

Australians at War Film Archive

Malcolm Keshan (Mac) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

01:06 **Tell me where you enlisted and which battalion you joined up with and where you got sent.**

I enlisted at Paddington [Victoria Army Barracks] and I got my needles there. Then I was taken by truck to Ingleburn Army Base.

01:30 Originally I was allotted to the 1st Battalion. We received there our giggle suits as they used to call them, palliasses and we were allotted to huts in groups. I was there for about

02:00 6 weeks I'd say. There was Sergeant Major Jackson in charge of us. I was picked out to go to Menangle, to an NCOs [non commissioned officers] camp. I went there for

02:30 8 weeks. Then I was picked out and sent to the showground to be in the guard, so I changed over colours from the 1st AIF [Australian Imperial Force] to the 2nd AIF. I was there for two weeks.

03:00 Then they sent me back to Greta Army Camp. When I went to Greta they put me in the 2/4th Battalion. I was there for about two months and I got called up to the officer in charge and he said I'd been picked out to go to

03:30 an officers' school at Narellan. So I went again. Packed up and off I went to Narellan. I was at Narellan for about a month doing a course there at the officers' school.

04:00 I passed out there and they sent me back to Greta as a sergeant. They said my commission would come through, I went back there and the officer in charge told me "Don't go overseas because if you do, your commission might come through so quick. It's very hard to get to

04:30 go overseas. Get your position first and then go overseas." How do you not go overseas? You'd volunteered for the army and they say, "All right, you're going overseas," so what do you say? I can't go? Eventually we went overseas. Went on the ship Slamet.

05:00 and went to Bombay first off. On the way over we lost a man overboard and the ship stopped to try and pick him up and then the navy pulled up alongside and went crook at them for stopping. They were making a target out of themselves.

05:30 They said they'd look after the man, "Get on your way." We went to Bombay and had leave in Bombay. Then from there we went across to Palestine. In Palestine we were going up the Suez Canal and the boat pulled up and

06:00 they immediately issued orders, "No one was to go in for a swim over the side." The place was laden with sharks, the water was unhealthy and on no account was anyone to go in for a swim. With that, promptly a man was thrown overboard and everyone sang out "man overboard" and everyone went in for a swim.

06:30 When they got them all back onboard we went further up the Suez Canal and we landed and caught the train to go right into Palestine. We went to a place, no I can't remember the name

07:00 of it. We went up there and I was still in the 2/4th Battalion but I was attached to the 19th Infantry Training Brigade to train the men of the 2/4th, all the reinforcements when they come over, I had to train them before they went up to the battalion.

07:30 I was there for a month I think training these blokes. Then the war in England wasn't going so good and we had a railway unit over there. France had fallen, so they were to go to France.

08:00 So they couldn't go to France so they had to send them back to Palestine. When they got back there they hadn't had any, they were a railway unit and they hadn't had any small arms training or anything. So they decided to send me and others up to Nablus and train them. So we went up

08:30 there for about 6 weeks. Trained them. Then came back to, I think it was called Beersheba. I was there for a long while and [Jimmy UNCLEAR] must stay there. Beersheba was up here and down the road about five miles was the

09:00 4th Battalion. They hadn't gone into action yet. One day a plane came over, went across, down to Beersheba and down to where the 2/4th Battalion was and they start dive bombing it. We're all watching from our camp.

09:30 Everyone was ordered into trenches and the others said, "Don't do anything until I do, until I say so." So eventually the plane bombed the 2/4th Battalion and we were watching it. It turned around and started to come back towards our camp. It was flying over our

10:00 camp and I don't know who started it, but someone fired at it. Then it got all small arms fire all over the place, firing at the plane. It's going across the camp and someone said, "It's one of ours." It was one of ours and it was doing a mock attack on the

10:30 2/4th Battalion so they'd get used to it. We didn't know anything about it. When it came over our camp we all fired at it. Apparently, when the pilot got back to his base, his plane was riddled full of bullet holes. I stayed there for a long while and I trained soldiers, went on route marches and

11:00 went on leave to Tel Aviv and all those sort of places. I thought, "This is no good, I want to get back to the battalion." So the sergeants in a training battalion were a bit dicey on going up to the 2/4th Battalion

11:30 because when they got up there, they were reduced in rank and they had to work their way up again. Most of them weren't keen on that. I didn't care, I went up. I volunteered to go up and up I went. I joined the Battalion and fortunately for me there was a vacancy up of a sergeant, so they didn't reduce my rank.

12:00 I carried on as sergeant, platoon sergeant.. After training there with the troops I went from there to Mersa Matruh. It was a sort of staging camp on the way up.

12:30 I stayed there for a month and then we were shipped out to go to Tobruk and we went up through the Mediterranean and it was the roughest ride I'd ever had to Tobruk. When we got to Tobruk, they'd just got Tobruk and it had fallen. We

13:00 came into the harbour and there were wrecks everywhere. So they had to take us ashore by boat. We went ashore. Then we were taken up outside Tobruk, on the hills, which overlooked Tobruk. There was a supply camp there.

13:30 I was put on guard on the supply camp. During the night the Germans came over and they bombed Tobruk. I suppose it was a real exciting time when you weren't actually in the bombing,

14:00 but you were watching it happen all the time. I came out of the camp and I was on my own and I was watching what's going on. I looked down over Tobruk, it's all dark, you couldn't hear anything but the bombing. I was standing in the road and watching it going on.

14:30 Unbeknown to be, an anti-aircraft gun was coming up and it was right behind me and all of a sudden they let go and they opened up. Well, I got the shock of my life. I think it was one of the biggest shocks I ever got.

15:00 All the bombing was going on and all of a sudden something blows behind you and, anyway. When that was over, a few days later we took off to Derna. They had ridges over the roads, not over rivers,

15:30 because they had hills everywhere there. The Italians had blown all the bridges so we had to wait for the engineers to fix those up. We went on to Derna. When we got to Derna we came down into Derna and it had been more or less deserted by the Italians, they'd all gone off. So we went through Derna and

16:00 carried on and fought our way up to Benghazi. We got to Benghazi and dug in outside Benghazi. Then whoever was in command decided that our lines of communication were too long

16:30 and they didn't want to go any further. So we were there for a long while. We had leave. There was nothing to have leave for, because there was nothing there really. From there, eventually, we left here and I think the

17:00 7th Division took over from us and we came back to Alexandria for leave. We had leave in Alexandria. We were there for quite a while and when I got leave in Alexandria, I had four days,

17:30 and I'd seen Alexandria before. There was nothing there. Only shops and restaurants and you could have a bath and all this sort of thing. So I decided, we all knew, no one was supposed to know, but we all knew we were going to Greece. So everyone went on leave and there was a lot of AWL [absent without leave] and all

- 18:00 that. I got my leave and I had 4 days. So I went to Alexandria and I was in the restaurant there and I'm thinking "I might never get a chance to see Cairo if I go to Greece, so I'll go to Cairo." So although I was AWL going to Cairo, I didn't overstay my time.
- 18:30 I only used the 4 days. I flew up to Cairo and there was me and another corporal who decided to go with me. We flew up and we were the only two on the plane going up. We had our cameras hidden in our pocket, you weren't supposed to take any pictures or anything. Consequently I took pictures.
- 19:00 There was no one there to see whether I did or not. I landed in Cairo. When I got to Cairo I went down to stay at the Shepherd's Hotel. It was actually an officers' hotel and I got in an awful lot of trouble there because in Alexandria, when I went to restaurants, someone had stolen my hat and I only had a
- 19:30 side hat, which I didn't like. So I just stuck it under my lapel. I was wandering round there and I got pulled up very smartly when I went into the hotel and asked why I wasn't wearing it and "You'd better put it on or you'll get in trouble." So I put it on. While I was there I went to the pyramids and the Sphinx
- 20:00 and the museum in Cairo. Dreadful place.

Just for now, can you tell me where, after your leave, where you were then posted and the events leading up to your capture?

Then I went back to, finally

- 20:30 I flew back to Alexandria. I got back to camp on time, so I wasn't, the only way I was AWL was I went to Cairo and you got leave to Alexandria. There was nothing said because I was on time. Then we boarded a Dutch ship, I can't remember the name
- 21:00 of it. We headed for Greece. Had the best bread on it you'd ever tasted. We went over to Greece and we landed at Athens and we were camped just outside Athens. Then we got leave into Athens. It was short leave because things were starting to heat up over there.
- 21:30 I didn't get leave into Athens. Then they put us on the train and we went to a place called Larisa to guard an airport there. We were on guard there for about two weeks at the airport. Then, once again, they came and relieved us and took us up
- 22:00 by truck to, Greece, I don't know where we went. We went up to the trains and we boarded the train. We headed up to Vevi, which was right on the Yugoslav Greek border. They took us off the train at the finish, we passed quite a few
- 22:30 Greek soldiers coming back from their session of war with the Italians, I think, in Albania. Wounded were coming back. It was quite a few. The Greeks didn't have anything to fight. I think they had one rifle for three men and some had uniforms, some didn't. Dreadful. We got up to Vevi
- 23:00 and we embarked again. All the roads there were built up above the fields. We had to walk up into the hills and that's where we had to dig in and confront the Germans and stop the German advance. We got up there and
- 23:30 it started to snow. We weren't dressed for snow. We'd just come from the desert. We had uniforms on, but not shorts. They weren't dressed for the snow. We went up there and we dug in up there. Then we fought for 3 days up there. We couldn't
- 24:00 get anywhere. We were holding the Germans, they couldn't advance, but the trouble was with the snow, you used to dig your trenches and all this snow inside the trenches would melt and so the trenches were actually a target for the dive bombers. We had no air force. We never saw any air force. Not
- 24:30 at any stage. The Germans, when things got tough, they just called in their air force and their Stukas would come over and they'd dive bomb us. We sent out patrols here and there. This night we looked and you could see the Greeks were on either side of us and I think it was only
- 25:00 the 4th Battalion, a few Kiwis, a few Englishmen holding the Germans back because they hadn't reached their full potential then. You couldn't fire on them. If you started to fire on them, as soon as you started they'd call in the air force. These Stukas used to almost be able to drop
- 25:30 a bomb in a barrel. So you can imagine what they did with trenches. When morning came we looked over towards our left flank and the Greeks had gone. So we looked over to the right flank and the Greeks had gone there too. So we were just sitting up on this hill with
- 26:00 no one on our flanks. Eventually order came through to evacuate the position. So then we proceeded to evacuate. When you evacuate you had to carry everything. Your ammunition, which weighed a ton, and everything you wanted you had to carry because we had to walk back to a
- 26:30 picking up place where we'd got off to get into the hills. We had to go back there and they were going to pick us up and take us back. So the orders went. The lines of communication were cut. We couldn't communicate with anyone, it was only done by a runner. So our orders were, "Cover B Company and

- 27:00 when you get them out, pull out yourself and go back to be picked up." So we covered B Company. Eventually we headed off back to be picked up. We came down out of the hills and you've got no idea what the bedlam was. There was blokes everywhere without rifles, they'd thrown everything away and they were just
- 27:30 marching out. My blokes were sat down for a rest on the way up. They said, "What about this? This bloke's got nothing and we're carrying the lot." I said, "You can't do that. You can throw your tripods away and all the heavy stuff that you don't need, but you've got to keep your rifles. If you don't keep your rifles and you run into a German,
- 28:00 what have you got? You've got nothing." So they thought that was right. Eventually we came down and I left my lieutenant, Lieutenant Copeland he was, he said, "I'll go ahead and you come on afterwards when you've stopped for a rest. I'll meet you down the pick up junction."
- 28:30 So we went down to the junction on the road and there was a Major Barham there. They were just streaking up the road in disorder. So Major Barham said to Copeland, "Go up the front and stop them. We've got to get organised or we've got no chance at all."
- 29:00 So Copeland said to me "Look after Major Barham and I'll go up the front and I'll see you when you get there." The roads were built up quite high on the side. You couldn't go up the road because you'd get bogged straight away. With the snow it was all more or less mud and there was trucks and everything bogged in the fields where they
- 29:30 had gone off the road. There was no trucks where we were supposed to be picked up. Apparently it came through later on, that we weren't to go there at all, but no one knew it. So we were there and we were watching the German lines back further. There was no advance or anything like that.
- 30:00 All of a sudden a German came up on the side of a road. A German sergeant. He stood up. Where he came from, I don't know. The only thing I can think of, there must have been a drain under the road and he crawled up that drain and when he got out the other side he stood up. When he stood up he was in the middle of
- 30:30 the Australians. He called on Major Barham to surrender. With which, Major Barham and him fired at the same time and they both got killed. I don't know whether it was Major Barham killed him, because everyone fired at him. So then we were left without the officers or anything. So we headed up the road again. I was bringing up the
- 31:00 tail. I had a Tommy gun [Thompson gun] issued to me by the American army. I had three cylinders of ammunition and they weighed a ton, stuck in my pockets on my overcoat. We headed up the road. We're going up, and I'm more or less walking
- 31:30 backwards, just watching what's behind me. As I got along the road a voice said, "Put your arms down and turn around slowly." I looked over my shoulder and it was a German and he had his
- 32:00 gun trained on me. It all happened in a flash. You don't realise it, but to me it was slow motion. I'm thinking "What do I do?" I thought, "I can't fire at him because he's surrounded by Australians."
- 32:30 I'm thinking and he said again, and this is unusual for a German, "Put your arms down and turn around slowly." So I thought, "I've got no option." So it was a creek alongside the road so I just threw the gun out and I turned around slowly.
- 33:00 I was a prisoner of war. We marched, they took us up the road about 200 yards and here's the Germans dug in right across the road. The SS [Schutzstaffel]. They were all dug in. They went around taking watches and all sorts of things off blokes. Then they decided
- 33:30 they'd put us, there was no one to take us back, so they decided they'd put us in the field alongside them and just put guards on the outskirts. So there was approximately 250 men here. They pulled them in and fell in alongside them. We hadn't been there
- 34:00 long and over the hill, about a mile away, came British tanks, all British tanks. They just came over the hill, then they stopped and they started to open fire. We, being alongside the Germans, we looked like it was just a line of Germans, so they opened fire on us too.
- 34:30 They killed quite a few blokes there and they wounded quite a few. Copeland, who had got up there, where he got it from I don't know, but he got a white sheet and he's - and major Copeland started to wave
- 35:00 this white sheet, wherever he got it, so that they could see, trying to indicate that we were what we were. All he got out of that, he got shot in the back by the Germans. As soon as he started to wave it around they stood up and they fired at him and he got shot in the back. Fortunately he wasn't killed.
- 35:30 Eventually the tanks withdrew over the hills and they took us out again over the road and we were heading back. They had guards for us. So we're heading back down the road. A German anti-tank gun got up and he got off the road, onto the side. As soon as he got onto the side he got bogged.

- 36:00 There was about 4 men with the gun, trying to get up front and he's trying to dig it out and he couldn't get it out. So he said, "Hilfe." Everyone looked at him and no one done anything. He said in no uncertain manners
- 36:30 "Hilfe." Help to get his gun out. He got a very rude reply. With that he pulled out his pistol and he came up and he said, "You, you and you, help." So they helped him get his gun out. They had no option. Then we headed down the road and we came to Major Barham and he was
- 37:00 still just lying there. So we got permission to bury him. We buried him down there at the corner. Then we were marching back again under German guard. The Germans were really getting there in force and we were getting off the road and there was an endless stream of Germans coming down the road in transport.
- 37:30 That was the first time we saw the air force. They came over and they bombed the Germans. And unfortunately they bombed us too because that was at the start of the line. We had to scatter from our own air force. Instead of helping us.
- 38:00 They were the only, there was 3 bombers and they were the only 3 I've ever seen. They came over and bombed and we scattered as the Germans did, to get off the road. When they came back they had hit a truck, and the Germans were getting very upset. It looked like there was going to be trouble until the
- 38:30 German officer said to the bloke in charge of us "Get them out of here." So we had to march further up the road and on our way. We marched about 6 miles and it was getting late, getting dark. So the Germans came to a camp that they'd captured. It had
- 39:00 been a stud, and there was all built-up house and with the underneath part was where they used to keep horses. I don't know who took the horse, whether the Greeks took them before the Germans came or the Germans took them. They moved us in underneath the house because it was very close and easy to guard. They led us down there on the horses' straw for the night.
- 39:30 In the morning, up and off again.

Tape 2

- 00:41 **You were taken prisoner. Give us a list of the places you were taken after you were taken prisoner.**
- 01:00 Do I need to tell you all the places?
- Just tell me all the places now and I can make a list and ask more later in the interview.**
- The first place, we went back to Nish outside Belgrade. Then we went from Denische to Belgrade, then from Belgrade we went up to Budapest [Hungary] . They were going to march us through Budapest.
- 01:30 They were skiting about catching Australian soldiers, so they were going to do a demonstration sort of march.
- That was in Belgrade?**
- Yeah. Then we went to Maribor on the Austrian-Yugoslav border. From there, I went to Wolfberg.
- 02:00 From there I was taken to a stone quarry, punishment. From there I went to Gratkorn, it's a farm. There's quite a story about that.
- Were was Gratkorn?**
- In Austria.
- You were working on farms from here on?**
- No. 9 months.
- 02:30 From there I went to Spittal. And because they decided I was a bloody nuisance I was taken to Germany to a place called Hohenfels. When they took us
- 03:00 down they also said, "You'll like Hohenfels. It's an NCO's camp. There are Englishmen there, your own people are there. There's facilities there, there's sports." They said, "You'll like it there. But if you
- 03:30 escape you won't like where we send you." So we went back there. Eventually I escaped from there and I got back to the American lines at a place called Neustadt. They'd just taken it. They took me back to Nuremberg and from there the Yanks [Americans]

04:00 flew me across to England.

You were there when the war ended?

Yes. Piccadilly Circus.

There was one escape attempt from Hohenfels, which was [Stalag] 383?

No.

That was your successful escape. Did you attempt to escape from any of those other places?

From Denische, I made a plan for escape. Fortunately I didn't succeed

04:30 there. I still had my own men with me and we tried to break out there. We had no idea where we were going if we broke out. The Red Cross hadn't registered us so we weren't registered. If we got out the Germans could have just shot us and no one would have known anything. It didn't succeed. Then I went to Belgrade and I had another plan.

05:00 There were Serbs in there. There were Serbs in one side of the barracks and we were in the other. We decided, talked it over with a couple of fellows and decided that, they said they could get a boat. So we decided, they used to go out to work during the day, we didn't. So we decided we were going to change,

05:30 two of us, Sergeant Barry and me, were going to change uniforms with two Serbs, we were going to go out as Serbs, they had a boat, and we were going to go down the Danube River to Turkey. As they weren't very liked with the Turks, we had to do the talking when we got to Turkey, get to the British Embassy and get back to

06:00 Palestine.

Was that a successful attempt?

As we were about to, we organised it, we were going to do it the next day and they moved us out that day.

Sounds like they had inside information.

I got away from the farm. I was out two weeks there.

In Gratkorn?

In Gratkorn. Two weeks before they caught me.

06:30 I was very well fed there and I got almost all my strength back. When I escaped, I used to work on the farm and I had a free run of the place. I used to work through the day, you were only honoured not to escape during the day, but

07:00 I was locked up at night. There was just one guard for three men.

At the end of the war you came back to Australia. How long were you in the army after the war ended?

07:30 Not long. I was in England when the war in Europe ended and I had, I think I was in England for about 6 weeks. Then I came back via the Panama Canal. I got back here and I was discharged

08:00 almost immediately. Then I went to the tech and I learned ladies' hairdressing and I went into that. I used to get terrific headaches. So much so that I'd have to lay down till they went

08:30 away and then I got up and I'd start again. I went to the Repat [Repatriative Care] and they couldn't find anything wrong. The doctor virtually said, my own doctor, he said, "It could be the fumes from the hairdressing. How about trying something else?" So I got out of that and I went into dry-cleaning.

09:00 I started off as a pick-up merchant, I used to do home deliveries on a commission basis. I worked there for a couple of years. Then three of us went out on our own and we started our own drycleaner. We were bringing all the work in and there was just a fellow

09:30 and two others working in the, processing it, getting it clean somewhere else, doing the pressing and sending it out. Then one of them decided we weren't making enough money doing that so he wanted to get out. So there's two of us bought him out. Then we had a

10:00 partner got down in front of the boiler and he was adjusting it. There was a can in front and the oil was dripping into it containing the oil. It blew back and hit the can and consequently he caught fire. When he came out of

10:30 hospital, he was very badly burnt, he couldn't go near it at all, so he wanted to get out. So I looked round and I got a loan and I bought him out. I worked on my own from then on. Eventually I got

11:00 the whole cleaning plan together and I moved out to, this is Bankstown, I moved out of that and I built

my own place at Kingsgrove and went into dry cleaning there. In the finish, I employed seven men.

That's where you ended up in your business life?

- 11:30 Until, I kept going back to the repat for these headaches. I found that in there I was working the press and I found out that I was going to sleep, just a short period. I'd be working and I'd black out and
- 12:00 come around almost instantly again. So I went back to the Repat and they inspected me and done everything and they said, "No, you'll have to live with it." I went down to a specialist down at Kogarah and he had a look in my ears, and he couldn't understand why I'd gone deaf in one ear
- 12:30 and not in the other. They both looked alike. He said, "That's no good. We're going to look at it like this." CAT [computed axial tomography] scans had just come out. I went into there, I had a CAT scan and he put me into hospital straight away and I had a brain tumour.
- 13:00 They took the brain tumour out and when I came out I'd fallen down on this side of the face. After a while I decided I couldn't do dry-cleaning anymore. So I had to sell out. But I kept the factory and I just sold the business. I used to go up there every now and again and
- 13:30 just see how things are going and I wasn't very pleased with the way it was going. The bloke that was running it wasn't running it right. He wasn't doing anything right according to me, which was right, because eventually he went broke.
- 14:00 Then when I eventually got all my gear out I rented it out as a funeral parlour.

Was there any lingering

- 14:30 **effects from your war experience that affected your health later in life?**

Yes. They decided the brain tumour had been caused, one of my escapes I got hit in the face with a rifle. I had a broken nose. They decided that and the cold weather, I think they said it was cold weather, was the

- 15:00 cause of the tumour.

We'll come back and talk about that.

When I got out I was finished, I had to retire more or less.

How long ago was this?

1979.

We'll go back now to the very beginning.

- 15:30 **You grew up in Carlton. Tell us about Carlton in the years when you were young**

I can't tell you about Carlton because I was very young there. I moved to Ashfield eventually. Eventually I moved to St Peters and I went to Cleveland Street School. The Depression was on and things were very tough and my parents were having a hard time. I left school

- 16:00 when I was fourteen. I went to work at Hotel Australia. I did learn a lot there.

This was in Martin Place?

Yeah. Was there, not now, it's gone.

What images of the Depression do you remember from St Peters?

- 16:30 We had a fruit shop there and when the Depression came along it went bust. We'd go out of the shop and moved down the road into a house and it wasn't very good times then. My parents couldn't afford anything.
- 17:00 I think I went to a film once with my auntie. They just couldn't cope. It's all sort of running into. I don't know.

Tell us about your parents. What was your father like?

- 17:30 He was a good person. He had a short leg, one leg shorter than the other. He was very strict. He used to be the sales manager of Toohey's Brewery before he bought the fruit shop. He was an accountant.
- 18:00 No, I don't know how else to describe him.

How much was he around when you were a young boy?

Average I suppose. He used to go to work and come home, we'd see him then..

- 18:30 Actually, he joined the army even though he had a short leg, because he was an accountant. He was in

the pay office doing work in there. He was a sergeant.

This was during the Second - ?

Second World War, yeah.

Had he any experience in the First World War?

No. He wouldn't have been

19:00 accepted as a soldier. Because he'd go into the pay division.

What connections did you have in your family with the First World War?

I had an uncle who I was named after. He was named Malcolm McLeod Keshan. I was named after him. I've got his photo there.

19:30 He was a lieutenant. That's about the only one really.

Was he the uncle you were to stay with?

No, I never knew him.

What about your mother?

He was killed in France.

What sort of a woman was your mother?

Very religious

20:00 person. A caring person. I suppose hard-working you'd say. She used to work at the Hotel Australia before me. She got me in there. She used to go along as a cleaner and work during the night

20:30 most of the time. Hotel Australia was a good place to work and it wasn't. When I started to work there I used to just give my pay envelope to my mother because they were having a hard time. I got enough tips so I used to live awfully well.

21:00 My uniforms were made to measure. I was inspected every day to see that I was dressed right. I wasn't just a bell boy, you had to live up to standards. The only thing wrong with it was it was shift work.

21:30 You could be working in the night time or working from the middle of the day well into the night. Really, you didn't get much time to yourself because all the time you're not going to work you go and sleep. I used to go to the beaches and all that sort of thing.

How old were you when you went to work at the

22:00 **Hotel Australia?**

Fourteen.

What did your job involve as a bell boy?

That's it. Bell boy. You carried the luggage and all that sort of thing. Take people up to their rooms and in the slack period, clean the bath. It was really a good job.

Describe what the hotel looked like.

22:30 It was a big hotel. You could get anything there. I don't know how you'd describe it. It wasn't like an ordinary hotel. It did have a bar in Martin Place, but that was separate from the hotel. It was about

23:00 eight stories high. Had a commissionaire, porters and about 6 bell boys.

23:30 It was a very exclusive place. When the boats used to come in all the passengers used to come there. It was the place to go. While I was working there, there was Ushers Hotel across the road from us. The manager of Ushers came over there and he said, "If you ever want a job, come over and see me,"

24:00 for no reason at all. I did work at Ushers for a while. I got out it because of the shift work and I decided that I wanted something where I could get more time for myself. So I just wanted to go into a trade. When I went out of the hotel I'd get a job at a hotel

24:30 anywhere because I'd been at the Hotel Australia. I went down to the clothing place and I got put on there as an apprentice to learn the clothing trade. I worked there for a day and a half I think and came in on the lunchtime and

25:00 the boss came along and said to me, "Get a bucket and mop. Right, mop out the ladies' toilets." I said, "What?" He said, "Mop out the ladies' toilets." I said, "You've got to be kidding." "No," he said, "that's part of your job."

- 25:30 "No way," I said, "I didn't come here to mop out ladies' toilets," so I walked out. Across the road was a private hotel so I went over there and I showed him my reference in the Australia Hotel and they stepped me up straight away. So I kept looking around, then I went down to Dymocks, the bookshop.
- 26:00 I decided I'd try there. So I went in and I got the job there sure enough. Lunchtime came along and he came along with a list of lunches. He said, "Now go down the road and you've got to get these." No way. So I walked out on that.
- 26:30 Then I went to L. C. Smith's, the typewriter people and I was there for 6 months. Then I don't know how I got the call, I got a call from this Ushers Hotel. So I went up to see them. I was put on straight away and then
- 27:00 after a few days the manager said to me, "I've got a cloakroom on the first floor. I want someone to run it. I'll rent it to you for," some very small amount. He said, "You don't get any wages. What you make there is yours
- 27:30 and that's it." He just went out. So I went along with that for a long while. Then I was very good. I used to go down to Woolworth's and buy a handkerchief and combs and all things like that. I used to take them up and sell them and I used to sell them to the customers for twice the amount. At least. Eventually I got sick of that because of the shift work.
- 28:00 You were starting in the middle of the day and you were working, sometimes, till the middle of the night. So I decided to get out of that. So I went looking around again and I went to Grace Building and they'd advertised for a lift driver, so I thought, "I'll do that in the meantime." So I went there, I was
- 28:30 a lift driver. I must have been there 6 months and I met Dorothy. She was only fourteen at the time. I didn't know.

How old were you?

18. That's where we met and

- 29:00 we've been together ever since.

What would you do together as a young couple in the late 1930s?

Swim, ice skate, she wasn't allowed to do very much because she was fourteen. I didn't know that. I used to buy her chocolates and her father would keep the chocolate because he liked chocolates. That's the only reason he'd keep them.

- 29:30 **Where would you go swimming?**

Coogee.

What was Coogee like in those days?

Much the same as it is now, really. I say that, I haven't been there for a while, so I wouldn't know what it was like now. It was a good beach and we used to go down there. Used to go down the coast to Cronulla

- 30:00 and places like that. All the friends and mates were going. Coogee was the main one.

What costumes would you wear to go swimming in?

They were more like a singlet. A top and a tight bottom.

- 30:30 Not quite as heavy as a singlet, but that type of thing. You had to have something on the top as well as the bottom. The girls used to have a full top and a skirt.

What about the pictures?

- 31:00 **What would you go to see and where would you go?**

Used to go to the St Edward. That was just near Martin Place there. That's mainly where I used to take Dorothy. I used to go to the Capitol in town.

- 31:30 Anywhere there was something I wanted to see.

Would you see newsreels at the time?

Yeah.

What news do you remember hearing around that time?

It's very hard to say. I often see, you see on TV where they show old movies and you say, "Yeah, I've seen that." That's because

- 32:00 that reminds you of it. At the State Theatre they used to have a little newsreel theatre alongside of it and you'd just go in there and you'd see newsreels. That's what you'd see. It was quite popular. Only a small place, but it was quite popular.

What other interests did you have?

32:30 I worked a lot. I used to go to the gymnasium a lot and do workouts. Gee, you're going back now.

33:00 Were you living at home this whole period?

Yes.

What was your home life like? Had your parents gotten on better?

Pretty good. I was practically allowed to do as I liked. I think I used to behave well. I think if I hadn't I'd have got pulled into line very quickly with my father

33:30 my father. I had a happy life I'd say.

What did they do after the fruit shop? What jobs did they have during the Depression?

My father, we went to Redfern. We lived in a house there.

34:00 My father didn't do anything. That was when my Mum was working then because he couldn't get a job. Then

34:30 there was a doctor next-door and he had two rooms at the front and he had a house behind. Eventually we lived in there and my mother kept the house and kept his interviewing room clean and all that. I think it was rent free. I think. I don't know for

35:00 sure. We lived there for a while. That was where, from there I started to work at the Hotel Australia. After a while I got a bike. I used to do a lot of bike riding.

35:30 I joined the Niven Bike Club. I used to ride to Burragorang Valley and back and all sorts of trips like that. I raced at one time. Road raced.

36:00 My brother, he was a public servant and postman. He was in this club and he decided to enter me in a road race because he knew what I was like. He took me down this day and we lined up for the road race. They're getting everything

36:30 ready there. "Have you got this, have you got that? We'll do this and we'll do that." He was a mad bike rider himself. He had a racing seat. It was very sharp. How he sat on it I don't know. He decided that "use my seat because it would be better for your racing." He took his seat out and he put it on the bike I was riding.

37:00 I started off this race. It was about a mile, I think it was a 10 mile race. The seat cut the hell out of me and I couldn't sit on it. I had to go through the whole race just sitting on the bar more or less. I came second.

37:30 That was my road racing experience. The public service, there was some ado there. I wasn't allowed to race for him anymore because I guess I was a ring-in.

You weren't working for the public service.

I used to go to the races a lot. I loved the races.

38:00 I used to play cards a fair bit.

Where were you and do you remember hearing the news about the war breaking out in 1939?

Yeah.

38:30 I don't know that I took that much notice of it, really. I remember hearing about it and saying, "It's going to happen, it's going to happen." But then I went into compulsory training. For six weeks I think you had to do if you were eighteen.

39:00 I went into that. That was at Greta Army Camp too. When I came out the men had done their 6 weeks and they were about to come out and they had them all lined up and they called for volunteers for the AIF. I decided then that I sort of

39:30 liked the army, so I stepped forward and volunteered.

Tape 3

00:33 **You were very much a city boy.**

Yes, I'd say so.

How did you take to the compulsory six weeks' training in the army?

I didn't mind it. I was working at the Hotel Australia again. I went back to work there about three times. The manager of Ushers Hotel

01:00 came over to the Hotel Australia to manage it. There was an order out at the time that they weren't allowed to sack you on account of the compulsory training. So they said. I left the Hotel Australia

01:30 to go into the army and I got sacked. I didn't do anything about it. I never went back there anyway.

The war changed the course of your career.

Yeah.

What did you have to do in this compulsory training?

Just small arms and marching and

02:00 one thing and another. It wasn't really what you'd call training. Nothing you'd say was serious training. I think it was just the idea of getting you used to the army. They were calling of volunteers.

What did you like about it?

02:30 I don't know. I think just that style was different to the AIF to join. I just thought that they'd done the right thing by me, Everything I wanted. I thought it was

03:00 all right. The type of training I'd done.

How much of an influence was the fact that you'd lost your job at the Hotel Australia?

It wasn't an influence. I didn't care. I knew I could get a job anyway, if I wanted to, in any hotel.

03:30 No, I don't think it influenced me at all.

What was the procedure for joining the AIF once you volunteered?

Then you volunteered and they'd take you down to Paddington and then you got your needles and that was it. Put you on a truck and take you out to Ingleburn.

Was that a decision you discussed with

04:00 **anyone? The decision to join the overseas service.**

No, I don't think so. How do you mean discussed?

Your parents would have been quite concerned at the thought of you going away to war.

If they were I don't know. I don't think so, but if they were I don't know.

04:30 **What mates did you have around you at the time?**

In the army?

From the training perhaps.

I always thought that I was unfortunate that I got moved around so much, because you never settled down and made friendships.

05:00 The men you were with were changing all the time. That was the same as when I went into the training Battalion. You trained men and then shipped them out and you get another lot. You never really got the.

05:30 It was a sort of, I had a few good mates, but I missed out on a lot I think. I had more time to make mates when I was prisoner of war.

06:00 Because you were with men longer. You'd get to know each other. As a prisoner of war it was a curse in a way. You had fourteen men to a hut. After a certain period of time you knew that you'd wake up in the morning, you knew what that bloke would do, you knew what that bloke, you knew what everyone would do.

06:30 They used to do the same thing every day over and over again.

We'll come back to that. Who were the people going into the camp at Ingleburn? What mix of men were you with?

All sorts.

07:00 I don't really, I would say that I couldn't put a tag on them. They came from everywhere. There was blokes from Leichhardt, Blaxland, Bexley, blokes from Ashfield,

- 07:30 blokes from you name it, all over the place. Used to go in and you used to have to get your giggle suit. You were all the time going on parades to get stuff to build it up. By the time I got everything together then I started to be shifted around. So that really doesn't give you time to get close.
- 08:00 **What training did they give you in the AIF and how was it different to the compulsory 6 weeks?**
- Marching, drilling, short arms, bayonet practise, not sufficient for what you're going in
- 08:30 to. Really. For actual war, they can't train you for it really. You've got to get it before you know what it's like. They do all the training in the world, but it's not the same thing.
- How did you take to using a gun?**
- 09:00 I didn't mind that. I was pretty good with a gun. Didn't worry me. As a matter of fact I used to like the training as far as on a rifle range was concerned and shooting a target.
- 09:30 I did have one impression in, I don't know why it came or where it came from, that when I was in Vivi, we were on the top of the hill and we were looking down on
- 10:00 the Germans. There was a bloke came into view down there. It was very short lived. I looked down on him and I thought, "I don't even know this bloke. He could be a family man,
- 10:30 I don't hate him. He probably thinks the same about me if it gets heavy." I just a moment a thought flashed through my head. "Here you are, you're shooting at someone you don't even know. You've never seen him before. You don't know whether they're good or bad.
- 11:00 They could be quite good people, really." You're taught that if you don't shoot them they'll shoot you. That's the way it is.
- What did you do at that moment?**
- That moment was gone straight away.
- 11:30 It was just a thought that flashed through your head and then was lost completely.
- How often in your service career did you find yourself having to shoot at people?**
- Quite often. Too many times,
- 12:00 I think, really. I tried to, in my way of looking at things, I always shut the horrible things out of my mind. Things you don't want to remember, forget them. Dismiss them and just think of the good parts of war. That's what I try to do.
- 12:30 Just like going out of a room and shutting the door behind you. Cut it off.
- How did that system work for you in dealing with the things you saw?**
- I think that system's always worked for me. Even present day. If
- 13:00 there's anything cropped up and I can do something about it I do. If it's something I can't do anything about, shut the door.
- We'll talk about both sides of your experience, good and bad. It's an important thing to understand how you cope. But if something comes up, feel free to share it with us.**
- 13:30 **Don't feel you shut things out from the interview. We'll come to your active service in a moment. About your training, you saw the changing of the colour from 1st to 2nd AIF?**
- Yes.
- Tell us how that came about and what that involved?**
- Apparently,
- 14:00 they were all different men from different units picked out to go type of thing he training. I've got a photo of it there. I've got a photo of the guard. I think there was fifty-two men in it, there's a brigadier, chief captain, two lieutenants, and the only one
- 14:30 that I know in it was me. I don't know anyone else, I've got no idea.
- What was the show? Can you describe what you went to see?**
- How do you mean?
- Of the changing ceremony. Can you describe what happened?**
- It was just changing of the guard.

15:00 Just two guards stand facing each other and they just go through the procedure of changing the colours. Any guard was the same only it's a special occasion. That's all.

What did you understand of the significance of the occasion, changing from the 1st to the 2nd?

15:30 It was significant because the 2nd AIF was taking over from the 1st AIF. That was the whole significance of it.

How much was there a sense you were part of an Anzac tradition and links to the action of the 1st AIF when you joined?

Say that again?

16:00 **How much was it instilled in you that you were part of a tradition that went back to the 1st AIF and the ANZACs [Australian and New Zealand Army Corps]?**

It wasn't really. It just said, "We're going to be changing guard from the 1st AIF and that's it. We trained for a couple of weeks I think just changes of the guards. When the time came that's it.

16:30 **What were you hearing of the war going on in Europe at this early stage in the war?**

Not very much. You were more occupied with what you were doing at the time. Even the

17:00 news you get about what's happening you just listen to it then forget it. Didn't take on any importance. I think even when France fell, France fell and that's it. I think it took on significance later on when it meant more to you.

17:30 **Where did you think you'd be going?**

Palestine. Never expected anything else I think. Going to Palestine to fight in the North African Campaign.

18:00 **You were sent in a reinforcement battalion?**

Yes.

Tell us how your embarkation came about from what news you got that you were going to leave.

Very short really.

18:30 I think it was just one day they said, "Tomorrow you're off," and that's it. Never got much warning. Probably they said, "Don't do this or don't do that because you'll be leaving shortly." But nothing definite. Definite was the day before,

19:00 "You're going tomorrow."

Was there leave before you embarked?

No, not immediately before, no. Well before I used to go AWL, go to see Dorothy.

From Ingleburn?

No, from Greta.

19:30 **What were the tricks you used to go AWL?**

There was a, used to do it mainly on the weekend. There was a bloke in the camp had a Buick car that was quite well to do. He used to take a ute full to go on leave. Officers included.

20:00 Used to go down there and arrange for where to meet to go back and we'd all be there, down and back we'd come. Never missed.

What were the punishments of being caught AWL?

I don't know.

Never happened?

20:30 No. Probably a fine or something like that. Wouldn't be too good if you were a sergeant of course. They can punish you. They can reduce your rank. But if you're a private, what are they going to do? They can't make you any less.

What was your rank when you embarked?

Sergeant.

21:00 **What responsibilities did you have as a sergeant?**

You had your group of men you had to look after. See they were treated right. Train them, take them on physical training, route marches. When they're on leave, they're on their own.

21:30 We used to go to Maitland a lot on leave. Get full. Very sorry the next day.

How did you take to being responsible for a group of men?

I just thought it was my duty

22:00 to see they were treated right. If they had any complaints they'd tell me and I'd take them to the officer. I'd do what I could. See that what they were entitled to, they got. Just make sure everything ran smooth. For your own benefit as well as for theirs.

22:30 The trip over, was it a Dutch ship?

Slamat.

Tell us about the Slammat.

It wasn't a very big ship. It was pretty rough going over. We used to live

23:00 well. We had cabins and a mess, which was alongside the officers' mess. We were well fed. You couldn't complain really. No one was crowded or anything like that. You used to do gymnastics on deck and that sort of thing.

23:30 There was nothing else you could do to pass the time away.

There was a man overboard. Were there any other incidents you can remember?

No. Don't know how he fell overboard. He wasn't ever retrieved.

24:00 They saw him when he fell over and they threw a life buoy over to him and everything. He was swimming all right when he floated to the rear. Then he got too far away to see and the navy arrived and roared through a loudspeaker at the captain to get on his way. They said they'd look after him.

24:30 I don't think he was ever picked up.

What was the danger from submarines or other ships?

From submarines. They reckoned if the boat stopped it was just a sitting target. If it was moving it had a chance, stopped it was a sitting target.

25:00 Where did you stop en route?

Bombay, then when we first entered the Suez Canal we stopped there. It was no particular place where they all went over the side. Where we disembarked I can't remember the name of the place.

25:30 We got in trains to go to the, passenger trains, to go to the camp. You had to see them to believe them. First time I wanted to go to the toilet and they said it was at the end there behind a curtain. Went up and

26:00 I pulled back the curtain there was a hole in the floor. All tiled, and that was it. A hole in the floor. It was rough.

Where did they take you on those trains?

They took us to, I think it was Beersheba I think they called it. That was

26:30 way up in the countryside. It was villages around where the Arabs used to live. They used to live, and their sheep used to live, and their goats used to live, and their cattle, whatever, all in one house. Goats and all. If they had them outside someone would pinch them.

27:00 This was your first time outside in the world?

Yup.

What were you thinking of these new strange places you were in?

My eyes were open all the time. I went everywhere I could just to see what it was like. You used to get into buses

27:30 to go on leave. They'd have an Arab driver. He used to say, "No worries, Allah will look after us," and he'd shut the door and he'd take off. They used to go like rockets. Winding roads. He always got there, so Allah must have looked after us.

What contact

28:00 **did you have with the local population?**

Not much. In Tel Aviv it was just like going into a shopping area in Tel Aviv. Just the same. I even bought shoes in there because I liked them. There wasn't anything else to do. That and eat.

28:30 That's what you used to do. Walk around. There was boats with refugees that would come in and beach themselves so the Jews could get off. They were still on beaches.

What did you see of them?

Not the refugees,

29:00 I didn't see them at all. I take it they were the locals. They were only out to sell you something. They didn't mix with you. They'd sell you anything, but they didn't mix.

How much leave did you get on arrival in Palestine?

29:30 Now and again you used to get three or four days.

What was camp life like?

30:00 Used to go on route marches mainly. Your training was repetition all the time. There was only certain things you could teach them, so you teach them and used to teach them to look after their rifles, how to look after them. You used to inspect them. You'd do a bit of bayonet practise.

30:30 Then you'd go on route marches. You'd go on a route march and you'd be out in the desert. There wouldn't be a soul in sight. Every quarter of an hour you used to get a rest.

31:00 They'd all fall on the ground to have a rest. The Palestinian would appear was a big bag on his back full of water. He'd sell you the water. Don't know where he came from, I don't know where he went to. They just sort of appear out of nowhere.

31:30 It was a funny thing.

What other strong recollections do you have of that period spent training?

Not a great deal because it was all repetition, repetition, repetition. It was good when you went away to another camp to train someone else, because you'd get away from the camp

32:00 to a different camp. Then when you got there you'd done the same thing over and over again. I used to always instil in the blokes that they had to look after each other. They had to, everyone depended on everyone. They couldn't have likes and dislikes, they all depended on each other.

32:30 You do. You depend on each other. You depend on anyone that's got a job to do that job. That's it.

How did the training come into play when you first came into action?

The training I think didn't come

33:00 into play, but there's something you knew what to do. Then you had to adjust according to what's happening. When you came into action it was nothing like training. You couldn't train that. You had to be in it to realise what it was like.

33:30 The training was just to get you to know your rifle, to know how to use your bayonet and all those sorts of things. No, you couldn't train for it, really.

Let's talk about the first time you came into action and how things changed. You went to a staging camp at Mersa Matruh and then to Tobruk.

Yes.

Was Tobruk the first time you

34:00 **saw action?**

Yup.

Tell us about your first experience of the real war.

The trouble was when we were fighting the Italians you couldn't get near them.

34:30 They kept withdrawing all the time. That's why we were pushing up Benghazi and we wanted to get to Tripoli and they wouldn't let us. They'd get out of the road all the time. They were a greater menace for the blokes who were carrying up the cartons of food on their back and packs,

35:00 if they shone in the sun, they'd shell them. We always used to say they were at greater risk than anyone. The incidents where blokes had come over a hill. Might be a group at patrol, 10 blokes, over a hill and they'd all of a sudden find themselves on top of a couple of hundred Italians. The Italians would surrender.

- 35:30 Straight away. They didn't have to. There was no way they could have done anything. They were more of a menace when they were captured than they were a soldier. Because when you were marching them back you only used to have a man every now and again. You had to watch out because
- 36:00 they'd pick up a great rock if they saw one and belt you on the back of the head. They were always like that.
- Where did you first come across the Italians personally?**
- Just outside Tobruk.
- What was the situation on that day?**
- We were just
- 36:30 advancing along the road by truck and they opened fire on us and we had to bail out of the truck. As soon as we bailed out of the truck and opened up on them, they took off. That's the last we seen of them. They always had a plan. They had dogs galore, the Italians. I remember just as we came into Tobruk
- 37:00 and we had to dig in. We found their trenches where they'd been. We said, "We won't dig in, we'll use that." They were full of fleas. You couldn't believe the amount of fleas in them. They had dogs that used to bark all the time and let them know that someone was about.
- 37:30 That was their way. There was, I think he was a colonel in Tobruk. He was going to surrender. He sent his men out to the lieutenant captain
- 38:00 and he said he wanted someone of higher rank to surrender to. I don't know why, what he thought. He didn't get anyone. The captain said, "I'm higher rank, I'll do. That suits me." Then he took him and gave him to Colonel Dougherty.
- 38:30 It was a funny army, the Italians. The Germans were different altogether, but we never struck Germans in the desert. We'd gone over to Greece by the time they appeared on the scene.

Tape 4

- 00:31 **You were talking about your first action at Tobruk. What happened after that action?**
- We pushed on to
- 01:00 Derna first. It was deserted. When you look down on Derna from the hills as you're coming down into it, it's like a square mile of green in the desert. It's all been cultivated. It just a square mile
- 01:30 and that's Derna. Everyone had taken off from there. There was no one there. No one left. They were all gone back because we were advancing. We went on to Benghazi. When I say pushing the Italians all the way, you didn't have to push them, they just went.
- 02:00 We stopped at Benghazi and they kept going on to Tripoli. We dug in at Benghazi in case anything happened. We stayed there for a couple of weeks and then we came back to go to Alexandria.
- What was it like**
- 02:30 **digging in in the desert?**
- It wasn't bad. You could at least dig in in the desert. You had to pick your spot. No, it was reasonably easy. Used
- 03:00 to dig in for your own protection, that's all. So if you're doing it for your own protection it didn't take, you didn't need to be encouraged because you wouldn't like to be caught in the open.
- You mentioned you were an instructor.**
- Not when I joined the battalion.
- Before?**
- Yes.
- 03:30 **From that training, what skills did you use to dig in when you were at Benghazi?**
- Strangely enough, in training, you never got to the digging in stage. That didn't enter into it. It was only, you had to be in action where you
- 04:00 were digging in for your own protection. That's the only reason you dig in. When I say it was easy,

sometimes were easier than others. It was hard work anyway.

How well equipped was your battalion at that stage?

Good, I'd say.

04:30 When I say good, we had everything we needed. We didn't need that much because they were on the run all the time. It's when you're fighting against together and you're both fighting each other, that's when you need the air force, really.

05:00 I think you always need the air force. Today I say that if you haven't got an air force you can't win the war, purely and simply. It's so essential.

When you went

05:30 **to Benghazi, what did you understand was the role of your battalion?**

When we finally got there we were just holding our position so the enemy wouldn't come back. They didn't intend to come back. They went and took everything before them. I think the Italians

06:00 they weren't volunteers. A lot of them were in the army because they were forced into the army. For that reason they weren't so keen. That's only my thoughts.

You were a corporal by this stage?

No, I was sergeant when I

06:30 was there.

How did you see that manifest itself amongst the troops? What did they say about the fact they didn't want to be there?

No, no, no. This is the Italians I'm talking about and it's just my opinion. The reason they

07:00 would throw it in so easily. They just didn't want to fight.

What did you understand was going on in the war by now? Did you know where the Germans were or what the German threat was?

We didn't know the Germans were coming across. If we had pushed on to Tripoli

07:30 they wouldn't have come across because they wouldn't have had anywhere to go. They stopped us at Tripoli because, not because we looked like getting beaten or anything, but because they thought our lines of communication were too long. So they decided to stop there, which was a mistake.

08:00 We allowed the Germans to come across and then. They had a lot more power than we did. Really, it's all a power thing. In Greece it was the same. They had the power and we didn't.

How long did

08:30 **you stay at Benghazi?**

About two weeks after we got there. Went sightseeing wherever there was anything to see, but there wasn't anything to see.

Was there anything at all?

We found a ghetto. You go down into the

09:00 cave and you go right down the bottom and they had water down there and they had boats that used to have to pull yourself along under the roof. When you were up there, there was nothing there anyway. Only water. It was cool, that's all.

How did you react to being in desert conditions?

I didn't mind them. Didn't worry me.

09:30 I think it didn't worry you because it was what you expected, sort of thing. Yes. That describes it. It was just what you expected it to be, so there it was. Used to get very cold in the night time

10:00 and very hot in the day. You knew that's what happens so you sort of lived with it.

After Benghazi, you

10:30 **moved down to Alexandria?**

Yes.

Why were you going to Alexandria?

To board ships and go to Greece. They didn't tell us that, but everyone knew. It's one of those things that no one knows, but everyone knows.

How did you know?

Just word of mouth.

11:00 Everyone knew they were going to Greece, but it wasn't official. It's just one of those things that sort of happens I think.

Rumours start up and word gets around quickly.

Yes. Very quickly. As a matter of fact it gets around quicker than

11:30 quick.

At that point, did your battalion have ideas about where you wanted to go?

I don't think so. I think they go where they were ordered to go. Your battalion leader knows long before you do that you're going to Greece.

12:00 Everyone said, "Don't tell anyone, it's a big secret." I don't know why. Unless they reckoned that on the way across, if they tell everyone, you're there waiting for the submarines to sink you or something.

Who was in command of your battalion?

Colonel Dougherty.

12:30 I think after Greece he left our battalion. I think he went to the 2/2nd Battalion. I'm not sure on that. While we were in Greece he was the commander.

What did you and your troops think of the command in your battalion?

Very good.

13:00 He was, I don't think anyone ever thought of him any other way. Terrific bloke.

Who did you immediately report to?

13:30 Lieutenant Copeland I reported to, then he had to report back to - he was pretty good. I mean pretty good, he was good. I think you have to have confidence in your leaders to do any good,

14:00 really. If you've got no confidence in them you automatically think they can't do anything right. I think that applies to everything. You've got to have confidence. We had confidence. Just as well.

14:30 What was the mood like when you were on your way to Greece?

I think it was good. Everyone was interested to get there to Athens. They were looking forward to leave. Unfortunately we

15:00 didn't get very much leave because it was getting too hot, too busy, too much action around. So there you had to do what you came over to do.

15:30 You went on leave to Cairo. Do you have any other leave stories from Cairo or any of the other places you went to in the Middle East?

No, not really. Cairo was the same as everywhere else.

16:00 You had leave. There was the pyramids, the museum, the Sphinx, and then the brothels. They always had those.

16:30 Unfortunately they used to be very busy. Dreadful place. Used to be all sorts of fights and everything in there because the blokes would be drunk before they went, usually.

17:00 Some people weren't interested in things, you know? I was always interested in going to places and seeing things I'd heard about and I'd read about. I guess some people are not like that.

Did any of the blokes give you a bit of

17:30 pressure to go off to get drunk and go to the brothels?

No, no. Probably if you went off and got drunk with them they would give you pressure. Say, "Let's go down to so and so." But

18:00 the thing is, if you got drunk you couldn't remember half the things you'd seen so was getting you drunk. Really. Someone just used to go on leave to get drunk, that's it. There was nothing else they could do.

Who went

18:30 **sightseeing with you?**

In Cairo? I forget his name, he was a corporal. He found out I was going to go to Cairo and he said, "Can I come too?" and I said, "Yeah, if you want to." That's just the two of us together. We walked around and got rickshaws and saw all the goings on.

19:00 "That's so and so" and, but largely we went out to the pyramids and poked around there. We didn't have much time because I wanted to be back on time regardless. I didn't want to be AWL.

19:30 I suppose they couldn't have said I was AWL if I wasn't. I wasn't AWL really. The only thing I done was I got leave to Alexandria and I went to Cairo, but I still kept in the times.

So you didn't get into trouble?

No, didn't have time. I went to the museum. That's an

20:00 awful place. I'm trying to think what they used to call it. The museum of what? No, I can't remember.

Might come back to you later.

Yes.

Those times would have been exciting.

Oh, yes.

20:30 Went to the pyramids and I climbed to the top. You had to have a guide and climb to the top. Then took a photo another way looking down from the top and you could hardly see the pyramids, it's that steep. You can see the ground way below, but you can hardly see the pyramids themselves.

21:00 When you climb to the top you don't go much further after that, because it's a long way to the top. Went to the top and the centre.

You went by boat

21:30 **from Alexandria to Greece?**

Yes.

Do you remember the name of the boat?

No, I don't. I think it got sunk afterwards. It was a Dutch boat. The only thing I can remember about it was the bread.

22:00 Wonderful bread.

Why does the bread stick in your mind?

Because it was so good and you hadn't had anything that good for a long while. Not in Egypt.

What had you been eating?

It was real fresh and hot.

22:30 **Tell us what happened on that journey.**

On the boat? Not much really. It was all, we boarded the boat, we

23:00 took off in the night and the next morning we had breakfast. That's when we had the bread. From then on you were looking for land because you knew it was going to be Greece and you're sort of "Where is it?" sort of thing. No, there's not much happened on the boat because there was nothing you could do. It was very crowded.

23:30 **What did you see what you first arrived?**

Just green fields with tents in the background. We were pretty close to the coast

24:00 and the tents were all set up for us already when we got there. We just moved in and you were allotted your tents. Your areas. Then you proceeded to settle in, I suppose. Everyone looking forward to leave of course.

24:30 Unfortunately we didn't get any. The whole battalion doesn't go on leave at once. They went out, but it was too much action going on and we didn't have time. Before we could go on leave they put us onto trains. The Greeks stood there and they waved goodbye. That's how they wave goodbye.

25:00 "Come back."

Can you take us through again what happened and where you were being sent?

From Athens?

25:30 We went up to Larisa and then we were put on guard duty there on the airport. It had, I think it was Spitfires [British fighter planes] there. The bombers used to come over and they'd circle the camp and then the Spitfires would take off and escort them to where they were going.

26:00 I think, during the period of time we were there, we used to count the planes as they went out. There was only ever 1 missing. One time there was 10 went out and 9 came back. But every other time, if 10 went out, 10 came back. Just once there was 9.

26:30 We were only there for a short while. Things were getting a bit hot up the front. So they took us from there and we went by truck to the railway and then up through Greece. We struck

27:00 a lot of Greeks coming back wounded on the train. A lot of wounded, but they weren't disheartened at all. They were cheering us on all the time. We went up and finally they took us off the trains and put us on truck and went out to Vivi.

27:30 the it started.

It was hot and fierce fighting.

Yeah. Not hot weather I suppose.

28:00 It was cold actually, because when we got up there, there was snow and we weren't used to that. I remember telling the fellows not to take their shoes off, because I thought they'd never get them on again. Despite that I think some did take them off. You had to think on

28:30 everything.

You'd come from the desert where conditions were quite different.

Oh yes. And dressed accordingly. Came from the desert where you were in shorts and you get in uniform, you go over there and it's still a summer uniform and

29:00 you go out into snow. It was very, makes conditions very hard.

Can you describe the first task or action you encountered in Greece?

That was there up in Vivi. We came up against the Germans.

29:30 They came along and they were trying to advance, but we stopped them, they couldn't advance against us. They tried and they tried, but they couldn't. The only reason they got behind us was because the Greeks pulled out and we weren't notified. Then they had a passage through.

30:00 We didn't know that either. We had no idea they were behind us. They just dug in and waited for us to come out. There was no way we could have got out. They said to the

30:30 Lieutenant Copeland when he went up the front and he was the first one that came into contact with the Germans and they said to him, apparently, "You've got two minutes to make up your mind. Surrender or we'll just fire down the road and kill the bloody lot." They would have. No one would have known what was going to happen.

31:00 So he said, "I had no option but to surrender." He couldn't say, "I'm going back to Major Barham and find out what to do." He had two minutes to make up his mind there and then or they opened up down the road.

31:30 Against all blokes who were straggling along anyhow. They'd have had no chance.

Did you have to fire on anyone at that point?

No. When Major Barham was shot

32:00 we opened up there. I think the German that came under that road, I say he came under the road, but the German that stood up there, I think he must have had some men with him behind him. Whether they were coming up the drain or not, I don't know, but there must have been some there somewhere. Not in force.

32:30 I don't know whether he got a shock or what. He stood up there and suddenly found he was in the middle of Australians. I suppose, when you think of it, what else could you do?

33:00 He done the wrong thing when he shot Major Barham anyway.

You were able to bury him?

The next morning we got permission. We were marching back, and when we came on his body

- 33:30 we asked the guard for permission to bury him and he said, "Go ahead." It wasn't a very good time really.
- 34:00 Marching back there was wounded and, walking wounded and all sorts of people going back. Fellows assisting fellows. No transport. Actually, the transport was supposed to be where Major
- 34:30 Barham was. Supposed to be. That was the original order, but then they changed that, but we had no lines of communication. We didn't find out.
- You're talking about the surrender at**
- 35:00 **the end of that action?**
- Yes. That's about all you could say about that.
- 35:30 **Can you tell us what was going through your mind?**
- I think I was amazed.
- 36:00 I was amazed and I was trying to think of how to get out of it. You've always got a sort of lay-out, what you do next. You can't just do things haphazardly. You've got to have a sort of plan. The
- 36:30 first time I tried to escape we had no plan whatsoever. If we'd have got out of the camp, we hadn't made up our mind where we were going. So it's impossible to succeed.
- Given that,**
- 37:00 **before you even went into action, had you thought about the possibility of being taken prisoner?**
- No, no. Not at all. We were very confident. There again, we never thought the Greeks would pull out and leave us there, and that why we were captured because as soon as they
- 37:30 pulled out, the Germans could just walk through. And they did. You sort of, you don't think of those things. That's negative thinking. If you think "Yeah, we'll go up there and they're going to pull out."
- 38:00 Mind you, they had nothing to fight with. Less than we had. We didn't have that much.
- Do you think there's been forgiveness of that Greek action to withdraw and leave you there?**
- 38:30 I think so. You don't know what happens, really, and why the reason for they done what they done. We had no lines of communication. You don't know whether they thought we were going to pull out too, at the same time, or anything. I don't think, it's only thought, I don't think they'd do it intentionally.
- 39:00 You sort of, how do you know what leads up to it?

Tape 5

- 00:50 **You mentioned that as soon as you were taken prisoner, you were already thinking of an escape plan.**
- Not straight away.
- 01:00 **What happened?**
- The first time I thought of it would have been about two weeks later, but I didn't have a plan. I still had my men with me. There was 10 of us. They weren't giving us any food,
- 01:30 We decided that, I had a talk with them and we decided that we'd have a go at escaping. Where we were going to go I have no idea. You had to go a heck of a long distance to get back to Greece. Then where do you go from there?
- 02:00 They had us billeted in this building. It was all straw, that's all you got to sleep on. We'd watch the guard. As we sat there watching the guard they had no barbed wire, but they had a machinegun post about 150 yards out, out the back.
- 02:30 The guard used to come up the side of the perimeter and the guard used to come down the other side and they'd meet at the bottom, and they'd have a little talk, and then they headed back. They were doing this all the time.
- 03:00 We watched them and we thought, "When they meet and they have a talk and they go back, it'll be at least 10 minutes before they go back to have another talk." We could get out there, the machinegun

tower was about 150 yards out, we can take off around the

- 03:30 side and we'll be gone before the even know we'd been there. So this night came along and we decided "Right, this is it." So we went out there. We watched them. The two guards came down, they met on the corner and it was raining, only lightly, but it was raining. Then they turned round and we saw the bloke
- 04:00 go back the other way. So we gave him time to get clear and then we went to dash out. What we didn't know that the guard that goes down the other side had decided he was going to stay there and not get wet, where they met on the corner. When we went out we went out straight in front of him. He
- 04:30 let out a roar. We got the shock of our lives. The searchlight went on in the machinegun tower, so we raced back into the hut and all got bedded down. Then the German patrol arrived and he's screaming at us and he's tuning the blankets over to see who's fully dressed.
- 05:00 I thought, "God. If he keeps going he'll be down to me soon." He gave up and he said, "Now, you tried to escape." "No, none of us." "Yes, it was Australians." "No, no, not us."
- 05:30 He said, "It was Australians. There was one there with an Australian hat on and he was seen, so they were Australians. I'll tell you now, if one man escapes he'll shoot one. If ten men escapes, we'll shoot ten. That's it. You attempt!"
- 06:00 Then he went off. Sure enough, one of our blokes, a bloke called Tom Hopper [Private Thomas Brittan John Hopper, NX 6123, 2/4th Battalion], he'd had his Australian hat on. He never wore it after that because they'd know it was him. If we'd have got out, we weren't registered with the Red Cross, we didn't know where we were
- 06:30 going to go, they could have taken us and just shot us and no one would have known any different what happened, because we weren't registered. Two days later the Red Cross arrived and everyone was registered and that was it. We didn't stay there long because then they moved us
- 07:00 out and we went to Belgrade.

You were captured at Vivi and put on train to Denische or did you walk?

No, no, we were put on the train and taken to Denische by train. I think, I don't know, I think Denische was a reasonable size.

- 07:30 In the meantime they didn't give us much to eat or they didn't bother much about water.

Who was with you? You were with your group of ten.

Yes, I was. There was lots of Australians, New Zealanders, Englishmen,

- 08:00 I think we started off with 250 and it would have been 200 or so by that time. Then we went on from there by train up to Belgrade.

What happened to the rest of your battalion?

No, that's all that was captured, the 250. That was all of my battalion that

- 08:30 was in the front. Not the whole 200, but about 150 of the 2/4th Battalion. All the rest were mixed up.

On the day you were captured and put together with other troops

They just bunged them together.

What was it like? Was it organised?

No it wasn't organised, no. No organisation at all.

- 09:30 Because when we were captured they took the officers away straight away. All the officers gone. I don't even know of any warrant officers there. I think there was, it didn't make any difference because rank didn't count then.
- 10:00 When we went on from there we went on to Belgrade and we marched into Belgrade in threes. This shows you how word spreads. We came in the gate and
- 10:30 we were in threes marching up. Somehow, I don't know how, word gradually came down the line "don't smile or laugh." That was all that's said. We marched, then we halted. There was a bloke behind me, Benson,
- 11:00 he was always carrying on and joking and all sorts of things. He was laughing. There was an old German walking down the line and with that he walked in and punched him in the stomach as hard as he could. Now, how did that start? How did they know that was going to happen?
- 11:30 It came down the line, "Don't smile or laugh." For no reason at all. Of course, he didn't laugh when the German had gone, everyone laughed at Benson. They had a great sense of humour. They could see the

funny

- 12:00 side of everything. The Australians, I mean. Don't know, no matter what happened, they'd see the funny side. They went up and round into the barracks. There was the Serbs were in that branch and the Australians were in this branch. They had one little door.
- 12:30 When it came time to go to your hut, you were allowed to walk around in circles for exercise, this old German used to walk up and he had a whistle and he'd blow the whistle. With that you had to get off the grounds and into your huts. You only had this little door to go through and they'd
- 13:00 be queuing to get through and he'd start firing his gun to get them in. There was a young Australian there, and there was three floors. Every flight of steps he went up he put his head out the window and would yahoo at the German. Then he'd duck in. There was
- 13:30 bullets flying everywhere, ricocheting off the wall when this old bloke would fire at him. He never hit anyone. I don't know how they didn't get hit by a ricochet. During the day for a toilet, there was a big trench dug out. That was the toilet. You had to use that is you wanted to go.
- 14:00 It got full as you can imagine. So they dug another trench further back. One poor bloke went up and he wanted to go to the toilet. So there's little tree there and he's sitting there. He was going to the toilet. The
- 14:30 old German came up and "Was ist?" "I'm going to the toilet." "You don't use that one, you use that one over there" So he said, "Jump in." The bloke looked at him and he gave him a shove, "Jump in."
- 15:00 So the bloke grabbed hold of the tree. So he immediately hit his fingers with the pistol until he let go and then he just pushed him and he jumped into the trench. Up to here. We all fished him out and then everyone roared
- 15:30 with laughter. They had to hazard the bloke there. Biggest joke. There was a Sergeant McTigue. He was a fanatic on languages. So he was at these Serbs, he got two Serbs and he's at them to teach him
- 16:00 to speak Serbian. So they were teaching him. The day came along when we were going the next day. So this fellow who had been teaching McTigue came up and he said, "Please, will you teach me?" "Teach you what?"
- 16:30 "I want to say goodbye to McTigue. Will you teach me please?" "Yeah, we'll teach you. You want to say 'goodbye' to McTigue? We'll teach you." So they taught him to say goodbye to McTigue. So he marches up to McTigue and he says
- 17:00 "McTigue, I wish to say goodbye." Get it? Fortunately McTigue would have the good humour too and he laughed until he killed himself. That's, I think all the way through they always had a sense of humour.
- 17:30 No matter what happened, they could always get a laugh out of it. That was the big thing.

It's a really important survival mechanism.

Oh yeah. Essential I'd say.

- 18:00 **The actual day you were captured, was there any attempt by anyone to conceal a weapon or keep your weapons?**

The first time after

- 18:30 we were bombed we went up to, where? They were going to search us before putting us on the train. They had a room, you had to line
- 19:00 up. They lined you up and you had to go up slowly, take your turn and then go in the room and they searched you. I don't know what for. I think to see if they could get any information. I'm marching up towards this room. I think I was about 5 to go before I realised I had a revolver in
- 19:30 the back of my trousers. I hadn't realised I still had it there. I thought, "God, if I go in there and they dig out a revolver they'll probably shoot me with it." So I had to get rid of it before I got in the room. So the wall where we were alongside, I just found a
- 20:00 crevice in it and I just poked it in there. Cause you never know. When you got to that stage they were different people you were dealing with than the frontline troops. Different altogether. If anything, more brutal I think.
- 20:30 **What did you do with your weapons as soon as you were taken prisoner?**
- Discarded them. There was a creek alongside the road and we just threw them in there. So they couldn't use them. The further
- 21:00 you got back, the worse they seemed to be for some reason. The other didn't do anything for you, but

they weren't against you sort of thing. They went round looking at watches and all sorts of things, looking at blokes' wrists to see if they had a watch.

21:30 If they had it, they'd go up, look at it, if they thought it was any good they'd take it.

Did you have any items of value on you?

No, not really except my army pay book. I had that on me and I still had it when I came home. Might have had

22:00 small change or some such thing. You had cigarettes, they'd take those.

What else did you have on you?

Nothing much. Had your uniform on and you didn't carry anything. Once you were taken

22:30 prisoner of war you got no use for anything.

What might have happened to your haversack or other personal belongings?

I don't know that I had my haversack on.

23:00 I don't think so because when you're coming out you're carrying your ammunition, your tripods for your machine guns, everything like that. You're carrying a heck of a weight. Ammunition alone weighs a terrific amount.

23:30 So you got your water bottle. You've got that on your belt. No, as I remember it, once you're captured and you're coming back and you come to where everyone had discarded everything,

24:00 there were a lot of blokes going through the stuff to see what they could get that they needed. They took it that way.

Did you have a watch on?

I don't think I did.

24:30 I would have had a watch because I would have had to have a watch. But when I was taken prisoner and they were going round taking watches off blokes' wrists and all that, I think I took it off and put it in my pocket, out of sight. If you can't see it, you might keep it longer.

25:00 **The German guards were rough or brutal with you.**

Not the original ones. They were just

25:30 sort of matter of fact, the actual frontline troops. But when you got back to where they were, I suppose you'd say not immediate frontline troops, they treated you a lot rougher. They went out of their way to be nasty.

26:00 I think probably the frontline troops would have thought you had more in common with each other. They'd take watches and things like that, but they weren't brutal.

26:30 When the tanks opened up on us, they didn't hesitate to fire at Lieutenant Copeland, but it was because he was making a signal at folks back on there.

27:00 Later on we met some of those blokes who were in the tanks that came over the hill. They said, "Oh, if we'd have known you were our mob we'd have came down and got you."

How seriously

27:30 **was that comment taken?**

As just a comment. They probably got away with it, because 4 tanks among the Germans, they didn't have any tanks there.

What was the

28:00 **barracks or the camp like at Belgrade?**

I think it was Prince Alexander's troop's barracks. He was the head of the Serbs then. Was what had been his

28:30 troop's barracks, before hand. We weren't there that long, really. It was sort of a staging camp. Just long enough for them to get organised. When they had a train come down bringing something down, then they'd take you back.

29:00 **What were you eating?**

Potato soup I suppose you'd say. On one occasion at Denische we got a bowl of soup and a slice of bread. That was your daily ration. On one occasion,

- 29:30 I said, "I got a bit of meat." Someone else said, "There's a bit of meat in mine too." The bloke said, "Go down the cookhouse. There's a donkey's head on the rubbish heap so you've probably eaten the rest of the donkey." Didn't make any difference.
- 30:00 They didn't, when we went into Belgrade, the main feed we got was from the Serbs was what they call corn bread. We didn't get much off the Germans. We were getting,
- 30:30 pretty thin then. They didn't seem to worry about food at that stage. For a long while they didn't worry about food. We left there and we went to, I think Budapest was where they were going to march us through as an exhibition, to
- 31:00 show the soldiers that they'd captured Australian soldiers and everything in Egypt. They took us up in the train and they pulled up outside Budapest and they unloaded us. Then they started to march us through the town. With that, we started
- 31:30 singing. The Germans were screaming to shut up. So they shut up. Then a team down the other end would start singing. Then the guards had rushed down the other end to stop them from singing there. They were singing Roll out the Barrel and Hang [Out] Your Washing on the Siegfried Line.
- 32:00 When they'd rush down the back, the ones up the front would start singing. They stopped the ones down the back and the front would be singing. This went up and down the line for about quarter of an hour and then they decided they wouldn't march us through the city because they couldn't shut us up. That was just a spontaneous thing that happened.
- 32:30 So they loaded us back into the train. Then we went into Budapest itself. On the way in we passed children dressed up in all their glamour, throwing stones at us. Throwing stones at the carriages as we went passed. Went into
- 33:00 Budapest and it's the first place we got feed. The Red Cross was there. There were a lot of Red Cross ladies and they gave us a bowl of soup and a piece of bread each. But they never smiled. Just served it. They belonged to the Red Cross. They were doing it.
- 33:30 Then they put us on the train and we went down to Maribor. We'd pulled up outside Maribor Camp and they unloaded us and they couldn't take us into the camp because the French were in there and they had to separate the camp
- 34:00 make room for us. So we had to sleep there for the night. They fed us before we just sleep on the ground. They fed us before and they fed us a bowl of sauerkraut and a piece of bread. That was it. A lot of the blokes just scoffed it down and brought it
- 34:30 straight up again. Their stomach couldn't take it because they'd never had sauerkraut. Then the next morning they took us down into the camp. That was a dreadful place. The French wouldn't mix with us. They had
- 35:00 access because they were in the same barracks, there was nothing separated. They weren't interested in us much at all. You couldn't get any food. They only had one German doctor who used to come in to attend to them.
- 35:30 If you were reported on the sick parade, you lined up, you went in to see him, and said what was wrong with you, he syringed your ears out and that was it. Doesn't matter what you had. I think if you had a sore toe he syringed your ears out and out you go. They used to sit around there
- 36:00 and one day a couple of blokes are sitting on the rocks on the side and the German doctor's coming in. He was a little short sort of a bloke. A little bit on the stout side. Grey beard. He comes along. He never said a word. He comes walking up and the blokes look at him and he said to his mate
- 36:30 "Have a go at Santa Claus," it was getting near Christmas. "Have a go at Santa Claus." He walked up and he stopped in front of him. He said, "I might be Santa Claus, but I'll be home for Christmas. I'll be home for Christmas, you won't," and just walked off. In there we used to have three tiers
- 37:00 to sleep on. Not much food. There was a bloke in there, and Englishman. He was called McInty. He was a busker in England. You know what a busker is? He was sitting there and a bloke came through the
- 37:30 gate, got overalls on, ladder on his shoulder and he says "Heil Hitler," regards us, "Heil Hitler!" and walks through, puts his ladder up against the building and goes into the main office. I don't know where he got them from, I think he must have got them from a Frenchman. McInty appears in a pair of overalls, picks up the ladder,
- 38:00 puts it on his shoulder, walks down, "Heil Hitler," walks out the gate and went down to the local pub, threw the ladder away, went out the local pub busking until he got enough money for a few drinks. Went into the pub. They went down and got him from the pub. He was as drunk as a snail. He done that

forever after.

- 38:30 There, the food especially was so bad, blokes were getting all sorts of things. Farmers used to come along to the gate and they'd ask for someone to go and do a day's work for them. The guards would
- 39:00 give prisoners out to go and work for them during the day and he had to bring them back in the afternoon. You'd go out and work for them and they give you a sandwich or even two sandwiches. The people were all right, they were Austrians, but that's where they used to come for labour. They used to
- 39:30 call for workers of a morning. You'd line up, any one who wanted to go out to work would line up and he'd say, "You want to go out to work? If someone comes along we'll send you out." Some blokes wouldn't do it. I was there for a while and they couldn't send me out because I was a sergeant. I had to volunteer. Privates could
- 40:00 be sent out. They used to go on parade and they used to have crutches and everything just to go out to work. They said they wanted fourteen blokes to go out and do a job on a canal for which they would get extra food. Now, extra food, that
- 40:30 was it. You had to have food to more or less live. So I volunteered to go out and work with the blokes. So I was put in charge of fourteen and they send fourteen blokes out to a place called Wolfberg. We were digging a channel across the grounds.

Tape 6

- 00:35 **What was the worst fighting you encountered?**

The occasion was Vivi. That was the worst.

This was where Lieutenant Copeland put up his flag?

Yeah.

- 01:00 **Can you tell us once more what happened on that occasion?**

In reference to what?

In reference to the fighting you encountered at Vivi.

It was a case of holding the Germans at bay. We were doing that very successfully. They couldn't advance. They tried to advance, but we

- 01:30 kept them at bay. They just couldn't get forward. That was where we struck the worst. They were persistent and they called in the air force. They done everything, but they just couldn't go forward because the air force couldn't stay there. It would eventually run out of petrol and go away and then we'd drive them back again.

- 02:00 That was about the heaviest fighting, I think, that I struck there.

How long did that situation last for?

Couple of days. I think a couple of days. Then we were ordered to get out. We were ordered to cover B Company, which was slightly forward from us on the mountain.

- 02:30 We covered the, and when they we out, then we retreated ourselves. For some time I didn't think we should have retreated, but I didn't know the Greeks had pulled out. We had no word of that. All they were operating on was runners

- 03:00 to bring all the news. The runners weren't getting through because the Germans were up front. So they couldn't get back into us.

Describe how your lines were formed at Vivi, and the terrain and where the Germans were in relation to you?

We were on top of the, in a V shape on top of a hill. The shape of the hill.

- 03:30 B Company was right on the point and we were covering the sides where the valley came up. The Germans were trying to come up the hill towards us and they just couldn't do it. We kept

- 04:00 steady fire up. Every time we'd see movement we were right onto them. They tried several times. There was no way they could do it. They just tried it and tried it and they couldn't do it. Even with the air force they couldn't do it. We had no air force at all.

- 04:30 So I'd say that was the heaviest fighting.

You were a sergeant in a platoon?

Yeah.

Where exactly was your platoon and what was your dug in position like?

It was the hill

- 05:00 came along and then there was a V shape and it came down again the other side. We were on the left hand flank right on the edge. We were covering the forward position and also on the side so they couldn't come up the side valleys. We had all that area covered
- 05:30 till the Greeks took over right further down. Actually, when the Greeks pulled out, even then the Germans didn't try to go round our flank that side. They went on the other side because that was where the road was going through.
- 06:00 To go round our side they were just going into bush and hills. So they didn't try that side for some reason. In the finish I think they were content to just sit there and keep us engaged, really. While we were fighting there, we weren't
- 06:30 fighting somewhere else.

What were the losses like on each side?

I don't know about the Germans, but our losses weren't bad. There was a lot of wounded. There was blokes treated for frostbite. A lot of walking wounded. Not that many actually

- 07:00 killed on that session. Not till we got down to the main road. That's when they were trying to come through there again and of course we held them. They weren't as heavy down there. They were just coming straight along the road. Later on they were very heavy.
- 07:30 No, I can't think how to describe it other than that.
- 08:00 The thing that made me dismayed was when I got down off the hill, seeing all the blokes moving out without arms, without anything. They'd sort of just discarded the lot, you know? I was absolutely amazed when I saw it.
- 08:30 What their circumstances were, I don't know. That could have been a lot different.

As you look back at that moment and say you were about to be captured.

I didn't know that.

Exactly. At the time what emotions were going through your mind?

- 09:00 "What the hell's going on?" You see all these blokes around and a lot of them were walking wounded. You come down and you've just been fighting and your men are loaded up with everything and you see all this bedlam going on down there. Just don't know what to make of it.
- 09:30 Till I got down to Major Barham and he was actually, I suppose he was much the same. That's why he sent Copeland out to the front to stop them so he could organise them, but he was too late. In any case, he got shot, so he couldn't do anything about it. Even then,
- 10:00 you didn't think of being captured. You just thought, "What the hell is going on," and said, "Right, we're going down to where we're supposed to be picked up." Of course, when you got there, there was nothing there. Quite rightly so. They thought that we were going up the road to where the trucks were. But they weren't.
- 10:30 They were long gone. There were trucks in the field that had tried to go out through the fields, but there was no way. It was all mud. As soon as they got out there they had to finish up lying them off. They were bogged down. I don't know how else
- 11:00 you could describe it. You just come out and you come on an amazing scene, or what seems to be to you. You don't know what to make of it.

When you arrived where you thought you were supposed to be and there was no one there, how much anger is there that the system has let you down?

- 11:30 No, I think you get used to the idea that things in the army don't run smoothly. You see they're not where they should be and you just think "Oh well, they must be further back or something," and you go looking for them sort of thing. I don't think
- 12:00 anger enters into it. If you start getting angry about everything you lose your lot, perspective goes. You've got to keep your mind on what you're doing. As long as what you're doing is right, you're right.
- 12:30 **What instances of bravery can you recall from that time?**

Nothing really.

13:00 Lieutenant Copeland's was the most, I think. Trying to do the right thing. Major Barham was trying to organise them, but he just didn't get a chance. This bloke popped up from nowhere and that was it.

13:30 He was very highly thought of, Major Barham. I can't think of any other acts of bravery.

What else can you tell us about - ?

He was very efficient.

14:00 I think he done everything that was expected of him. His actions actually, were limited. He done what he had to do and he done what he was told to do and what else could you do? Just do what you're told to do.

14:30 Major Barham told him to go up the front, so he went up. He told me to stay and look after Major Barham. So I did. I didn't really because Major Barham got shot. Really, that couldn't have been avoided. What happened, the bloke just popped up

15:00 out of the blue and that was it. I thought afterwards, quite a bit, about how he got there to pop up. As I said, the only thing I could think of was the roads were built up about 4 feet and there must have been a sewer ran underneath the road. When he came

15:30 along there was a road along there and a road up the middle. When he came along he must have come through the sewer to get to the other side. I don't know what he expected to find when he popped up. When he popped up it was too late to pop down. He didn't see. So the only thing he could have done was try and get Major Barham

16:00 to surrender. It didn't take him far. Other than that I don't.

Do you think you saw any examples of cowardice?

I don't

16:30 think so. If one lot of blokes start to disarm or whatever, throw their gear away, it sort of, the other blokes see, my blokes saw them and said, "What the bloody hell are we carrying all this stuff for?"

17:00 So I don't know. There weren't many officer or even sergeants or corporals around much. I don't know why. They did

17:30 say, when they, this is only hearsay, when Copeland got to the head of the column, there was another lieutenant there. I don't know who he was, but I never saw him. Whether that's right or not, I don't know. He couldn't have done anything.

18:00 They were just dug in facing down the road: "Just say the word and we'll open up."

Is there anything else you haven't told us about that time that you want to mention?

18:30 **When you moved to Wolfberg, can you tell us again who the fourteen men who were with you were, how you got there and what you thought you were going to do?**

They transported us out there. We got there because we thought we would get extra food doing what we were going to do. They billeted us in a

19:00 sort of barn out there. There was only 4 guards I think.

You were billeted in a kind of barn. Describe that for us.

Each day two guards used to take

19:30 us out and round to the field and we were digging this ease-way across. Lining in the banks and everything. I found that actually we weren't getting any extra food. I asked the guard about it. He said, "You're getting extra." That's all he said. We went on and

20:00 we weren't getting extra. At the weekends the farmers would come around and get a couple of blokes out to work for the day and give him a sandwich. So I worked there for a while and an officer came out to visit the camp to see what was going on. As soon as he did, I nailed him. I said, "We're supposed to be getting extra food

20:30 for doing this work and we're not." He said, "Oh yes, you are." I said, "No, we're not." He said, "What do you mean you're not?" I said, "We're not getting any more than we used to get before, which is not very much." So he said, "Oh, wait a minute." So he went out. He was talking to the guard for a fair while and he found out that we weren't getting extra, the guard was taking the

21:00 extra food and not giving us any extra. Didn't amount to much, but it amounted to extra. So he came back and he said, "You're right. I'll fix it up." So he locked us up. The next thing a truck arrived and

picked up the guard and took him off.

- 21:30 I said, "What the hell's going on?" So a while later another truck arrived. The officer came in and he said, "Now, you're trouble makers." I looked at him. He said, "I'm going to send you to a punishment
- 22:00 camp where you won't be able to make trouble." All we'd done was ask for what we were entitled to. So it was just "Oh yeah?" He led us on and we went to the stone quarry. What happened at Wolfberg after that, I don't know. We got to the stone quarry and there was other blokes there
- 22:30 at the time. We finished up, I think it was about thirty strong. It was an enclosure with rooms for us with 3 bunks. There was four lots of three bunks high and there we had to fall in of a morning on parade order, then they'd march us out to the
- 23:00 stone quarry, half of us. Half of us would go to the cement factory that was at the other end of the flying foxes. For our meals we got more meals, but we had to form up again and march up to the cook house and then have our meal and then we march back and they lock us up again. This routine went on again in the morning. We worked there for some time.
- 23:30 It wasn't bad. It was hard work. Then two blokes decided they were going to escape. They told us the plan they had. When we marched out for food and they'd drop off on the way down, off they'd go. So we said, "Right-o."
- 24:00 So, this morning we were marched out for breakfast and two of the biggest men in the camp, they were quite big blokes, and strong, decided that they didn't want anyone to escape from there, they
- 24:30 were quite happy with what it was and they were prepared to do it till the end of the war. So apparently, they went into the sergeant of the guard and told him. What they didn't know, there was a very sick bloke called Makepeace and he was lying in the top bunk. He heard them talking and he heard them talking to the guard.
- 25:00 So he informed us when we came back. Then I went up to breakfast just like the rest. When we came back the guard came in and he said, "Actually I'm not German, I'm Czechoslovakian."
- 25:30 I know what two of you men expect to do. Now, I've got no choice. If they try to escape I've got to shoot them and I will. But I'm telling you now, don't try it." which was very good of him. He said, "I know all about it."
- 26:00 So he went out and it was then that Makepeace told us who'd done it. I know one of their name, the other was from South Australia, but I won't mention his name because he's since died. It wouldn't do any good anyway. We stay there a while.
- 26:30 Actually they did try to escape the following week. They got away, but they didn't get far. They were caught. We went back in there. We were working in the stone quarry. At the cement factory we used to go down to the cement factory and you had trucks pull coal dust and you had to unload it for the furnaces down there. We
- 27:00 used to get, we had an hour to unload the truck, a big truck of coal. Then we found out that we could open all the doors and scoop it out and do it in twenty minutes and then have ten minutes rest. So we used to do that. When the truck came up to go onto the other track and turn around on the other track you just leave it
- 27:30 slightly off and it'd come off the rails. That'd give you another break. The Jerries [Germans] never woke up to that. Then the other blokes that used to work issuing the cement to the locals. They used to put it on a slide and slide it down. They'd say, "Four bags." So they'd just slide four bags down. They got so that every
- 28:00 now and again they used to do a bargain with the bloke down below. He'd throw them up a sandwich or something and they'd stick an extra bag on and slide it down. This went on all the time. In the stone quarry we used to quarry the mine. They had a civvy [civilian] used to do the blasting. We used to quarry it and load it onto trucks and put a pin in just to hold it in place while
- 28:30 it went round the bend and tipped into the flying foxes. Then we got the idea of every now and again we'd send a truck down we'd leave the pin out. When it went round the bend it'd tip out and it would all tip on the ground. There were all sorts of tricks we got up to that they couldn't tell. One day, it was
- 29:00 coming towards winter, they came in and said, "You'll get out in the morning in the dark, because the days are getting shorter. You'll have your breakfast and then you go to work in the dark. The lights will be switched on and you'll start work
- 29:30 in the dark." So we thought, "Bugger that." We thought, "We haven't got the clothes for it for winter. There's really not enough food." There was thirty of us, we held a meeting. We said, "Bugger it. We won't do it." Next morning they came in,
- 30:00 marched us out and said, "Right turn," and no one moved. The German said, "Right turn," no one moved. Then he says "Was ist?" We said, "We're not working. We're not going to work in the dark. Our

clothes are not good enough and we're not getting our food." With that he wheeled us back inside and locked us up.

30:30 We were there for about two hours and an officer came out from the Maribor. He said, "Right!" Lined us up again. He said, "Now, when I say right turn, you will right turn. When I say quick march, you will march out to work." We all just stood there. So he said, "Right turn," and no movement.

31:00 "Right turn," no movement. So he looked at us and he said, "You, you, you, step forward." Three blokes stepped forward. He said, "Now, when I say right turn you will right turn and march to work. If you don't I'll shoot these three men."

31:30 Everyone's sort of thinking. With that, the bloke in the middle, he stepped forward and he said, "You can bloody shoot me now, because I'm not going out. If I go out there in these clothes, without food, I'll finish up dead anyway. You can bloody well shoot me." With

32:00 that the officer looked for a while. Back in the barracks again. We were in there for about an hour and they called us out again. Lined us up. He said, "Right, I've discussed it with my senior officers and if you guarantee to work for a fortnight without any trouble at all

32:30 we'll take you and put you on farms." Farms was the job, because that's where all the food was. So a lot of mumbling and discussion and we were, "This is all right, we're doing that." So we said we would. So we did. We were marched out for a fortnight, we worked,

33:00 done everything we were told. We came back and trucks arrived on the dot on the fortnight. They parked about two hundred yards down from us. Then they came up and loaded us onto the trucks and took us to Gratkorn to go on farms. The blokes, we'd never spoken to them at all,

33:30 they came in, they were in the place, they went on strike, they refused to work and they shot three of them. Just like that, shot them. How we, I say how we got away with it, I don't know, but the time we done it the Red Cross was inspecting

34:00 Maribor and we think there might have been an influence that saved us that day. They took us to Gratkorn.

Before we get to Gratkorn, you mentioned the two Australians who informed. What happened to them after that incident?

It's a funny

34:30 thing, they were declared WAK [?UNCLEAR] naturally, and nothing happened in the camp to them. They tried to explain it away. They didn't want it to change, they were quite happy with where they were. They were ostracised from the crowd. When we went to the farms

35:00 I don't remember them being involved. After we left Gratkorn I never saw them again. I only heard of a bloke I know who was in the 4th Battalion, because I issued a bulletin each month. In the bulletin one month,

35:30 he was mentioned as having died and they were saying what a good fellow he was. That's the only thing I know. I don't really know what happened to him. I can't remember him going to a farm. I knew everyone that was on the farms, but he wasn't. That was the last time I saw him.

36:00 **In the stone quarry, what were the conditions like?**

They were reasonably. The bunks were three high. Three tiers. No, as usual they were, I suppose you'd say

36:30 quite good. The food was definitely more than usual. But you were doing a lot heavier work than usual. They called it a punishment camp, so I don't know what they mean by that.

What was an average meal at that camp?

37:00 Everything, your meal was stewed whatever it was. Only that would have a few vegetable in it, more potatoes and a bit of meat and a bigger helping. You get more bread. So you used to get a slice of bread a day. A thick slice, but no butter.

37:30 Actually, with the Red Cross parcel it wasn't bad if you got the Red Cross parcel. You didn't get them very often when you were out of the actual camps. Maribor and that, you'd get them there. When you get onto the farms you get them there, but you get them about once a month if you were lucky.

38:00 If you got on the farms you didn't need them because you were getting fed. It mightn't be what you call good food, but you were getting the same as the Germans were getting themselves, the farmers. They used to grow some of their own and kill the pigs.

38:30 Not cattle. If you had a car it was collected, taken to hire.

What was in a Red Cross parcel?

Mostly tinned stuff. Cake of soap, packet of cigarettes, and then you'd probably get a

39:00 tin of egg powder, tin of malt, herrings in tomato sauce – bloody awful things. Baked beans, Spam occasionally,

39:30 Sort of standard things like that.

What was the ingredient in these parcels that was the thing you most looked forward to eat?

Not eat. Cigarettes and soap. Cigarettes, because I didn't smoke, and that's all you could

40:00 trade in. If you wanted to buy something you could buy it, but only for cigarettes. They wouldn't even look at money. Soap, because you could wash. We had a bloke in my hut and he was always spick and span and dressed to kill. He wouldn't wash. He used to get his Red Cross parcel,

40:30 open it, the first thing he'd do was sell his soap for cigarettes. You could buy that for cigarettes. If you had cigarettes you could buy a loaf of bread off the guard over the fence. You could get everything for cigarettes, but you couldn't get anything for money.

Tape 7

00:35 How important were the parcels for boosting your morale?

Very. When you're in camp you had to get the Red Cross parcels or it was very hard. You

01:00 couldn't do anything. You had to reserve all your energy. If you got the Red Cross parcels they were no good on their own. If you decided "I'll do it on my own," they were no good. Because once you opened a tin, you had to eat it or it would go off. Whereas if you had three of you and you were all together, you could

01:30 sort of cook these. But they were very important. At times they were pretty slow in coming. If they were good they'd come at regular intervals. You had to have them. Couldn't exist without Red Cross parcels,

02:00 at one stage we went without them for a long while for some reason. Blokes had pets. Cats, birds, all sorts of things they had as pets. They used to die off. Blokes used to get cats, kill them, skin them, take them to the cook house and get it cooked. Not their own cats, other cats. Take them up

02:30 and in the cook house you had a certain amount of blokes were in the cook house. You had to take your stuff up there and put it in and they cooked it for you. It had a name on a tag and at a certain time you'd come up and collect it. They'd give it out according to the tag. On one occasion a bloke at the corner, his cat had disappeared.

03:00 He went up the cook house at lunchtime and he waited for him to come up, and sure enough, they came along when they called out the name and it was his cat that was killed. There was hell to pay. No, without them it was very, very hard. When we got on the

03:30 farms you didn't need them. You used to get them occasionally, not very often, and I used to do my escape, when I started to get my strength back and everything was OK I used to store it. There was beds for thirty men in the hut we were in, but there was only three of us in it. I used to

04:00 store them in the palliasse. There was chocolates in them - and I used to store them in that. When I escaped I had a whole heap of food that was stored there. That's the way I done it, through the Red Cross. You didn't need them when you were on the farms. I was on three farms altogether before I got to the final one.

04:30 My first one, you've got no idea what the farm's like. They were [peasant UNCLEAR] farmers, they can't have you to work for them unless they've got somewhere to lock you up of a night time because you're on your honour you're not to try and escape during the day and they've got to lock you up at night. If they've got nowhere to lock you up they can't have a prisoner

05:00 of war. The first one I was at they used to thresh the wheat over a log, this is for their own use. Then you had to shovel it into a sieve and turn the handle. It'd sift it down three layers to get the wheat at the bottom. That's the way they used to have it.

05:30 They got permission to kill a pig. I had to wrap around the back legs and I had to hold the back legs. The grandmother sat on the pig to keep it down, the farmer cut its throat and the wife had a tray

06:00 and she held it under its neck to catch the blood until it was dead. She'd off with the blood, grandmother would go back inside and the old bloke, I'd help him drag the pig up to a trough and he's scrub it down there and then he'd carve it up. He wouldn't waste a thing.

- 06:30 He had a cow there. He used to plough the field with the cow. He used to milk it. When it was due to be served, he asked me if I wanted to go with him. I said, "Yes." We had to lead it five miles to get it served. We put its head in a brace, get it served
- 07:00 and then scrub its back so it wouldn't hunch up when it finished and then lead it back home. It had a calf and then when it was having the calf, they were all kept in stalls all the time, the wife would hold the head
- 07:30 and eventually when the feet got out I had to grab hold of the feet and as the cow heaved she'd say, "Pull," and I had to pull until eventually it got out. That's how the calf was born. The calf was there for two weeks. A German with a big St Bernard
- 08:00 dog arrived, picked it up, took it away. They weren't allowed to have a calf. Everything was kept on stalls. The cow was used when they had to get coal down at the railway. They had to hitch the cow up to a truck, it had to pull it right down the railway and get the coal and pull it back.
- 08:30 It was absolutely unbelievable. We went in, first time I was there, to sit down for a meal. I used to eat with them. They said grace, put a bowl of sauerkraut and stuff in the middle of
- 09:00 the table, said grace, then they all into it with spoons. I just sat there looking. When they saw I wasn't eating they stopped and said, "Was ist?" I said, "No, I don't eat like that." Finally I talked into getting my own plate. When we killed
- 09:30 the pig, it was winter and there was snow on the ground. When I finished killing it they said, "You go down the bottom to the woodshed to cut some wood." So I went down the woodshed and I was cutting the wood. The grandmother came down to me and said, "Like piece of cake?" I looked at
- 10:00 her and I looked at the cake and thought, "It's all right." I said, "Yeah." She said, "Have a piece of cake." So I took a piece of cake and I thought, "This is all right." So I stood there and I started eating it. It was quite good. I was about halfway through it when I suddenly realised what it was. It was the blood. That's as far as it went.
- 10:30 They locked me up in my room of a night time. They used to, I demanded a bucket of warm water. They couldn't understand it. The old bloke there, he wasn't a bad old soul, he came up and he was going to lock me up. He was sitting there watching me and trying to talk.
- 11:00 I had a blade razor I'd bought off the Germans. So I had a wash and I got out the blade razor and I was having a shave. Soon as I got out the blade razor he said, "Me no Nazi." Went out the door and locked that door. I don't know what he thought I was going to
- 11:30 do. I worked there for about a month. We used to have Sundays free. Sometimes I used to go back to the main set-up to see if there was any Red Cross parcels or any mail or anything and have a talk with the blokes. Sometimes I used to just go
- 12:00 across the road about two miles to where another bloke was working. I used to talk to him for someone to talk to. Eventually she came out, and she said to me "You work Sundays." I said, "No." She said, "I say you work, you work." I said, "Sunday nichts. No work."
- 12:30 She said, "I say you work, you work." I said, "No." She said, "I am boss. I say Sunday you work, you work Sunday." So with that I went up, I had a palliasse, packed everything in it and I headed back to the camp. She followed me up the hill saying that I worked Sundays, I worked Sundays until I got to the
- 13:00 top of the hill and she could see I was serious and then she called me for everything. I went back type of thing to the camp, I went in and the guard nearly fell over. He said, "What's this?" I said, "No, I won't finish. Nichts, fertig." He said, "Was ist?" I said, "No arbeit. Nichts, fertig." So he locked me up
- 13:30 and had a big conference and apparently found another farm that would take me. They had about six heifers and I used to have to look after them. I used to clean the stalls out, feed them, and that's all I done. It was down on the main road to the town. So after a while, getting bored,
- 14:00 I used to go and do my job, I'd feed the heifers and then I'd go out. I'd sit at the front fence. As the girls went passed I whistled at them. This went on for a long, I never got any results. You'd see some of them laugh to themselves. I'd just whistle as they went passed. I went down and
- 14:30 finally I was feeding the heifers and I had a melon to put in the grinder. I pushed down too far and I caught my thumb. I was in a hell of a trouble. Started to bleed everywhere. So they sent for the guard. He came down and he decided I'd better go and see the doctor. I was wrapped up in a towel. So away we went down to the
- 15:00 doctor's. Went into the doctor's. All civilians were pushed aside. If you were a soldier, doesn't matter who's side you were on, you were first. I went into the doctor's and he said, "What's up?" and the guard told him. He said, "Give us your arm." So he got my arm under

- 15:30 his, I'm standing behind him, the guard's watching me. He got the fingernail and he yanked it off. Oh God. Then he bandaged it up. "You're all right." So away I went, the guard marched me back to the farm.
- 16:00 By the time I got back there, the whole thumb was just a mass of blood. So the guard says "You work," I said, "No, I'm sick." So he looked at the thumb so we had to go back to the doctor's. We went back type of thing he doctor's and he took the bandage off and bandaged it up again. Then sent me back and they sent me back to work. I said to the guard "No, no, no, can't, I'm sick.
- 16:30 I won't work." So he took me back to the guest house. I went back there and while I was there the Gestapo [German secret police] came up and they said, "Get him off the farm. He's too familiar with the civilians." That's because I was whistling at the girls. They said, "Get him off."
- 17:00 So I stayed at the farm there for a while and then the guest house used the Bürgermeister [mayor]. He put me on at his place. He had two men working for him and I worked there for, I was starting to get good. Cut the,
- 17:30 I done the siding, I'd never done it before in my life, but I learned to side in there. I used to cut all the wood, it was quite a big guest house, and bring it into the fire for the stove. Just do what I had to do. They didn't
- 18:00 worry about me. I used to just wander around the place and do these jobs and do that job and have a drink of cider out of the cellar and all this. I had a free hand. I used to feed, they had a guard dog there, I used to feed him so he thought I was the best thing since sliced bread. I stayed there for a period of time and then
- 18:30 I decided "I've got my strength back, I'm going to escape." So I had a free run of the place. I used to sleep in the loft at times, during the day. I'm sleeping in there one day and I seen a bloke who worked for him, a German, I heard the noise down below. So I sneaked over the edge
- 19:00 and I saw this German hiding eggs down a hole they had down the side. So he used to steal the eggs off them and I used to steal eggs off him and take them back and cook them in the night. I used to have a free run. They'd tell me what they wanted me to do and I'd do it. They
- 19:30 didn't worry about other times as long as I done what they asked me. They had two stallions there, big stallions. I used to lead them when they used to plough the fields. They had an old bloke used to ride them. I used to lead them until a mare came down the road and then the stallions would start rearing up in the air and I wasn't going to be around that,
- 20:00 so I let them go. I decided to escape so I thought, "I've stored a lot of Red Cross parcels in the palliasse." So I decided that I'd give it a go. So I tried to work out a plan. I got a local and I was talking to him and he brought out a plan. He had shown me walks because
- 20:30 I used to go for walks. It was a map of the area. So I didn't say anything to him. I gave him a couple of cigarettes and just talking to him. Then I gave him a couple of more cigarettes and I said, "Can I have this?" He said, "Yes." So I put it in my pocket. It was a plan of where to go. During the day when no one was around I'd
- 21:00 go in the backroom, because when the guard let you out of a morning he'd take off and go to the local pub or somewhere. I got the hacksaw, I went up and they had a window at the end and they had all bars down it. So gradually I sawed through the bars. I'd saw them out and I'd just leave a thread hanging at the top to
- 21:30 hold them and then I'd get soap and I'd put soap in them and get dirt and rub it over it. I'd sawed three bars out of the window, the guard used to come in every night, look up and down the room and say, "Guten Nacht," [good night] and walk out. So when the time came to escape I had to tell everyone because I didn't know what happened
- 22:00 when I did escape. I they wanted to escape they had to be in it then, because they mightn't get another chance. Well, there was I was there in the room and there was two Kiwis [New Zealanders] and there was another big Kiwi that worked on the place who I thought was marvellous. There was another
- 22:30 Kiwi that was working at another farm, but they had nowhere to lock him away, but they were close to the centre so they used to bring him in, he used to be locked up at night time. When I told them I was going to escape the big Kiwi didn't want to come with me, he was quite happy where he was. It was the place to be, on a farm. The other bloke who
- 23:00 used to get locked up there, he said, "Can I come with you?" I said, "It'll be right as long as you've got some of your Red Cross food." He said, "Yeah." And another English bloke, Gawler Wright, was on another farm and he decided he wanted to go too. So I said
- 23:30 "You meet on the top of the hill at 12 o'clock. You've got to be there by 12 o'clock because I can't afford to wait till daylight." When the night came I used to feed the guard dog. When the night came I just grabbed three bars, pulled them out of the window, got out with a tin of herrings in tomato sauce,

- 24:00 got the guard dog, took him around the other side of the building and gave him a feed of herrings in tomato sauce while the other bloke go out. Then we got all our stuff and we headed up the hill. When we got up the hill the other fellow, Gawler Wright, was waiting there for us and away we went. We went down, we went through the village, and then we were going across a bridge. We didn't know whether they had a guard
- 24:30 on the other end or not. I'd worked out a plan and I decided we had to cross the bridge to go where we were going. So we had to take the risk. As it was, good, there was no one there. We crossed over the bridge and we headed off along into where we were going. I got out
- 25:00 the map. It showed this map walkway right along and it showed where it went down right along to some timber huts where the Jewish people used to work. Then I went up over the hill of a mountain and right at the top it showed a ski hut for people who got caught out, stranded, where they could get food
- 25:30 and supplies. So I worked out, if we follow this track down, we go along to the timber hut. If there's no one there we can sleep in there, and then the next day we go up and over the mountain, we can raid the ski hut and get some food, and continue on over the mountain. What I didn't know was
- 26:00 the map was probably as old as I am. We followed it down all the way. First of all we tried walking in the forest of a night time. I found out that when we got in the forest you couldn't see anything. It was absolutely pitch black. You couldn't keep track of each other. So we had to come out. We decided we'd walk in the night time and
- 26:30 go into the bushes in the day and hide. Well, we succeeded in that and we got down to the timber huts and there was no one there so we slept there for the night. The next morning we were off first thing. We went along the track and we followed it along. It was true. We went right a long and we got up to
- 27:00 where it went over the mountain and where the ski hut was. You don't want to know, there wasn't a ski hut there. There was a resort. A hotel. There were skiers everywhere. Skiing all over the place. We said, "God, what do we do now?" Fortunately at the very time we got there, almost ten minutes after we got there,
- 27:30 a bell rang. Real loud. All the skiers went into the hotel for tea. We crossed over and down the other side. You've got no idea. We scooted down the other side and we came, Gawler Wright could speak perfect German. We were going down the other side
- 28:00 and a group of two blokes, I think they were two blokes, sang out to us. Gawler said to him, "Be on your way, no need to fear, we're soldiers in their duties." With that they went off the other way as fast as you like. We went down and we got down to the bottom and it's getting daylight and we crossed the
- 28:30 road then. We crossed it and we said, "We've got to get somewhere to hide because it's going to be daylight soon and there'll be people all over the place." The only place we could see was a knoll behind a cornfield. I said, "We'll go up there and we'll stay there for the day." So we went through the cornfield and we got up on the knoll. We looked down back at the knoll and you could see the track
- 29:00 through the cornfield where we walked. It was a distinct track. We thought, "If anyone wakes up!" But fortunately they didn't. The next day we took off along the road going towards a place called Bruck. During the night, we're walking along, and as we came down the road you could see the
- 29:30 fire on the side off the road. As we got closer there was a guard on it. We thought, "What the hell do we do now?" So we thought, "There's nothing much you can do, but try and bluff your way through," because they'd seen us walking down the road. As we got down near it, it was cold and the guard stayed near the fire. He sang out
- 30:00 "Was ist?" and Gawler said, "We're late for work, we're going to work." The bloke said, "You'd better hurry up." We hurried up. We went right through and we got out the other side and got about a mile out of the town, it was only a small town. There was a big factory there, I don't know what it was, and Gawler said, "I've feel crook.
- 30:30 I've got to lay down." So we looked around and there was bushes there. They weren't very high but they were bushes so we got into the bushes and lay down and put our overcoat over him and snuggled into him to keep him warm. We're sitting there and daylight came. The next thing, a Gestapo bloke comes along and parks his bike out the front and starts checking passes as they
- 31:00 go past. There are the three of us, not 50 yards, behind him. We had to lay there. We lay there all day and not making a sound. Gawler came round, he seemed to be all right again. So eventually the bloke went on his way, done his checking for the day, so he went on his way. So we took off again and went down and over the hill.
- 31:30 Up on the tip of the hill we went into the bushes there and there was a creek so we had a wash in it. Freezing water. Had a great old wash and then headed down the other side. We got down just outside Bruck. It was a hill looking down over Bruck and we were running out of food. It just hadn't gone the distance. So we thought, "What do we do now? We've still

- 32:00 got at least" we were heading for Switzerland, see. We thought we'd got at least four hundred miles to go. So we decided that although it was taboo, we'd jump a train and try to jump a train. There was a rail centre in the middle of the town.
- 32:30 So we waited till it got dark and we headed into town. We were heading up and down the railway looking for some sign of anything going to Switzerland so we could see if we could hide ourselves on it anywhere. We were walking up and down and it's starting to get daylight and we were walking up towards the end of a rail tracks
- 33:00 and a Gestapo bloke came round there and he stopped and he looked at us and then he took off. So we said, "What do you reckon?" I said, "Well, we've been spotted now. There's no way we can get out of town. If we try to get out of town
- 33:30 we'll probably get shot by trying to avoid the Gestapo. So the best thing we can do is give up and try another time." We'd been out for a fortnight. So eventually we went into town. We tried looking for the Gestapo, knock at doors and they'd open the door and as soon as you say Gestapo they slam it.
- 34:00 Eventually we found a Gestapo place and we went and knocked at the door and no answer. Knocked at the door again, no answer. So we opened the door and walked in and the place was empty. They were all out looking for us. So we just collapsed on the floor and went to sleep. When the Gestapo came back we were on the floor asleep.
- 34:30 From there they took us to a camp. There was a camp of POWs in the rail centre, Englishmen. They took us down there to stow us away in there until they were ready to move us. They wouldn't speak to us. They wouldn't have anything to do with us. They thought we were a set-up.
- 35:00 They weren't really interested. You could see. They were sort of thinking "I'm not going to fall for this." Eventually they took us back to Spittal by truck.

Why did they think you were a set-up?

The Germans were

- 35:30 notorious for planting people in your camp to get information. That's what they thought we were. They didn't know. So they seemed to think we might have been. They wouldn't tell us anything. That's the only reason we could think. They were English. We tried to explain
- 36:00 who we were, but we were locked up in a room in the place and they wouldn't come near us.

How did you feel about that?

We didn't worry about that because it didn't make any difference. The next day they took us out and took us to Spittal. Spittal was a camp for troublemakers.

- 36:30 It was still in Austria, Spittal. When you went to Spittal, when they got enough they used to ship you over to Germany proper. The funny part about it is, in hindsight, looking after I went back to Austria, looking at the country I had to cross to get to Switzerland,
- 37:00 that would have been absolutely impossible. There were huge mountains you had to either climb or go through the tunnel. If you went through the tunnel you were gone because there had to be someone at the other end. You couldn't walk through the tunnel anyway, there was nowhere to hide if anything appeared. It would have been absolutely impossible to get out there. The best thing we ever done was to be taken to Germany because you
- 37:30 could escape. They took us to Spittal. When there was enough there they said, "Now we're taking you to Germany. It's a good camp, it's run by your own people. We have guards on it, but your own people administer everything that's in the place. There's sport, there's
- 38:00 everything you want. You'll like it there, but if you escape you won't like where we send you to next time." They said that to us before we went. When they got, I think it was two hundred to two hundred and twenty blokes, put them on the train and took them up to Stalag 383.

When you made the decision to

- 38:30 **find the Gestapo, what condition were you in?**

We were pretty good. Condition would have been running down a bit because we hadn't had any food.

- 39:00 Fortunately, when we took off from Gratkorn we were in good condition. That sort of stood us by. When we went to 383 it was a new thing. We had to go in there and it was lines of huts and fourteen men to a hut.
- 39:30 To escape from there you had to join the escape committee. If they were digging a tunnel, you had to help to dig the tunnel.

Tape 8

00:31 **Before we go on to 383, tell us about Spittal. How was the camp set up?**

It was behind an army barracks. It was only a temporary set-up. We had an escape that happened from there.

01:00 Not to me. They used to have the doctor used to come along. He used to drive in and he'd drive in, just say, "Heil Hitler!" and drive around, park his car, get out and go into the hut. The sick would parade to see him. This day, there were blokes on the lookout all the time,

01:30 this day he came in, he said, "Heil Hitler," he drove down, he parked his car, he hopped out and he went in to his room where he was going to interview blokes. With that, two Aussies came out, got in his car, one lay down in the back and the other sat in the seat, took his hat off the seat, put it on his head,

02:00 drove up, said, "Heil Hitler" and out the gate he went. Just like that. I think he got about two miles and he discarded the car. But he didn't get anywhere. There were huge mountains all around there. That's what they were like. They were thinking all the time. In

02:30 escaping, I found that you had to have a plan. You couldn't just escape and so something, you had to know what you were going to do or there was no way you could succeed.

By the stage in the war when you arrived at Stalag 383, what year was it? How long had you been a prisoner?

03:00 It'd be late 1942, I'd say.

Were you hearing news about the war when you were a prisoner?

All the time.

How were you getting news?

They had cat's whiskers. Have you heard of cat's whiskers?

Can you describe that?

They have a

03:30 little crystal and they get, they call it cat's whisker because they get a little whisker and they tune onto it and they can at times get news out of it, but mostly they don't. You get a lot of

04:00 what they think you should hear. You go to hut and there might be some of the cat's whiskers just laying in the door and they'd scream blue murder. If the whisker gets out of place you can't get anything.

Where did they have these?

Blokes all over the camp had those, but they had an official camp radio and they used to get the news on that.

04:30 They used to write it out in the bulletin. They had certain blokes used to go around and read it to the various huts. That was the official news.

Was that allowed?

No. They used to, I think the official one was hid in a guitar. They had it inside a guitar and they had

05:00 blokes in the camp and they used to be watching the gate all the time. They had a fellow they used to call the Mole, a German. Never spoke English. I believe he could understand it, but he never spoke English. Three of them together used to just wander round and unofficially they got radios that were unofficial.

05:30 They caught up with them.

You were describing the camp. Can you continue that?

It was a very big camp. I think they said it was five hundred blokes in it. Five thousand blokes in it, I mean. You could play football, you could

06:00 play any type you liked. I used to play league, union, used to ice skate in the winter, played basketball in the summer. If you want to learn something there was always someone there that could teach you. It doesn't matter what it was, there was someone could teach you. Even blokes used to learn Japanese. There was always somewhere

06:30 their teacher. They used to have dancing lessons. The Germans couldn't get over that. They'd go up and stand at the window and watch two blokes dancing. They used to have concerts. You name it, they did it. We even made grog.

- 07:00 Very potent grog. They used get a big tin, and they'd put sugar in it, prunes you used to get in the Red Cross parcel into it, potato peels, and they'd bury it. I think it was
- 07:30 aspirin they used to get from the doctor. Go on the sick parade to get aspirin and they used to throw that in too. They used to, when it finally got to the bubbling stage, it was all bubbling up, take it out and you had a little [UNCLEAR] hat and a little stove. You used to put a tube in, seal the lid up
- 08:00 all around the edge, put a tube in the top, you'd run it up over and down through water and out the other side. You'd start the stove up. It used to come out the other end drip by drip by drip. A Coke bottle would
- 08:30 take hours to fill. When it came out of that it was potent. I remember one time a bloke said, "It doesn't do that, I could drink a bottle of it no trouble." He drank a coke bottle of it and they had to hold him down and force a fork into his mouth
- 09:00 to stop him from biting his tongue. That bad. Our own doctor said, "If you keep drinking that stuff it'll kill you." It was that potent. But nevertheless, they had parties. In the night time the Germans wouldn't come into the camp. They'd come in in the daytime, but not in the night
- 09:30 time. The things that went on there were unreal. When the British landed at Dieppe and they took the prisoners in handcuffs remember. So the Germans decided, "Right, if it's good enough for them it's good enough for us." So they came in and they were going to handcuff us all.
- 10:00 So they brought them in. First thing in the morning, the guard used to arrive in the huts, bring in the handcuffs and they'd handcuff everyone. They'd walk out the door and by the time they got out the door the handcuffs were undone anyway. They used to get the handcuffs and they used to stick them in their pockets across the front and they'd walk around camp and if they saw a German coming they'd stick their hands in their pocket. That's all it was.
- 10:30 In the finish, the Germans, instead of pulling the handcuffs in they just used to come in and hang them on the back of the door.

How much was the camp run by your own officers?

By a sergeant major was, I never ever saw him. He was the administrator for the whole of the inside of the camp.

- 11:00 They used to have a, your trouble was heating, you had a stove, but you were lucky if you'd get fuel to fuel it. They used to bring a truck in there to pump out the latrine. It was a great, about a fifteen-holer
- 11:30 shed and used to go in there and have fifteen long. That way, in the finish, when it got cold, you wouldn't go to the toilet unless you had to because the blokes would take all the palings off the outside to burn. You nearly freeze to death too soon. So one day a truck came in
- 12:00 to pump it out. So he parks his truck on the roadway and connects his pump up and he's fiddling about with it. Immediately they descended on his truck without him knowing and they took all the fuel he had. He came back to his truck to go out and he saw all his fuel gone. So he said
- 12:30 "What's this? Where's my fuel?" No one knew where his fuel was. So he said, "I'll give you ten minutes. If my fuel's not back here in ten minutes, I'll dump the lot right here in your road." He did. His fuel wasn't back so he dumped it. Fortunately it was winter and it immediately froze.
- 13:00 So they had to get it picked up by shovels and taken back to. Another one was, the main entrance was a guard enclosure and they used to count you there and then they'd let you off into another enclosure. You'd walk through that and you'd go into the camp. The second enclosure was quite big and an administrative office
- 13:30 on the side. It had a guard box right at the top. The guard, they always had someone in the guard box, he used to come out of the guard box, he'd walk down the side of the administration building and around the end. Then he'd come back and come back up. This day this winter, he came out, he walked down
- 14:00 the side of the administration building, around the corner and he hadn't got one step around the corner, four blokes rushed out the building next door, picked up his guard box and carted it in and started to saw it up. When he came back he came round there and he was halfway back to his guard box and he saw it was gone and he couldn't do a thing because he couldn't leave without
- 14:30 someone to relieve him. He had to wait till they were changing the guard to tell them someone had pinched his guard box. Then they raided the place and it was sawed up, never saw it again.

How real was the problem of cold and weather at 383?

Pretty bad. They

- 15:00 used to take, looks like our good day's gone.

Talking about the weather, here it comes.

they used to take parties out to collect wood. Each hut was allowed one man and he went out and all he could carry back he could have. They didn't limit the amount

- 15:30 you carried back, but he had to carry it back himself. But they used to take you that far out to pick up the wood that by the time you gathered it you had to cart it about five miles to get it back to camp. They had all sorts of things. They got together a large pole and they'd tie it up with a bundle on it and pull it over their shoulder. Then the blokes got shrewd.
- 16:00 There were always thinkers there. They got shrewd and they were marching them out of the camp and they'd drop out of the party. As soon as they got on the hill near the bush they'd drop out straight away. They'd make up a terrific bundle and they'd stay there until they started to come back. When the first bloke came back they'd join in again.
- 16:30 So then they came back and they were saying "How the hell did you carry that?" They had great bundles. The trouble was, the Germans woke up to them too. They caught them, a few of them and just said, "Right, dump it and how back you go without any."

How fierce was the German punishment if somebody got out of line?

- 17:00 I don't think anyone ever got caught. I got a week on bread and water for escaping. Solitary confinement. They had a hut outside the camp and they used to put you in there for solitary confinement. It was
- 17:30 full all the time. You had to wait your turn to get in. I got in there when my turn came and the first day you go into solitary confinement, you've got a bed there, no blankets, nothing, that's it. Then they bring you along a
- 18:00 slice of bread and a dixie [mess tin] of water and that's what you got. Solitary confinement. First of all you get your bread and you just throw it in the corner. After about 3 days you go to the corner, get it all back and eat it. You used to come out through the day and you had to go around the hut for exercise.
- 18:30 A guard used to stand at the hut and every now and again the guard would walk around. You'd just walk around and around the hut for exercise. That's the only exercise you got. It wasn't far from the camp. The blokes, their mates used to get tins of whatever and throw it over so they could catch it.
- 19:00 This day we're walking round the hut, one after the other, and a bloke hurled a tin of bully beef across. Just as he hurled it across a guard walked around the corner and it hit him in the head and dropped him. He was cold. He dropped. Everyone went up the other end and guards tried to get them to go around the hut and they said they're
- 19:30 not going to be there when this bloke comes to. They kept walking round in a little circle round at the front of the place. No one would go round the hut because no one wanted to be there when he came to. So they shuffled us all back and went to find out what was wrong. Nothing, I never heard anything of it.

What the escape attempt that got you in solitary confinement?

That was the one from Gratkorn.

20:00 Tell us about the system for escape at 383.

- There was a committee there. If you joined the committee you could get papers. If you had a blanket they had someone who could make it into a suit. They had very good forged papers. They had all the
- 20:30 information they could get. Everyone that escaped and came back they'd milk him straight away for information. They done everything they could to help you. They built a tunnel. So they could build it, they made a garden outside and they used to get the soil in bags
- 21:00 and a bloke would walk around the garden and just drop the soil so they couldn't recognise it, to disguise it, to conceal it. If you wanted to escape you had to put your name down. The blokes who worked on the tunnel, they were first to be able to go out. There were blokes there,
- 21:30 there was one Englishman, he wouldn't escape because he had a family. He wouldn't risk it. But he'd risk climbing up and cutting a hole in the wire to get out. He'd risk doing that, but he wouldn't escape himself. There was blokes used to start
- 22:00 tunnels themselves. One of them tunnelled under the road, foolishly, he tunnelled under the road and when a truck came down the road it just sank and filled in the tunnel. This was going on all the time. The escape committee had another idea. The Red Cross parcels used to come in and they used to go into a hut and they were unwrapped
- 22:30 and then distributed to you. All the wrapping used to go back into the bags and they'd carry them out and dump them in the shed outside the camp. They got the idea, the little blokes, anyone who was little. They used to, when they were filling up the bags they used to put a man in and put the rubbish in on top of him and then,

23:00 it was mainly Kiwis that used to do it because the Kiwis used to just throw it over their shoulders, carry it out, dump it in the shed. Night fall just out he goes. You name it, they thought of it. When I finally got out there, my last escape when I got back to Neustadt,

23:30 they'd decided to move the, the Americans had landed, they were advancing on Nuremberg so they decided to move the prisoners back on a forced march. So they issued orders. "Tomorrow morning at 5 o'clock, you've all got to be up and

24:00 lined up outside your huts ready to march out. When you march out we'll take dogs over the camp with guards. Anyone who's found will be shot." That's all there was to it. A mate of mine used to work in the cook house. A Kiwi.

24:30 We decided that there was no way we were going to march back. So we had a discussion with the sergeant major in charge of the cook house and we decided, there was the cook house and there were cellars down below where they used to keep mainly potatoes to feed you. So we decided we'd go down in the cellar.

25:00 There was a whole heap of potatoes down there, we'd shovel them out, dig a hole in the wall underneath the room above, clear it out, board it up and shovel all the potatoes back so it just looked like a big bundle of potatoes. Go upstairs. We had arranged with someone to

25:30 take the stove out of the corner, it had a plate underneath it. He lifted it out, we'd saw a hole down into where we'd cleaned it out, put the plate back on top and the stove on top. It had carbine lamps. We'd take the carbine lamp and break it and throw it all over the room so the dogs wouldn't come near it. So we started that and then

26:00 there wasn't enough of us. We were only three. We thought, "Hell, we'll never get it cleaned out in time." So we enlisted 3 others. We promised them room. We enlisted three others to help us clear out the room. Well, in the meantime the sergeant major, he was a family man, he decided that he wasn't going to risk it. He'd said he'd help out, but he wasn't going to risk

26:30 getting down the hole. So we did, we cleaned it out and we got it all done in time. We shovelled it back and you could look and it was just like it had been before. So we went up top, we got down the hole, took our blankets and whatever with us, they put the stove over the top and they threw the carbine everywhere.

27:00 Well, they moved out the next morning, we heard a noise for a while and then it gradually quietened down. There was no noise coming out at all. So we decided we had to get out for natural reasons. So we got out and when we

27:30 looked outside we were peeping round corners. The whole camp had gone, there was stuff all over the place. Then gradually blokes appeared from everywhere. Some had buried themselves and had a pipe in their mouth and just lay there and stayed there under the hut until they reckoned everyone had gone. I think there was twenty-five altogether that escaped that way. We got out, we cut a hole in the

28:00 barbed wire at the back in case they raided the front, so we had somewhere to get out the back. We went down to the local village. There was a small village just down from the camp down there. We got eggs and WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and there was white flags hanging out everywhere. They didn't know what to expect. They thought the

28:30 Americans were coming, all black, and they were worried about what they'd do. We assured them they wouldn't. We went down there two days and we got fruit, we got eggs and a lot of talk. On the third day we decided we weren't going to go down there again. It was a waste of time.

29:00 The SS moved back through the town and every bloke that went down there that day never heard of again. Just took them. So we were actually very lucky. It was just a spur of the moment thing. We stayed in the camp for 3 days and then we decided, there was three of us together,

29:30 "Right, we've had this. We're going to get back to the American lines." So we took off. We walked across the field and we were out in the open and four tanks, three or four, came round the bend about, must have been half a mile away from us.

30:00 We were watching these and we wondered who they are. So we kept walking and walking and finally there was a Yank, an American tank. He said, "Where do you blokes think you're going to?" We told him who we were. We told him there was a hospital up there with sick and they wouldn't have anything to do with us because they had waived their rights

30:30 to protection from the Geneva Convention. We said, "Yeah." He said, "Have you got any identification?" I had my pay book. I showed him that and he looked at that. He said, "Have you got any arms?" We said, "No." He said, "I'll give you some arms." He's still looking.

31:00 He looked at me and he said, "Prisoner of war, are you?" "Yeah." "You're awfully well dressed for a prisoner of war." I'd saved my clothes up. I'd promised myself that I'd go out there dressed properly. I'd saved my clothes up and I had them all on because I was going out of there. I explained

- 31:30 and finally he came around and he said, "We're at least seventy miles in front of the others. I'm telling you now, get off the road in the night time because the Germans shoot first and ask questions afterwards. The Americans shoot first and ask questions otherwise.
- 32:00 So, I strongly advise you to get off the road in the night." So he gave us arms and away we went. He headed up to the hospital. We headed back and we got to a little town and we thought we'd better get off the road. So we went in there and knocked and woke a bloke up.
- 32:30 He didn't want anything to do with us at first. Then he saw we were armed so he let us in and said he'd give us somewhere to sleep for the night. So he pointed to a room upstairs. We went up there to sleep and in the night time, I don't know who, whether it was Yanks or Germans, shelled the village. So we all dived out of bed, we hadn't taken our boots off or anything because we were prepared.
- 33:00 We raced down to the cellar. When we got down to the cellar there was this bloke down there and he's got 3 daughters there so there was no way, he didn't want us there. We stayed there for the night. The shelling eased off. We came out in the morning and we went off again and we headed off to where we were going. We knew where Nuremberg was. So we walked down the street and we came to another fair size village and they had a
- 33:30 restaurant there. We thought, "Bugger this." We went into the restaurant and just stood at the counter and asked for a coffee. We got coffee and toast, no questions asked. They gave us coffee and toast and when we came out of that there was a few civilians around. They said, "Don't go up there, there's Nazis up there. There's Nazis here and Nazis there." So
- 34:00 we thought, "Bugger it, we know where we're going." So we headed further down the road to a crossroad. We knew when you get down to the crossroad you turn right and that goes towards Nuremberg. So we got down there and we turned right. We'd gone about a mile along the road and these troops came over
- 34:30 the hill and they were too far away to discern who they were. The Germans and the Americans looked much alike in the distance. So Spence said to me "What do you reckon?" I said, "we've got no choice. If we go to dart off and they see us go to dart off they'll open up on us no matter what they are. We'll just have to keep walking
- 35:00 and hope for the best." So we kept walking. I think they felt they could walk 10 miles. We came up this hill and a bloke popped out from behind a tree and he said, "Where do you guys think you're going?" It was the Americans. They had just taken Neustadt. So they took us back into Neustadt, they questioned us
- 35:30 Apparently the American officer said, "The Germans are withdrawing in blocks. You don't know how lucky you are. You're right between two blocks. You've walked between them to get here." We didn't know. I came out of being questioned
- 36:00 and we're talking to the Yanks outside and a Yank says to me "How long has it been since you had a beer?" I said, "Four years." It's been four years." He said, "You're joking." He said, "Stay here." He went away and I was talking to the
- 36:30 others there and he came down the hill with an eighteen gallon barrel. Rolled it down the hill. So we promptly got full. Then we stayed with them for three weeks I think before they were going to move on further. We stayed with them and the Yank says "What would you like to eat?"
- 37:00 I couldn't think of anything else but chicken. Cooked chicken. I said, "Yeah, chicken." He said, "Can't you do any better than that?" I said, "No, that'll do me, chicken." He said, "All right, get your rifle." So I got the rifle and we went out and we were heading for a German farm. The farmer came out and you could see him chasing all these WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s out of the
- 37:30 yard. He said, "There you are. If you want one, shoot one." So I promptly had a shot and he said, "God, no wonder you're a prisoner of war." Then we had our chicken feed and roamed around a bit round there and had a good time then they were going forward and we were going back. So he said
- 38:00 "Nuremberg is that way. You'll be lucky to get a lift because all the traffic's going forward. We'll see you. Just follow that road along and eventually you'll get to Nuremberg." So we were walking along the road and we walked a couple of miles and a
- 38:30 Jeep came along, going our way. So as it went past I signalled for a ride, it didn't stop at all. So I yelled "You lousy B." With that it skidded to a halt, turned around and came back and he said, "What did you say?" I said, "You're a lousy B.
- 39:00 All we want is a bloody ride." He said, "What are you?" I said, "They're Kiwis and I'm Australian." "Oh, God, I thought you were French. I wouldn't feed them. Get on." He drove us into Nuremberg.

What was it like to be free?

Good. Terrific. We wandered round Nuremberg a long time and

39:30 the British came in and they issued an order that any captive prisoner of war were to be given to them and they'd look after their own. The Yanks said, "No, I found them, I'm keeping them. I'll fly them back to England." The next day they flew us back to England.

Tape 9

00:33 **Can you tell us about the incident before Spittal, where you got hit over the face?**

That was at Bruck.

01:00 I had given myself up to the Germans. They were Gestapo and they were talking about us. Deciding what to do, I suppose. I spoke out of turn, if I had a turn, I don't

01:30 know. I spoke out of turn when they were talking there. With that, one of the blokes that had a rifle turned around and whacked me right across the nose. Broke my nose and shut me up. Just as a "shut up, I'm not talking to you." That was it.

02:00 I had a very sore nose for a long while.

Was that the worst beating that you got?

From the Germans, yeah. There were a lot of cases of, I don't know whether you could call it cruelty, in Stalag 383 we had a

02:30 wire fence and then 6 feet from the wire fence you had a warning wire. You weren't supposed to go beyond that warning wire. They used to play all sorts of games. Basketball, baseball, everything. Often the balls would go underneath. If they wanted to get them they'd just signal to the bloke in the tower

03:00 to get the ball. He'd just say, and the bloke would go and get the ball and come out again. On this day there was a bloke outside the fence. He was just standing there. This fellow hit the ball under the fence. He didn't say anything to the tower

03:30 guard. It was daylight, and he just automatically stepped over the fence and went to get the ball. With that the German shot him. I don't know how you'd work this out, we were just out from Regensburg

04:00 and the night before there'd been a bombing raid in Regensburg and his mother and father were found. They had been killed. That's probably triggered it off. It's understandable isn't it? These are the sorts of things you can't help. The old

04:30 German at Belgrade used to walk around. He had a pistol in his hand all the time. He was very vicious. He'd hit you at that time at the drop of a hat. The Serbs' wives used to bring food in for them. He'd stand in there and wait till they go there, they allowed them

05:00 to give the Serbs food. He'd wait till they give it and then when they turn around to go, start firing the pistol over their head. That sort of thing. I don't think it would have taken much to get him to do much more. He wasn't a frontline troop. He was just making out like he was boss and that's it.

05:30 You run into that all along. When I was working in the quarry there's prisoners of war here and there's civilians here. I fought with the civilians. The guard didn't do anything, just stood and watched. One in particular, over a pick. It was a good pick and I had it and it

06:00 was making my work a lot easier so he tried to get it and I wasn't going to be in it. It's like the blokes that followed us into the camp and they walked out and just shot them. Three of them. No reason. I think it's sort of individual cases.

06:30 The Hitler Youth were very vicious. If you got out, escaped, and you were seen in the area, they used to send a group of Hitler Youth out to hunt you down. They used to have a couple of rifles and about six blokes. They used to hunt

07:00 fellows down. Some of them got some terrible beatings off them. They were only Hitler Youth. Blokes used to say, "Bloody kids, I can deal with them," but they couldn't. That was the way they were taught. The SS, not to us, but they were very brutal

07:30 with the Russians for instance. They brought some Russians into, in Maribor I think. They were feeding through and our men had to delouse them. Six of them, had to work the delousing the bloke. They brought them in and

08:00 they hadn't had any food, pardon me, they hadn't had any food or anything. The Germans used to beat them unmercifully with sticks. They just did it. Just matter of fact. That's terrible. They were so bad that the Germans used to have dogs.

08:30 At first they used to send the dogs in the hut. In the finish they wouldn't send the dogs in the hut

because they wouldn't come out. The Russians would do the dogs in. We threw soap over to them when we saw they were, you know. Our doctor said, "Don't throw soap over anymore, whatever you do." Because they eat it.

09:00 They were that hungry. They'd eat anything. That's how they used to treat them. I guess you'd find individuals, as far as we're concerned, who met up with that sort of stuff. Knew more about it.

09:30 We didn't strike any. I didn't strike any.

I want to talk about survival tactics.

10:00 **Tell us about the train story.**

It's only short. In Stalag 383 you were looking for something to do all the time. Something to occupy you. You had to be occupied. I used to play every sort of sport. I wouldn't play cricket because I didn't like it. It just occupied your

10:30 time. I had a physical class. A South African was doing physics. I used to do the class just for something to do. Educated blokes used to walk around the camp and talk to themselves. There was one bloke that used to walk around and around the camp, talking to himself, reciting Shakespeare. He could tell you anything you wanted to know about Shakespeare.

11:00 He went nutty in the finish. Couldn't help it. The only one who survived was that McInty I told you about. We had a big pool, what they called a fire pool. It was filled with water in case of fire. After a while it used to get very murky. McInty used to sit on the side of that with a stick and a piece of cotton and he used to fish in it. He'd sit

11:30 there for hours. Blokes would come along and they'd look at him. He survived. It's different ways of surviving.

What was the story about pretending you would be going off to catch a train?

Oh yeah. The huts along the bottom of the camp alongside the fence,

12:00 for some reason the bloke in the first hut got the idea of building and painting his hut like an Indian. He painted it up to look just like an Indian going along. It sort of took off. The bloke next-door thought, "That's a good idea," so they painted theirs

12:30 to look like a carriage and it went down the line. There was about 4 carriages. In the finish, the Germans were amazed, they couldn't figure it out at all, you could see a bloke walking down the street driving a car and a bloke walking behind him carrying a bag. He'd say, "Where are you going?" "I'm going down to catch a train. It leaves at 1 o'clock."

13:00 "Right-o." Away he'd go. He'd go down and get in one of the huts with his bag. It finished up there was a stream of blokes used to go down to catch a train and see it off. They used to blow a whistle and the train would take off and the German guards, you could see them on the side looking. "God, what's wrong with them?" It was a real regular occurrence. They used to go down.

13:30 That was just for something to do. You could get paint. There was one German who used to come in and he used to bring whitewash into whitewash rock. I don't know what rocks because none of them were ever whitewashed. He'd bring a bucketful in. He went up to - with a cigarette you could buy flour off him. That was

14:00 the whitewash. He used to bring in a bucket of flour and sell flour and go out. He never got stopped. They used to go to the fence and they'd bargain with the bloke outside for a loaf of bread. They'd say, "Weis stoop ein brot," "we sell cigarettes for a loaf of bread." He'd say, "tzen." So they'd

14:30 throw a packet of ten cigarettes over and he threw the bread over. They got shrewder, all they did, they went down to the fence and said, "Weis stoop ein brot," "tzen." He throws the cigarettes over and he throws the bread back. When he opened the pack there was nothing in it but paper. So there was hell to pay.

15:00 I forget what happened. Something happened and they reported the guard and the guard got into trouble and the prisoner didn't. Because of the treaty. They were very, Germans were very strict on their own men. So that was their nature. I guess that's why they were strict

15:30 with us. There was all sorts of things happened in camp. You couldn't believe some of the things. You really couldn't.

Why do you think something like - was really helpful?

It was just funny. Anything that was funny was good.

16:00 Anything you could laugh at was good.

You all got to know each other and how each other behaved. Tell us more about who your

mates were in 383.

One in particular was a Kiwi

16:30 who I escaped with. I didn't know him, I knew of him early in the peace, but I didn't know him till I went to Stalag 383. Then I really got to know him there. He was a barber by trade.

17:00 If you wanted a haircut, doesn't matter who you were, he'd give you a haircut. Most of them used to charge 5 cents for a haircut, 5 cigarettes. He'd give you a haircut, if you could afford to give him a cigarette, OK, if you didn't it didn't matter. He used to be working for his fellow mates all the time.

17:30 Never stopped working for them. He and I finished up great mates.

What was his name?

Spence Hill. When he went home to New Zealand he continued in the same strain. He worked for the returned soldiers and got awarded for it.

18:00 He was that good. He was a funny bloke. They used to call him Terror. He always had someone chasing him saying "If I catch you, Terror, I'll bloody kill you." He was laughing all the time. He was the littlest bloke you've ever seen. A good

18:30 sportsman a good singer. He'd sing a song and if anyone wanted a song he'd sing a song. The Kiwis used to get from home parcels. They were all wrapped in hessian. Very light hessian. He got me, it was 1, 2, 3,

19:00 7 wrappings off the parcels. They were all square. I sowed them all together in a long line and made a sheet for my bed. Don't ask me what I sewed them with because I don't know. I know I sewed them, but I can't remember where I got cotton or whatever to sew it. But I did. I also made a sheet for him.

19:30 The only trouble was a when you used to wash it, to hang it out it was so long. That was a creature comfort. All the bunks, with the shortage of fuel and that, the bunks were lined along each side of the hut. There was about four bunks on one side and four on the other. They all finished up all joined together. They'd taken

20:00 one bunk and pulled the post out and put the other one in so they had two posts, one from each side, to burn. They had the floors were lined to keep out the cold. Blokes had pulled all that out and burnt all the wadding. Anything for

20:30 heat. Bathing facilities weren't the best. I used to go up and turn the tap on flat out in the washroom. They had washbasins and a big tap at the end. I used to turn that on flat out and then I'd jump under it and jump out, soap myself,

21:00 jump under and get the soap off and jump out again. That's all you could get, cold water. It was cold water.

How did you manage to keep your clothes in good order?

I didn't wear them much. My uniform that I was issued by the Red Cross

21:30 I used to sleep on that. I was determined I was going out well dressed, and I did. Not everyone was like that. There was some wouldn't have cared less.

Where would you put your uniform?

Under, they had boards under the bed, just laid it on that,

22:00 put the bed on top. It was only a palliasse full of straw. Keep it there. It's a funny thing, every now and again, things pop back into your mind. When I escaped from

22:30 Gratkorn, the next morning they had the Gestapo there and a patrol of SS. They set out after me. I think it was the way I went or where I went that no one in their right mind would have gone that way. Because

23:00 I didn't know what I was going into. I think that's why they didn't catch me because they'd have said, "he wouldn't go that way." I don't know where they thought I'd go, whether they thought I was going to try and get back to Greece or what. I went up over the mountain. I think that was just luck that I did do that. When they went out looking for me they went in the wrong direction.

23:30 **Luck can have a great deal to play.**

A lot to do with it. If you're in the right place at the right time you're right.

Tell us about your exchange of letters with your girlfriend.

24:00 They were very long between. They used to take, I think, from four to six months to get to me. By the

time I'd answered them and wrote back to her, she'd forgotten what she'd written because of the other four to six months. There would probably be twelve months between the letters. She sent photos. I got photos.

- 24:30 They meant a lot. You've got no idea what a letter meant. Just to make the contact. It was really, really something. You used to get real uptight if you didn't get a letter. The letters came around and
- 25:00 there's another funny incidence. Each block had a postman. That's how big the blocks were. They used to come round and just read out the names and dish out the letters. This day, the post came round and he went into a hut, he read out the names, he came to
- 25:30 and he read out the name "Bluey Einshaw." He says, there was an Englishman in the hut, he called him over. He says, "Do you think you'd mind reading this letter out to him? He's not very well educated and he can't read. He'd really appreciate it if someone read it for him."
- 26:00 "Yeah, sure. No trouble. I'll read it." So he gives him the letter. Out he goes. The Englishman opens up the letter and he starts reading it. His wife's left him, his girlfriend's pregnant and he's reading all this out. He said, "I can't go any further." Everyone
- 26:30 burst out laughing. It was a letter that had been written out especially for him to read. That's the sort of jokes they used to play on each other. They also used to go on holidays. If you got sick of everyone in your hut you'd pack up and go round, find a hut with a vacancy in it and you were in there. That was a
- 27:00 holiday. You could come back if you wanted to. They used to do that often.

What would you get sick of?

You knew what everyone was going to do all the time. Blokes would get up and they'd say the same thing every day. They'd do the same thing

- 27:30 every day. Then you used to get a loaf of bread per hut for a day. Everyone had to take their turn in cutting it up. Whoever cut the bread up they had to cut in equal size. Whoever cut it up, he had the last bit. So he had to cut it dead right, or he got a small bit.
- 28:00 **Do you remember the day you first got a letter from Dorothy?**
- No, not really. I think I was Stalag 383 before I got one from her. She did address them to Maribor, but I think by the time I got it I was in

- 28:30 383 as I remember. I never got a letter at Maribor at all. She could probably tell you that. They were very important.

When you got news from her, what would you share with your mates?

- 29:00 Nothing. I'd show them a photo. Just used to soak all the rest up yourself.

You hadn't known Dorothy very long before you left Australia. You wrote lots of letters to her

- 29:30 **while you were away. What might you write?**

Just, I suppose, "I love you," and "I miss you," at one stage I wrote

- 30:00 and told her I didn't think she should wait for me any longer. Then I got a letter and got told off for doing so. I think I gave her preference. I only got one letter a month you could write.
- 30:30 You only got the form. That's why I wrote so small because you had to get as much as you could in. You couldn't tell her anything because they'd black it out. So you really couldn't say much. So I guess they were mainly affection.
- 31:00 You'd have to ask her that.

It was very important to keep up contact with home.

Yes. She was a godsend.

- 31:30 **The Yanks flew you back to England. Where were you on VE [Victory in Europe] day?**

Piccadilly Circus, up a pole. I had to climb up a pole to get out of the crowd. I had a good

- 32:00 time in England. I think everyone treated me well. I joined more clubs than you could think of. You had to join clubs to get a feed.

What sort of clubs did you join?

Anywhere where you could get a feed. After a certain time you had to

32:30 be in a club to get a drink or anything. I used to go to the theatres and I used to just travel around looking at things. I was very anxious to get home at that stage.

What was the celebration on VE Day

33:00 **like?**

Just everyone cheering and kissing each other and dancing around and carrying on. I suppose it'd be like celebration was here for VJ [Victory over Japan]. How they were dancing around the streets and

33:30 throwing confetti and all sorts of things around. Everyone was sort of, having a ball.

How long did you stay in England before you got transport back to Australia?

34:00 Might have been two months. I think about two months. I got questioned when arrived in England. I got a medical examination. I remember I had my medical and the medical officer said, "You're

34:30 fitter than most the blokes we pass for the army." And I was fit only because I played sport. Sport used to occupy all my time. Sport and physical exercise. I'd play rugby league and rugby union on the same day. A game of each.

35:00 Sometimes we'd also play a game of basketball. The good thing about the camp was if you wanted anything you could apply to the Red Cross for it. In most cases you got it. If you wanted to learn to play an

35:30 instrument you could apply to the Red Cross and they'd send you the instrument. There was a bloke, I don't know whether he did get it from the Red Cross, but he had a set of bagpipes. He went up the sports field this day and learning bagpipes was terrible. He was up there and he

36:00 was practising his bagpipes. Finally, the German guard in the tower sang out to him "Piss off," and chased him away. He had his rifle out, he pointed it to him. "Piss off." That's another thing. We got a

36:30 salt was very scarce. So we got a bag of salt. It's a lot of salt. Bigger than a sugarbag. Quite a big bag. We were having a sports day and there was running and all the lanes had to be marked out

37:00 and we didn't know what to mark it out with because we couldn't get any whitewash or anything. So they came up with the idea, the cook house supplied salt to mark out the fields. So we marked them out in salt. That was the last time we ever got salt.

37:30 The Germans decided "If that's what you're going to do with the salt, you're not getting any salt." When we used to have foot races we used to have totalisator and everything. Cigarettes to bet with.

Did you make a killing?

Yeah.

38:00 I done a lot of running. I wasn't in any of the running teams but I competed quite a few times. Never did any good. But I used to run, run, run, run. When I knocked off of running I'd go and play football.

That would have played a big part in maintaining good

38:30 **health.**

I think so.

How was your health when you got to England?

Good. Health wise I don't think I, I can't ever remember having a problem. Being hungry yes, but still healthy.

39:00 **What about weight?**

Weight was way down. I think I was just over 60 at one stage. You could sort of count every rib. If you weren't getting

39:30 Red Cross parcels and you were in camp you were in trouble. On the farms you weren't. But if you were in camp and you didn't get Red Cross parcels you were in trouble.

Roughly how long were you at 383 for?

Three years. Roughly.

40:00 It's a long time. There was a lot of men there. At one stage they were going to enlarge the camp. Why, I don't know. It was big enough. So they brought all the timber in and stacked it up for the building of the

40:30 camp. That night, nearly all the timber went off. Probably burnt the next day. So that was the finish of that.

Tape 10

00:30 **What were you going to say just then?**

You sort of got through with sign language a lot. They soon got the message of what you were trying to tell them. I don't know why. You did learn a lot of German.

01:00 You learned a lot to use and when to use it and when not to. You could always sort of get through with sign language and one thing or other. It's amazing really. You learned little things like

01:30 Was gibt es Neues, 'what gives news', and all this sort of thing. You learned 'sick' – kranke very quickly. You knew that arbeit was 'work' and nichts arbeit was 'no work' and all things like that.

02:00 There's mainly sign language I suppose.

When the three of you, your final escape, how did you get by with the German population you met?

There was no, we were on the winning side at that stage. So when we went in for coffee we just said

02:30 "Kaffee," and you got coffee and toast straight away, no argument. They got the message straight away. "You want coffee? Give him coffee straight away and get rid of him," sort of thing. There was always someone around who could speak English, whether it was a German of whatever, I found.

03:00 **In Austria, did you find the situation a bit different on the farm?**

The language? No, I was on the farm and Rosie, who was the girl I worked with, when we went back I met her and she said she didn't speak English, but she did speak English. I used to argue with her all the time

03:30 and tell her how good Australia was and how big it was. She used to tell me she knew all about Australia, round the outside and desert in the middle. Then I'd tell her how big the farm was and she said, "Oh," and she used to say, "My brother will argue with you when he comes home," he was in the air force. She insisted when we went back that she couldn't speak English, but she could.

04:00 **You arrived in [England] and they passed you as fit as a soldier.**

Yes.

How do you think your mental health was?

I think it was good. I think I could accept those sorts of things. I used to think you've just got to think

04:30 of what you can do and what you can't do. If you go round trying to do things that you're not going to get away with, then you're going to have trouble all the time. I used to watch the Germans for a long while and figure out what people were doing and getting away with. I knew I could get away with it, so I'd do it. If I saw something that someone was doing

05:00 and they were jumping on the straight away, you can't get on top of that, so forget it.

How hard was it to adjust when you were free and you could do whatever?

It wasn't very hard.

What did you most want to do now that you were free?

No, in England? Get home.

05:30 That's what I most wanted to do. That was, I went to Southampton and different places, but it was always "Get home." I went to Southampton. It was pouring rain when I got there, so I got back on the train and came back.

06:00 **How did you find dealing with people that hadn't been through your experience?**

All right I think. Yeah. I'd say all right. I didn't expect them to have been through the same experience

06:30 as me, so I didn't think about it in that way.

Was it different when you arrived home in Australia?

No. I got active straight away.

How did you get home?

By boat. By the Panama Canal. So I went out via the Suez Canal and I came

07:00 back via the Panama. That was interesting. Going up into the locks and coming down again. All things you'd heard about and you've never seen. Then you see them and you know, instead of just knowing what people are talking

07:30 about, you know what it's all about.

Where were you when the war in the Pacific ended?

Don't mention it. I was down Burragorang Valley and they couldn't get the news down there. I was down there with my brother. I think my mother got me to go down there. She wanted me

08:00 to relax. I was down there when the war was over and Dorothy was up in Sydney. She was furious.

When you were coming home, did you expect to stay in the army? Did you expect you'd have a part to play in that war?

No, I didn't expect to.

08:30 It was nearly all over. Victory in Japan wasn't all that far away. By the time they'd trained me in jungle warfare it would have been over. But they didn't even try that they just discharged me straight away.

Tell us about the

09:00 **scene of your arrival back home.**

It's strange you should say that, because we'd both discussed it. I was discharged at the showground, Dorothy was there any my mother was there, my sister was there.

09:30 I think my father was there. We don't know whose car it was, neither of us, we can't remember who drove it, neither of us. I tell you, it was very exciting when you had to go through the channels

10:00 of getting all your gear and this. You came out the door to a room. A great circle of people around. You just came out there and you looked around till you saw them. That was really something. That was really something.

10:30 You think there's some things you'll never forget, but you do. I can always remember the scene and I can remember what I done. But there's other things when they say, "What about so and so?" I haven't got

11:00 a clue. You just lose it. I guess it's because it's not your main interest. Your memory centres on your main interest.

What did your memory centre on when you remember that scene?

Dorothy.

What was your reunion like?

Good. I'd told her by letter

11:30 not to come and see me when I got home. That I'd see her afterwards. Then on the day that I was going out I didn't shave because I thought, "I'm going out in the night time so I'll shave in the night time." Lo and behold, who turns up? Dorothy.

12:00 I was unshaven.

What did you do then?

I guess I just showered her with affection. My whole family. She sort of kept

12:30 me together I think in that period of time. She always sort of, she was a down to earth sort of person. Someone who you could rely on to always be there once you'd need it.

13:00 I think I learned the hard way I suppose you'd say. She kept me in line.

Why did you need to be kept together?

13:30 It stopped me from sort of wandering off in all directions. Not knowing what to do. Made it easy for me to make decisions and help me make the right ones.

14:00 I think I did.

When you arrived back in Australia, what was new or surprising about the place?

I don't think I really noticed anything new.

- 14:30 Probably was new, but I don't think I noticed anything. When I went away there was lean times were on. We were just surviving the lean times. When I came back
- 15:00 you didn't have to think about it. Everything was just right. Just fitted in. It's hard to explain. I didn't think that being a prisoner of war, I'm saying think, I didn't think that being a prisoner of war affected me in
- 15:30 any way at all. When I came back I just resumed where I left off. I just started to look around for the right thing to do. That's my thought.
- 16:00 **In hindsight do you still think that?**
- I still think that. Everything I've done has gone along just as
- 16:30 I expected it to. I had to work hard to get certain things, but I've worked at it and I succeeded, until I got this brain tumour and then I had to have heart surgery and all this sort of junk. I don't think that's caused,
- 17:00 I don't know. No, I think you'd say that my life has been very successful. It's had it's ups and downs. Always have ups and downs. But on a whole I've come out the right way.
- 17:30 **How do you think your wartime fighting experience and your prisoner of war experience help in that success? How did it help you? What did it leave you with?**
- 18:00 I don't think it helped. Might have made me more determined. I don't really know, but it might have made me more determined to succeed at what I was doing. I've always been
- 18:30 I suppose a bit of a perfectionist. I think I've always been like that.
- What about little ways like your attitudes towards food or**
- Well, I'm still pretty good on food. When I came back, though I did,
- 19:00 I think to a certain extent I still do now, I can't stand waste. I can't bear to see anything absolutely wasted. I think that's one of the main effects it's had on me. I saw how important it was not to waste.
- 19:30 From the German side too. A lot of people say, "They didn't feed us. They didn't give us this and they didn't give us that." They didn't have it to give. You can't give what you haven't got, can you? Whether they would have given it, I don't know. They didn't
- 20:00 have it to give anyway. Blokes say they were hard, "They didn't give us this and they didn't give us that." So what? They didn't have it to give you.
- How do you feel about the Germans and Austrians today?**
- The Austrians, all right. Where I came into contact with them they treated me
- 20:30 as well as could be expected. When I was at the guesthouse I used to eat with their workers. The Kiwi, he was a farmer in civil life, he was a big bloke, he used to, he'd kill a sheep
- 21:00 for them, skin it, gut it, the whole lot. They'd do a roast leg for us. They didn't eat roast leg. All their meat was smoked. But they did it for us. Not us, for him. Because the old man used to think I was too, he used to call me 'foul',
- 21:30 which was lazy. The Kiwi used to say to me, we went down to put some posts in, when we got down there they told us what they wanted us to do. I think there were three posts per foot. I went down with the Kiwi and he said, "You sit down. I'll do it, I'll do it. You sit down." I said, "No, I'll do it." He said
- 22:00 "Sit down, I'll do it." So I sat down. The old bloke came down and he saw me sitting on the ground while the other bloke was doing all the work. He'd give him anything, all his best cider, anything, he wouldn't give it to me.
- In later life you went back to the places in Austria especially. How did that affect you?**
- 22:30 I was very pleased about that because I'd always threatened to go back. I said to Dorothy "I'll take you back and show you Gratkorn because they treated me well there." First I didn't think we'd find it. Then we went into a police station. All I knew
- 23:00 was, at the time, he was the Bürgermeister. I didn't know his name at Gratkorn. So we went up to the police station when we couldn't find it. I told him that I knew that at the time he was a Bürgermeister.
- 23:30 He rang around and rang around and he finally found out who it was and he took us back there. That's how, we'd just about given up. When we got back there they couldn't do enough for us. Really couldn't do enough. They took us everywhere and showed us everything. Got us drunk.

24:00 **How did it affect you to see those people in that place again?**

I think I was pleased. Really. Just to see him and to show Dorothy that they weren't all bad. That was the idea.

24:30 I'd say I was pleased. I was probably pleased because of the way they treated us when we came back.

How much have you shared

25:00 **those stories with people in your life since the war?**

I was in Beverly Hills Lions Club and one night one of our guest speakers didn't turn up. So I spoke for two hours on it.

25:30 Another friend that was in Bardwell Park, they wanted to know all about it at one stage and I spoke to them. I have spoken about little pieces of it, but not overall sort of thing.

26:00 **Are there still things you don't talk about?**

No, I don't think so. If it crops up I don't necessarily talk about it. But if it crops up and someone asks questions, I answer.

26:30 **When you think about that period of time from where you are now in your life, how do you feel about it today?**

I think I accept it. I think that's,

27:00 I accept it was just something that happened that you couldn't avoid. That's it.

This will be put away and people might look at your story. What do you hope they might learn?

To be tolerant and not to be too hasty to judge.

27:30 Mind you, I don't, if anyone mentions to me Hitler Youth or the SS I get a little bit up in arms. But other than that I don't, I don't think.

28:00 I've got books galore on Hitler and his regime that I've read them all. I take sort of an interest in that side of life because that was a period of growing, I

28:30 think, that I spent in Germany. I feel that I want to know about it all the time. If I see anything, I feel I want to know that. So I read it.

What about the value of mateship and camaraderie?

Always important. You should,

29:00 I don't think you should ever neglect that. That's a very important thing. It counts a lot, mateship. It really does. The only

29:30 real mate, when I say real I mean real mate, that I really struck is the New Zealander, Spence Hill. He was the same. He was a great bloke. He'd do anything for anyone, he'd help anyone. That was it.

30:00 He was my mate and what's name, we were mates. He'd get a parcel from home that might have a pair of socks in it. He'd bring one down to me and try to give it to me. That's how he was.

Are you still in touch today?

Yup.

What do you talk about?

30:30 A couple of times he came over to see me here and we talked about the war and our experiences, but we talked about the funny side, things we could laugh at. I don't think

31:00 I ever heard him say evil of anyone. He always saw the best side of them. He's eighty-nine now. We went over to see him once. I'd say he's a person that's never changed. Always been the same.

31:30 **Thank you for sharing your stories today. Is there anything you'd like to add? Any closing comments you'd like to say for the future?**

I'd say

32:00 that I don't think I'd survive the whole thing except for Dorothy. She's been my backstop, my backbone or whatever, all the way through. You couldn't

32:30 ask more. She meant a lot when I got letters from her, she's been a sort of backstop all the way. Get down in the dumps and you get a letter and you're right now, you're on top. You know?

