the war they were both into storage in the Mediterranean. Every time I went into Alex, Alexandria, hoping

06:30 to find them they were both fighting at sea somewhere. Every time I came back Potter's ship was on guard outside the Alexandria harbour. I never saw them until we got back. We joined up again and we used to have lunch every Thursday somewhere around the town. We all worked in the city. And one day in this restaurant which is called the Seeker, down in Wellington Street, it was really a registry putting on light meals for people working in the city,

07:00 and I went see this girl in the white hat, and I said, "Moss, cop have a look at this, wow." I knew one of her friends that she was at the table with, so on the way out I said to this friend that I had met somehow, "Who is that girl in the white hat?" She said, "Forget that, she is out of your area." Because we were on petrol rations to get petrol tickets, she said, "She is out of your area, you have got petrol tickets to find her, so forget that lot." So I had to scrounge around to get petrol tickets to get

07:30 down from Fremantle to find her, didn't find her then at all. We then went to Rottnest in the little boat that my brothers and I had, we went over to Rottnest and I had a girlfriend there somewhere, and one day we had a little dinghy, we used to scull the dinghies with a single sail over the stern. You don't know about that, do you?

Yeah I do.

Do you? Oh, good. Good man. Not many people do. We sculled the sail and he said, "Come with me I'm going up to Government House to meet so and so." And I said, "Oh I'm supposed to be going up to Bathurst

08:00 Point to meet Helen." He said, "No, no, come up this way." So I went up that way with him and there sitting at the top of the steps was this girl in the white hat waiting at the top of the steps in Government House. So we linked up. And that was it, and here we are still together, that is only 55 years ago.

Sounds like an apparition.

Sounds like what a white hat will do.

And what about a career or a profession then, what did you choose for yourself?

No, no, unfortunately, well fortunately not unfortunately,

08:30 as I said that story before because Dad couldn't keep us all at college we all had to leave at junior and start ordinary work around the town as clerks or whatever. My two brothers did accountancy and they went on fairly well, but I then went from pillar to post in sales organisations, did fairly well and I think I was a bit busy sailing around the world and playing hockey around the

09:00 world. That was more interesting than study. So I did that very successfully, and then built up a number of businesses quite successfully in later years and that involved me in a lot of travel, a lot of time working in America and Holland, around the Pacific. I built up a company here of which the headquarters was in Holland,

09:30 but I pioneered new methods for them and they gave me the right to. I was the biggest user in the Pacific of this product. And then they sent me around the world to teach other people to do what I had done. They produced a product which they thought was domestic, and I could see the enormous opportunity for it in the commercial world in all the commercial building. So I turned into commercial world and it was extraordinarily successful. So they sent me around the world, and even to America,

10:00 to teach them how to enter the commercial world. That was the battlefield, they didn't want to listen to an Australian teaching them what to do. So I had a chance to tackle a very big job, which they were building a big headquarters for Nike in Portland, Oregon. So they sent me over there to meet the people and I got the order, the big order for the whole of new Nike headquarters in Portland, which was exciting.

10:30 And then came back here and was going very well. The Dutch took fright. The two senior manufacturers on the east coast, or the west coast of the States were suddenly under their very noses, and bought out by the opposition, and they took fright and thought, "If we don't buy other major manufacturers now we'll lose them." So they said to me,

11:00 "We're going to buy you out." I said, "I don't want to be bought out." And they said, "Too bad. If you don't let us buy you out, you won't get our product, so you'll be broke anyway." So they bought me out here. But it was pretty successful and wonderful fun.

What was the wonder product?

The thing called verosol, it is still here. They succeeded in impregnating a transparent fabric with aluminium. A permanent

11:30 transfix of aluminium. The aluminium outside had tremendous thermal performance in that it reflected a great amount of the sun's heat. But you still had your view through it. So they had it for a domestic product and I saw with Billy in Perth because I knew every architect because I sailed and played hockey with them. I said, "We've got a product here that will revolutionise your handling of windows and sun loads in Perth." So I did practically every building in

12:00 Perth. Because they had no other product to touch it. That is why they sent me around the world teaching other people how to do the commercial application of this product. And at this moment, I have been out of it for 20 years, I look like doing some deals with verosol into China and to the Persian Gulf, because I'm the only one that can still I think handle the commercial side of it. So that

12:30 might take place within the next year.

So you are still keeping busy huh?

Very busy, I've got a lot to do, no time to sit about doing nothing.

You had plenty of time for sailing though I understand?

No, I'm not sailing this year because for certain reasons. You might know the boat owner, but he had a… He seems to want to have with a lot of women on the boat,

13:00 as much as I admire, like women. There'd be 10 women and about two blokes, and they would take over and the boat would go out of hand, I found it, and it was becoming unpleasant. And there was no real sailing knowledge and sailing application and experience that I had. So I lasted a year and then I didn't go back this year. I will go back again one day when it suits me to some other boat. You are sailing, apparently, are you?

No.

Windsurfing?

No, I've

13:30 **sort of had a bit involvement with powerboats and I've done some yachting and I spent a lot of time sailing around Rottnest.**

Oh did you, did you, on launches?

Yeah mostly on launches yep.

Well we did the Bunbury race last year with one girl on board and 4 blokes, 4 blokes. And then there was a girl and I weren't seasick, the rest were stacked out of their minds. Then we said, "We better take up a reef in the main." It looked about

14:00 30 knots and we are bashing we are going to Bunbury. So we put a reef in the main and it split, so we brought it down to the second reef, which is a very small mainsail, and that held with a mortgage. So we are handling the conditions and by 4 o'clock in the afternoon it was very rough and the sea breeze is 30 knots. It built up to a very big sea and everybody is sick except the girl and myself. And then we started to take water, and I was on the helm,

14:30 not long before dusk, the sun was just setting on the western horizon and I thought, "We either got to sail through the bottom or whatever, you take your pick, because she is taking water. A few people are sick. If the breeze died away you can't unleash the mainsail again because it is torn. We can't sail with a pocket handkerchief on a light breeze." So we tossed up and said, "We'll go back to Manto." And we got back to Manto about 10, and a beautiful harbour down to Manto we didn't know about. I went

15:00 to get my gear out and it had been underwater all day so I had no gear to sleep in, so I sat and waited for dawn, and then we sailed home in the sunshine. I am not really keen on going back to that boat, no. I

like the adventure of the ocean racing, doesn't matter what happens it's an adventure. But on board here it must be 7 women on board, as I say, sometimes two or three of us, and you can't sail the boat, you can't apply your knowledge

15:30 or your experience, because they'd grab it out of your hand and they are doing something else. You don't want to cause a fight, so better to disappear. So when I'm ready I will find something else.

You mentioned today, Peter, that you sailed around the world?

Yes.

Was that on this yacht or?

No, no, no, no. It was way back, I had a yacht here called Thea, which was very fast Sabot, 45 feet. And I did a fair amount of ocean racing.

16:00 I created the Geraldton race because I was cruiser captain at the south of Perth. Because we had no races left that we could use because all the clubs had I took and want to Geraldton and did the organised the Geraldton. And then prior to that I linked up with Alan Bond when he built the first Apollo and I said, "Do you need me?" And he said,

16:30 "Right, step aboard." so we took her straight to Apollo 1, a beautiful ship. It was Ben Lexcen's first ocean liner. So we took her to America and sailed in the Newport Bermuda. Called the Onion Pat series around New York, round Long Island Sound and eventually finished up at Newport and then prepared for the Newport Bermuda. And then sailed back and that was absolutely magnificent.

I bet.

We stayed.

17:00 We didn't sail home. We stayed on Bermuda for a couple of weeks. We all had a little motorcycle for towing around the island and we had picnics over at Horseshoe Reef and the eclipse with the band playing. And people would dance on the beach and it was all pretty good and we sailed her home. That was another big adventure. If you want to hear about that ask me.

I'm asking.

I was navigating to come back because the bloke who had been in America, navigator

17:30 named Mel Smith, was a great American navigator and he did the race. But I had to bring her back. And we set out from Bermuda and we never saw the sun. I had seconds or sun shots, there was no way of knowing where we were except I had a system up from Nantucket. They used to send out beams across the Atlantic. And each beam had a different signal on it.

18:00 If you could listen and count the signal you might know which beam you're on. And a signal consisted of a combination of dots and dashes, you had to count the dots and dashes and try and work out which ray you're on. Well I sat down below with the headphones on until I nearly went bonkers trying to find out which ray we were on and where we were in the middle of the Atlantic, it was a long way back. And

18:30 it was pretty difficult. In the end I found that if I could take the time between the change of sequence and put that across two rows, I might have an idea where we might fit in to which beam from Nantucket. So eventually I noted the change of colour of the sea and I noted a big smudge on the horizon ahead. We are hitting land anywhere from there to there somewhere, from Philadelphia

19:00 to Boston we are going to hit America. Eventually this bloke said, "No, no. I saw something happen at sea." I said to a bloke named Bill whatsaname on the helm, "Give me 5 degrees more rudder, 5 degrees increase, from 270 to 275 degrees." He said, "What are you talking about 5?" I said, "Do it." So he put the 5 degrees on and eventually the bloke who was skippering,

19:30 Ryan said, "Give up. You don't know where you are." I said, "Yes, I do." I said, "Ask that fishing boat that is going past." So I said, "Ahoy there." He said, "How are we standing for New York Harbour?" The magic word, "Right on the button, bud." I was sailing right in the middle of, because the ships, I saw ships I saw appearing across the horizon were peeling north across the Atlantic and south down to Florida, dead in the middle had to be New York Harbour. And I sailed straight in, straight up the middle.

20:00 And they couldn't get over it, the greatest fluke of all time.

Did they eat their words?

Mmmm?

Did they eat their words?

Of course he did. He couldn't, he said, "5, I wondered what that was." I said, "Bill I'll tell you secret. I knew where the ships were coming over the horizon." They came up and they'd split, dead in the middle was New York Harbour. So his 5 degrees was, anyway that was a thrill to do that and great sailing. To sail into New York Harbour and report to the coast

20:30 guard, you know, Australia Apollo reporting into whatever whatever. When we arrived there, I went over to New York ahead of the system with another bloke to prepare for Apollo to be you know looked after, but she was late, she was caught in a strike in Santa Cruz so I had to try and find how I was going to get the ship

21:00 off the freighter and to the start line for the first race and luckily I had a mate that was on the board of New York Yacht Club, he got me into New York Yacht Club with my own room. Which is like being in Buckingham Palace, I can assure you. I used to meet him every day and he'd tell me how the ship was going. Eventually he said, "You are not going to make it, you are going to have to take the crew down who hadn't yet hadn't arrive, drive them down to Philadelphia. The ship is coming up from Philadelphia.

21:30 Unload it there and try and sail it to the start line in time." So I had these huge charts of America and I could see they had these inland canals, and there was a possibility of getting inland on motor with the mast down, from Philadelphia to New York except for one place with a bridge that we couldn't have got under. So I had to give up and we had to decide we will sail her back. So the crew arrived and I drove the whole crew down to Philadelphia and there was this freighter with the Apollo on the deck.

22:00 And it was 4.50 and I said, "I will go up and get the longshoreman to unload it for us." So I went up to the longshoreman, who was the same as our maritime unit, and he said, "We don't talk to nobody but. We don't work here until tomorrow morning, bug off." They weren't going to do a thing until it was 5 o'clock and nothing could induce them. So we went down and we got the ship's owner to lift it up and we cut the frame off it while it was hanging over the side, and the water was flowing past about 5

22:30 knots. So we gradually got this frame off and dropped it in the water and sailed down to Delaware. And the ship that down the Delaware was enormous to get her around the corner, refuel at some fishing place, and then I sailed up past Atlantic City, could see the lights of Atlantic City. And in New York Harbour was big excitement. I passed the statue across the harbour and had to get into a little…

23:00 You can get out of the harbour into Long Island Sound, a little gap, you know, just wide enough to get through. So we sneaked through there and got through to the Manlik house. As you came through in darkness, it was fairly thick fog, we were just putting along with the motor. I was navigating I had all the stuff worked out, we came past the end of Idlewild airport or Kennedy airport. And these huge monsters were coming in at the end of the

23:30 runway, just their lights coming out of the fog, missing the mast by about two feet and hit the runway, with the danger exposed by a 747, pretty exciting. So we got through into the Manlik and there we prepared for the races. We were there on time, just.

Had you ever considered in enlisting in the navy?

No. I have to ask myself why, and many people have asked me why. Probably had I not gone

24:00 into the 3rd Field Brigade for fun, I might have gone into the navy. I loved flying and I loved boats. But I think I got into the 3rd before the war, that is the direction I took, so that is where I stayed. Also I have a saying now since the war, whatever I did, I did it right because here I am and I'm alive. Had I gone to the navy, a lot of them got sunk. Air force got shot down. I'm here and I'm alive, don't ask any questions, that's the way I

24:30 like it.

Well, despite the danger, you still managed to have a lot of adventures in the army?

Yes of course, yes just being there was an adventure because it was an adventure. Hideous as it might have been in parts, it was part of an adventure. Remember being in an army in wartime, there were short periods of very intensive excitement followed by long periods of

25:00 boredom. When you go back, when you move somewhere else. Fortunately for me I was able to make the boredom into something very, very exciting. Like my time in Beirut, skiing in Syria, meeting people in Cairo. Sounds like a piece of cake [easy] for war but I made it happen that way, the time we were in action whatever it was.

Heavy traffic out there.

Yes. I remember

25:30 short periods of intense activity, followed by long periods of boredom can tell you what being in an army is like in peacetime. But I am here to tell the tale and that is very important.

Well the contrast between some of the adventures that you have had and some of the adventures I have heard from other veterans that I have interviewed and their action that they have been involved in it is just unimaginable, it's…

It's unimaginable, you can't imagine, you can't

26:00 imagine whatever your little piece of war might be. Those blokes you have spoken, to whatever track they were on, my little piece in the gun pit with stuff coming over it was full bore, and you are firing back with everything you've got. The intensity of action, and intensity of fear of everything stirred up,

you just do it until you are off your brain probably. And each one of those blokes did something like that

26:30 in a different situation. Mine was just my gun pit and my piece of war. Each one in a different circumstance with that but the same intensity, isn't it?

And with contrast to your piece of war, the opportunities that you had for adventure and the people that you met and the romance is stark contrast to that gun pit.

Oh, magic contrast, wasn't it?

27:00 **That contrast has actually offered you a lot of positive experiences.**

Yes it has. I think in my own summing up, the fact that I spoke French and got me into the situation in Cairo with these families was

27:30 actually dream time. Nobody could have fluked what I fluked, the homes, the people, the cars, the entertainment, the young ladies, the daughters of the families who invited us, the way the table was set up. As a matter of fact the first lunch I went to was Monsieur and Madame Dabbah, was a sumptuous table with our, like a

28:00 red tail bush and a white and a red sash around the middle serving the food. As a matter of fact at that stage I hadn't just turned 21, I hadn't drunk until then, this day in Gazira, I said, "Yes I'll have a can of this beer." Whatever, and it was magic, it was my first ale. And we had a bloke with us who from another country, who shouldn't have been there.

28:30 When I say that, deserved to be entertained, but he was out of his depth. He virtually licked the plate. He did the things that were, did things at the table which were very embarrassing from a normal social point of view. Then when it came to the do, the host Monsieur and Madame Dabbah gave us a cloth each to inhale to break away the tiredness over the beer and the lovely lunch.

29:00 He did that and rubbed it on his head and said, "Have you got a comb?" Anyway, we didn't have to meet him again. He went back to his own country somewhere. We made a mistake one day when we were asked to meet Monsieur and Madame for tea, and tea for us meant dinner, when we got there there was a sumptuous row of cakes on a trolley and young Doris was there, whatever her name was, and the three of us, and they entertained us

29:30 beautifully. I was saying to myself, "I better not eat any more of this cream cake. I won't be able to eat the dinner." A little while later they said, "You'll have to leave now because we've had tea and we've got people coming for dinner." Tea? We thought we were going to have dinner, and that was very embarrassing, not to know, and we had to excuse ourselves and leave full of cream cake.

30:00 I told you about the picnics in the pyramids, I told you about, all of that happened. Because French was so easy for me. I am just eternally lucky and eternally grateful. It was a piece of cake.

What about the action you experienced did you take any positive learning from those experiences?

From the action?

Yeah.

30:30 The war time action?

Mmmm.

The fighting.

The fighting.

No. I guess one thing I taught was at all costs, that the Germans must be beaten, if that is what they are going to mean to humanity and we play our part, then let's beat them and do it to the best of our ability with what we had, with just our guns and our hands and whatnot. Yeah a great feeling. No way could we visualise them running the world.

31:00 Nor could anyone else.

How do you think that that fighting has changed you as a person?

Fortunately, I would like to think not, but I don't see myself as other people see me. People would say I'm pretty aggressive when I want things done. I am aggressive when I see people standing around saying, "We should be peaceful and not fight." I say, "Okay

31:30 you sit here in your house and the door bursts open and the Japanese come in, they rape you and stab the kids and burn the place, is that what you want?" You only say that by protecting it and I am very adamant peace is very fragile, you've got to fight to protect it. And don't let any person come to me and say, "Oh you're all right because you fought the Germans." I fought the Germans because they were not going to run this country and run my

32:00 people. They were hideous. The Nazis were a hideous regime. I don't know how much you have read of it or you but what they did to gain their way was extremely hideous. And to have a hand, even the most minute hand having fought that, yeah I'm intensely proud and nobody will

32:30 take that away. I've said the same thing about the Japanese, what they did to people, to China, whatever they did. What they did to Iraq people. Would they let that come here? Now it is going to be who's next now, the communists have gone now it is going to be the extreme Islamic. They are saying we want to get rid of the west, we don't like what you are doing. We are going to beat them too, we are not going to beat them by being nice

33:00 and shaking their hand. They are dreadful extreme terrorists. Lucky I can't imbue it on people or I would have to go again, wouldn't I?

If then, if war then is the extreme example of fighting for what you believe in or what you believe is right or yours, has that area of belief taken to other areas of your life?

That I've taken?

That you have taken into other areas of your

33:30 **life, on a lesser extreme sense, perhaps business or?**

Oh yes yes yes.

Sailing even?

Sailing. Not so much there because the rules are pretty strict. But I feel that this house breaking and burglars going on, if you break into this house you've got to kill me. This is my house and it is nothing to do with you. The fact that you can break in and climb over that fence and bash in that window and take what I've got, no I'll screw your neck. I'll kill you, or you might kill me

34:00 but I'll kill you too. Don't you touch what's mine. Now is that my army training? What do you think?

Possibly, were you a competitive person before you entered the army?

Yes yes yes competitive. That is why I got into the Australian hockey team I think. I had to be better than other people around me.

Did we explore that very much earlier?

Did you, the Australian hockey team.

Yeah?

We were too busy dancing in Cairo.

34:30 I have a little a little over, one of little medals over there has got my 8th Army clasp. Which to be in the 8th Army under Montgomery was a big deal for a soldier. To have a clasp, an 8th Army clasp, big deal. I say to my children when they say, "What is that for?" I say, "Because I was the best belly dancer in Cairo." "Were you really?" "Oh was I ever." I don't think they believed me but I tell them.

What does that clasp mean to you?

35:00 Intense pride. Would you pass me those medals over there, can I do that?

Sure.

The big, the biggest means that is the Pacific Star which means from 1939 to 1945 Pacific Star

35:30 up here, and the stars are for ordinary soldiers, are the major medals to have. They represent campaign and areas. And that is the colour of the Pacific. And the Africa Star which is a sand of the desert with the army in the middle, navy and air force, but the desert sand. And that is the Africa Star, but the clasp is for having been in Montgomery's 8th Army.

36:00 And to be part of the 8th Army, which was what was won at El Alamein, is so significant to us. And not really belly dancing. You are too old to listen to that, aren't you? And then you come to the other stars across here, the medals for various things, and this one was because I served before the war and then I served in active service, counts as double time.

36:30 And then I did a couple of years after. It adds up to 15 years is an official declaration, which is for being a good boy in a class. The others are for campaigns going from the highest down to the lowest and the others I passed to, what happened they issued the 1939–1945 star and then war continued. We still had active service and had to get 45 to the next level so we got the next one which is over there. Would you like to get that one?

37:00 And know which one it is.

Do you march on Anzac Day?

Oh very much, very much so, very much. Yes that is the continuity, that is the next part of the Africa, so

it went onto 45 to the South-west Pacific side. So that is really a continuity. So the stars are the main thing as far as we are concerned and that one in particular

37:30 you would like to hang onto because you won't… When we were pulled out of Egypt and back into Palestine and being prepared to come home, Montgomery and the other bloke who was chief then, General Alexander, wanted to pay a contribute to the 9th Division. So we had the whole division paraded on Gaza airstrip

38:00 and marched 200 abreast passed the saluting base of Alexander. And they were intense moments to really see a division parade. But he said, "Of all the things that happened, I am proud to have 9th Division under my command." And there are a lot of points to remember by, that was significant, so there we are.

What does Anzac

38:30 **Day mean to you, Peter?**

Anzac Day is a tribute to everything that is meant for the men have fallen as Australians wherever, and a pride in their achievement and a pride to be able to march down the street and look at the public and say, "Yes, we are part of this. We want you and the children to be proud, not of the war

39:00 but of what we did to preserve this place." Anzac Day is extremely important as a gesture. And this year we've got to march the other way because the esplanade has been taken up with the new council house and whatnot. Instead of marching westward, we've got to march eastward down to Langley Park. But it will be just the same, the spirit is there. And also in recent years, the children in the street clapping and cheering and putting their hands

39:30 out to touch you, it is very, very rewarding and very warming, as though they are trying to say, "We respect and understand what you are and what you've done." And we want them to feel, we want them to feel the intensity, in this country so they can hang onto that. Anzac Day means a whole heap.

Just the image of them reaching out to touch you is a beautiful image.

It is marvellous, I always try to march on the side file, the

40:00 kids I want to wave back to them, and say, "Yes, I love you and I love what you are saying to me." And then when they touch your hand, that is incredibly warm.

It symbolises the legacy that you provided?

The which?

The legacy of your service.

It is, it is, it is. And I think in the last few years the crowds in the street have increased quite dramatically, the children in the street are dramatic.

40:30 And the feeling we are passing onto them, the sense of achievement and love for this country.

What do you think of children marching?

I mentioned it at a meeting the other day and it was 50/50. I said the people in charge decided not to make it holus bolus. If one wanted to come in and wear a father's medals,

41:00 but not holus bolus marching in the street, just for the sake of marching. I thought it would be good and they said, "No, not yet anyway."

I think we are very near the end of another tape there Peter.

Tape 9

00:31 It so happens that in my time in Cairo we spent a lot of time dancing at Groppis, the great international centre of great renown, and there I met a girl named Stella Diacayami. She had been the receptionist or the cashier at the Tokak, which used to provide food for soldiers, lovely meals. And she took me down to dance at Groppis and there in her best French

01:00 she taught me the song or song zo blong of zat zun dre and this is how I think it went. Remember we are dancing in Groppis.

\n[Verse follows]\n (SONG IN FRENCH)

01:30 (SONG IN FRENCH)

02:00 (SONG IN FRENCH)

\n[Verse follows]\n Au revoir although we are apart in the heart of me au revoir\n Au revoir as a song lingers on in my memory, so you are, always dear to me\n Like a star from afar you appear to me, so my sweet till we meet\n

02:30 Au revoir.\n

And that took me out of Groppis all around the world. I've had to sing that song for the regiment 4,985 times so that is why I remember the words so easily. And I remember once in Beirut before I learnt this song, we were in a little cafe first learning

03:00 the extraordinary internationality of some of the people. A little girl come over to me, she was about 8, she was about 8, she spoke in 8 languages and she sang songs that I had never heard before. And I thought, "How is this little girl of 8 able to sing and talk in all these languages and here we are in Australia fresh with English and maybe a little smucking French?"

03:30 I thought the whole atmosphere was marvellous. And in Beirut we used to go down to a lovely hotel built over the ocean and there we would be goggled eyed watching along the beach beside us ripping off their tops and baking in the sunshine and me

04:00 at 21 out of Perth, I had wondered what I had struck. Many years later I went back into Beirut, I got back into our old campsite up in the hills at Basama and there was not a trace left of where we had ever been, and not even a bootlace or a badge. This whole hillside was deserted and I thought this regiment occupied that site for so many months before we went

04:30 tootling across to El Alamein. But not a single piece of grass knew we existed there and I felt a touch of sadness from that. I am not sure what I was going to tell you next, but it has to be pretty exciting.

We were talking about this girl that could actually speak and sing in so many languages?

So many languages, yes. But there is something else more in my mind.

05:00 But the time in Cairo dancing on Sunday evening at Groppis, in town in Sunday afternoon going to little Groppis for tea and sandwiches was very sophisticated and very exciting. And when we left, we were out one day by called the Temple of Dead, which was a great temple they'd unearthed,

05:30 just in front of the sphinx. And a man called 'Gully Gully' man in Egypt, he was a bit of a magician and do tricks for you, and this man I had to pay a few piastres for information, I said, "What can you tell me we are Australian in uniform." He said, "You are going to take a long trip over the ocean." "You don't say."

06:00 So we thought we were going home. What else can you ask me?

Well I was going to say, what are some other songs you can remember from those times that for you really bring back to you some of the memories from your time?

I think I am losing a little bit of my voice.

Do you want to go for a glass?

No, no, what is gone is gone.

\n[Verse follows]\n No more will I see this starlight caress\n

06:30 your hair\n

no more feel the tender kisses we used to share\n that is wrong\n

I not too good

Start again.

\n[Verse follows]\n No more when I see this starlight caress your hair\n

07:00 No more feel the tender kisses we used to share\n

I close my eye and clearly in my heart remember\n A thousand goodbyes could never have the embers\n Darling\n I love you so, in my heart forever\n We'll

07:30 come back to those memories of those days that we knew before\n

Please come back to my arms\n We belong together\n Come to me lets be sweethearts\n Then we'll be apart no more\n No more\n No more\n

That is the end. There is not a single voice left. I can hardly croak. I

08:00 didn't realise how worn out it was.

That is fantastic.

Thanks for letting me try.

You've got a great voice.

I did have but it's worn out. Wait till I, I'll drink something see if I feel better.

Okay.

That was fun, but thank you for letting me try, it must sound, my voice isn't bad but I think it is a bit worn.

That was pretty fantastic.

Well I suppose I learnt to play ukulele when I was 17 at Rottnest and

08:30 I think I haven't improved much since then. But my brother who was also in the same regiment comes around tomorrow, every Tuesday night, and we sit here and we have a few beers, he brings his guitar and we sit here and play a few simple songs that we can remember. And that is fun to be with him.

Do you think that your love of music actually helped you through the war years?

Yes. Absolutely.

In what way?

Well I'm convinced that I picked up French so easily, but also

09:00 my sense of music and sound, it came so easily for me, it still does. And I feel that the association of ear and music is very, very close. And when I got round that piano with Doris Sadis and sang immediately, I could give out and make the mob enjoy it and make them come up and sing with us. And that transformed our stay in Cairo.

09:30 As I said, we were booked three and four weeks ahead. I don't know. We can't come. We'd booked with her and whether we'd booked and they sent cars out, and that was all because of music, music and fun. Yes I have a lot to be thankful for.

That is a bit of a sort of impressive thing to have when you want to impress girls?

Yes I was at a funeral the other day and a mate of mine from way back, he was a disaster this bloke. But his wife was so lovely and at the wake she said,

10:00 "And there was one song he used to sing and it was called 'Until we find that long lost goldmine in the sky'." I said, "I'll sing it." She said, "You'll what?" So I sang it right and that slayed them, she hadn't heard that sung. 'We will, dum dum de de de de dum

10:30 and we'll sit up there and watch the world go by when we find that long lost goldmine in the sky', and she said, "Thank you. I didn't know anybody else knew the song." So music was great and dancing.

Just want to ask you I think about the fleas was just a short one?

Oh it was a whole verse

11:00 I haven't even got a copy, it was printed in our newspaper and everything that could possibly go wrong went wrong in the flea bound bug bound desert and I don't know it, I never learnt it.

That is all right. I didn't know that.

I'll scratch myself if I, the fleas will bite you if I ever tell you about it. No that is long since gone. I guess also dancing. One day we were guarding Tripoli in Syria

11:30 and there was a tunnel had been built along the…, the called 'Corcheca' Tunnel. We had to guard both ends of the tunnel in case the saboteurs blew up the tunnel and prevented the trains coming up to northern Syria. And up on the top of the mountain was a little Arab village and one night we were invited up there because the Moktar was celebrating having his sixth son, and a son was so

12:00 important. So we stood arm in arm out in front of the village gate and did the shuffle to the little side to side that you've seen them like in Zorba and those things. So I learnt to do that pretty quickly. Wherever I went I danced or sang, actually whether they never liked it or not. I was never bashful about that.

12:30 I tell you what I haven't talked about, after sailing back from Bermuda. My family and I had decided to go and live in Europe for a year on a Greek island. I was walking down the middle of St George one day and Alan Bond came up and he said, "Hey, I want you." He said, "I think I am going to take the boat over to England, I want you to sail." I said, "Yes, sir, when are you going?" "I'm not sure." I said, "Well ring me when you get there and tell me."

13:00 So we went to England and living in London and we had the most incredible employment. I was a parcel packer in the French international railways in Bond Street, down underground. Eventually he rang and said, "You better get the boat ready, go over to France and organise how we are going to unload the boat in France." So I got time off and went across to France and organised with the ship's agent how we

are going to unload

13:30 Apollo in Dunkirk. In came the ship the Novogorod a Russian ship with on the foredeck, no on the cargo bay was Apollo and the captain in Russian said, “Do you take vodka?” So my mate and I said, “If you insist, we will take double.” He gulped it straight down. We couldn’t drink it. After about the fourth vodka I said, “If we don’t get off this ship

14:00 we’re never going to get that boat off.” So eventually we unloaded it, the crew turned up the next day, got them aboard, and we sailed back, back to Dunkirk back to Plymouth, not to Plymouth.

Dunkirk?

Not Dun, we sailed out of Dunkirk, back to the Isle of Wight, and that was another adventure. So then we had a month of sailing in all the races in the

14:30 Isle of Wight series, finishing with the, finishing with the great race to, see I’m so tired my mind is going as well, the Fastnet race, the race to Fastnet and back.

So what year is this, was this the ’80s?

I think that was ’72 when we did the Fastnet. And the most extraordinary race, we hit a storm on the way back, coming back from Fastnet back to Plymouth and we screamed home

15:00 100 miles an hour and came second, broke the prize record. But there was no prize second. We were beaten in my a bloke, an American eagle, a great American yachtsman who got to the front and beat us. So that was just another adventure.

So how annoying, so did you actually move your whole family over to England?

Yes. Yes we lived, we all had to go and get jobs, I said, “Out and get work whatever you can.” I was a parcel packer, my wife worked next door in

15:30 the it is called the where they book all the bookings for, I have forgotten the name. My daughter worked in Ciros, a jewellery shop in Bond Street. And my son worked at the (UNCLEAR) and we stayed for a year. Picked grapes in France. Adventures you would even begun to have believed about.

You

16:00 **dragged your whole family along with you.**

My daughter got married, she got married. She went down to Spain with her husband, new husband, and the three of us wandered through Europe, went down to Spain to get onto the pictures to be an extra in Spain. And then they had to come home. She had to come home to bring my son home. I decided to drive from Spain to Perth.

Drive?

Drive. I had a big new car

16:30 so I sent off from Bulgar in the north of Spain and just going eastward, eastward, eastward, and all sorts of adventures before me. Like the war broke out between India and Pakistan and I couldn’t get through so I had to. I was walking through Athens and I couldn’t get through and I found a little shipping company and they said, “Yes we’ve got a ship, the Ithmia, leaving Istanbul for Haifa and we’ll book you space on the deck if you can get there.” I had to drive flat out to get

17:00 out of Greece. And when I went to get my money on the Monday to get started it was a Monday holiday so the banks weren’t open. So instead of doing the trip in 48 hours I had to do it in 24, so I skeeted through the middle of Greece into Istanbul, got to the outskirts and it was about 2 hours before the ship sailed. And a huge crowd gathered around me as I had a great big car out of Stuttgart. And I opened the window and I held up a photo of the ship and said, “Does anybody know this ship?” And a bloke at the back said, “Yes

17:30 I know that.” I said, “Hop in.” He hopped in and he drove me to the wharf. Got me there, entered me on, they book you on freight according to the length of the car, it was a very long car. I said, “We better tell him in Turkish how much it is.” And the fellow got out a book and started to say according to length how much it is going to cost you. And I pulled all of the money out of my pocket put this pile, as he bent over the counter I took

18:00 half of it back. I said, “That is what the freight is going to be?” He said, “Yes you are dead right, that is what the freight is going to be.” So he loaded me up on the deck and there all the people going out to the kibbutz, out to Palestine, loved me because they could sit on the ship, turn the radio on and pretend they were driving down because we were going past all the cliffs, the Dardanelles, they thought they were tourists. That was fun. And they unloaded me in Haifa.

That is extraordinary.

A bit extraordinary, but then, I got

18:30 I had to take it down across the desert down to Alat, get ready to load on the ship which I did, and I was exhausted, I was at the end. Everybody, every bone in my body was beaten to a pulp by getting there. Car on the ship

Why were you on this time frame?

I had to catch this ship, it was the only ship I could get my car on. I couldn't get back across Burma because they wouldn't let you through. They'd shoot you and take the car or whatever, so get to that ship

19:00 and to get it away and then, go get a bus back to Tel Aviv and catch the plane was great. And I got into the airport at Tel Aviv and were there for about three hours, got on the plane, and as it took off they said, "We've just had a radio call. The Red Army are coming from Japan and machine gunned the whole lot of the airport and killed 26 people." And I got out, there was about I suppose there was 24 hours to spare. It made life exciting. They came in, the Red Army used to come in and

19:30 shoot up people. They came into a lot of airports and just skittled everybody in the terminal. And I got out the day before.

That is amazing.

I thought it is amazing too, that is why I'm alive to tell how amazing it is.

So is that how you eventually got yourself back to Perth?

Yes, yes. The thought of driving the full distance was great, except you couldn't get across Burma. They said, "Yes we'll charge you double the price of the car at the beginning and double the price at the end and we'll take the

20:00 car away anyway." If you tried to get it across Burma. That was the story then. So I got back in and because I had been away 15 months I got the car back in duty free, which was great, which was 15 months.

So there was no way to bribe yourself really through to Burma?

No you wouldn't, you couldn't even try it was too distant and too remote. Plus the war between Pakistan and India had broken out and I couldn't get through their either. So I sailed home and months and months later, this tiny little ship

20:30 had come down the east coast of Africa, my car on the deck which was nearly as big as the ship, it went on and on and all around the place, went to Tassie [Tasmania] and eventually it came back into Bunbury. And there was this piece of canvas flapping with my beautiful big car. I took her off and it was covered in grease and muck that I had put on it to protect it. A mate of mine was a builder in Bunbury and he got a hot steam gun and steamed all the grease off and there was my car underneath. So that is the end of my story.

21:00 **That is bizarre and what did your family think about you going on this drive back to Perth?**

They used to be on adventures everywhere. I was always on adventures somewhere. Wonderful things happened when I was a, do you want me to…?

Yeah, yeah, sure.

When I was a parcel packer with the French International Railways down below in Bond Street, in Piccadilly, because the bloke in charge was a cockney, a wonderful bloke who, he had been in Australia in the army, loved Australians.

21:30 And when I said I was going to work he thought it was great because he had Corsicans, he had a Corsican and an Algerian who hated each other bitterly and wouldn't work. So all his place was in a mess. So he said, "Kennedy you better fix it." So I took the Corsican and Algerian and said, "You are going to work now." So and in no time we were up to date. We were sending out French literature to all the travel agents around England. And we were up to date and ahead of schedule. So I went up to authorities and my best friend said, "I've

22:00 completely reorganised this whole department, for being six months behind and now in three months we are up to date. I want a raise." They said, "What? Nobody has ever asked for a raise in French, go away and come back in a week." I went back and they said, "Yes, we've decided." And they gave me an increase of 10 shillings a week, for having saved. Anyway that was fun to work, that was fun because Mick used to hide things in his apartment down below and we used to invite the French ladies to have cheese and wine all built into the

22:30 cupboard and we'd have parties, he could tap dance and I'd sing and he'd tap dance, he was a sword fighter and he would turn handsprings and we'd entertain for French ladies. I thought that was most necessary.

You've had this clear cut and drive for most of your life.

It had to be that or give in. That was a great episode.

So what happened after you came back into Perth, did you continue to sail on the Apollo?

23:00 From… I went back to… I think I was with National Mutual then. Did very well. Then eventually took over for verosol and built up a big business which took me around the world again, there was adventure somewhere wasn't' there.

You mentioned before Alan Bond [Australian yachting identity] quite a bit, how did you find Alan Bond?

Those days marvellous,

23:30 marvellous, because there was no hint then as things being wrong. Tons of money available. The boat that had been Lexcen's first ocean ship and we sailed it well, had a good crew, and it was fully liveable on board with all the luxuries. They went ashore, I was the interpreter for French customs and to meet the French people. We'd sail home. We used to change ships, and sail home on each other's ships and sail home for fun.

24:00 And there was a wonderful boat called Jita, Jita Katim, Jita the 4 and she was beating us a couple of times and we didn't like this too much. So at one stage we came back from France and in the admiralty series of the racing in various countries this boat Jita made a mistake and missed a buoy off the isle and lost points for France. So I sailed back with them,

24:30 Juan Pierre and all these fellows, and some of them sailed on Apollo. And I was saying to them in French, "Who was the nong nong that made the mistake?" He said, "It was me." And I said, "Who are you?" He said, "I'm Baron Edward Rothschild." I said, "How nice to meet you." So he gave us a party, he gave us a dinner for the crew, so fun wasn't it?

That has got to be a bit of fun a Rothschild party?

"Who was the nong nong who made this mistake?"

25:00 "Me." "Who are you?" "Baron" – Edward or Edmund – "Edmund Rothschild." And he gave a party for us.

Well you stuck your foot quite firmly in your mouth.

Did I ever, actually well normally it is the navigator or something that is reading the sailing instructions, but when he is the owner that made the boo boo [mistake] then we had every right to castigate him. Luckily I did it with gentleness.

25:30 So he gave us a great party. And then we were at another party for the Prime Minister Edward Heath, he gave a party and we were being… It is funny, you walk into the party and they do these tents so beautifully, walking down to the entrance all these people lined up and they were clapping as though you were a celebrity. And Heath was waiting up the entrance and we greeted him. And my son

26:00 came along, who was 16 with enormously long hair, and he went to kiss his hand – he thought he was a girl. That caused great upset in the family.

I am sure this poor child of yours still hears about it at Christmas?

Yes he knows about that.

You must have been pretty thrilled to have found out what that the Americas Cup was coming to Perth, or Fremantle?

Thrilled beyond belief. Because my time in America sailing

26:30 Apollo, when they were getting ready for the next, and they were preparing their boats and we used to have fun chasing their boats around the harbour in New York, in Long Island Sound, and race against them and thought, "Oh, they should be able to slap us down," but we coped with them fairly well. And somewhere there Alan got the idea of moving from

27:00 Admirals Cup or called the Onion Pats series up to taking on the Americas Cup was an enormous undertaking and fraught with difficulty as you've read since. By then the problems had started to develop. However when the first Americas Cup challenge, he took us all over as guests to live in this enormous mansion called Shustalux, you couldn't believe it. Everything laid on.

27:30 But we were beaten 1, 2, 3, and he had chartered an enormous liner called Captiva owned by some gross billionaire who had never been on it. Had a crew of five, a beautiful ship and we sailed on that every day. But it got more and more dismal every second, watch the boat would get beaten first, second. And the last race on the last day

28:00 wasn't a very strong day, strong wind. And we had pride of place in Captiva but behind the two boats, and Intrepid I think it was, I've forgotten, it was way ahead and poor old Southern Cross, sailed across our bow, across our bow not far ahead and in the dead silence a bitter defeat. Bondy [Alan Bond], he said, "Hey, cut and fortune, full speed ahead."

28:30 Well we ran that bloody thing just to bathe the mast. We might get something back on insurance, and

we erupted, we broke the sail, he broke the agony and a great party of defeat erupted by the time we got back into Newport we were all completely all around the bend. Because on board all the sponsors, of teachers, of champagne, all this stuff was on board as much as you could drink as there just as the sponsors. But the party back home of defeat was quite big, it took us days to recover. And that was the end of Apollo,

29:00 the end of Southern Cross.

Did you partake in any of the festivities with sailing of the Americas Cup?

No, I didn't because I was on the committee here. But I couldn't go back again because of my business concern, and I certainly wasn't there for the big win, which would have been

29:30 beyond our wildest dreams. No, just the sheer celebration back here of having achieved it. To come from, what were we down, four, three down, or something to win the whole series was brilliant sailing. And only at the vital end on the last leg when we had caught up, no we were catching up on the downward leg, it was slightly faster, we were at one stage

30:00 whatever his name was, realised we were about to pass him. He put on a manoeuvre which he could come about and jibe onto the correct board and ram at us. We had to either pull back and lose or accelerate and take a punt. We accelerated and got her by about 10 feet. That was a crucial moment, and from then on he couldn't catch us. And way up on the last beat up to the finish line we must have attacked

30:30 20 times I guess, but he couldn't pull it back. But that moment when he tried to jump us on the way down was that close to defeat. So I enjoyed watching.

How did you celebrate it?

I think we went to a gathering with the mob at the club, something or other and probably had a few drinks, and we were all bewildered by the enormity of it. Nobody could believe that it could have happened. We'd come a long way from Tarakan, haven't we?

Yes.

I've forgotten where it was.

31:00 **I was just going to say, were you at all surprised when all the Bondy trouble started coming out?**

Well, I knew after some time, after my links with the Apollo, that things weren't right. But we never knew how bad, because I had come off the committee by then. And we knew enough from people around the town that things were not good. And when you read of it now it is quite disastrous.

31:30 I just know from my time sailing with him then, on first Apollo, when things seemed to be all right, was such joy and adventure that every yachtsman would give his right arm for. What happened subsequently, too bad. I wasn't part of it. But from my era there, big deal.

It just always seems such an incredibly tragic fall from grace when he achieved so much?

There were so many of them though.

32:00 Look at what has happened now with the HIH thing [corporate fraud resulting in the collapse of HIH], the S11[September 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre] thing, look this current thing in America now with the stock market, they ripped off billions. And now this thing in Italy [Parmalat being bankrupt] with a major company, billions. So if they think they can get away with it, they do. For us down at our level it looks disastrous, but it continues to happen. And for him, yes it was bad.

Well

32:30 **anyway I think we will just leave it there. But I just want to thank you so much Peter for talking to us today for the archives. I can hear your voice is starting…**

And thank you both for listening and enthusing me to keep talking and telling my stories. I am sure I have left parts of them out but I hope it has been okay.

You've been absolutely delightful, thank you so much.

I always go back to saying my part was so little. The others did so much.

33:00 The blokes, my friend Johnson who flew 47 missions in the bomber and lived, and he wrote a story called 'It is always lighter above the clouds", that is a big deal.

But what the archive is, is the story about everyone.

Correct, correct. Well thank you both so much.

Our pleasure.

Would you like a beer?

INTERVIEW ENDS