Australians at War Film Archive

Frank Cave (Maurie) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:34 **Can you give us a bit of a life summary?**

All right. My father was a soldier settler at Buderim, down near the Glass House Mountains. I suppose we ought to go back further actually. He migrated from England in 1910. He arrived in Australia with 2 pounds and he gave a pound to his mates. That left him with a pound.

01:00 His father died when he was about 5 so he'd had a fairly tough upbringing. He was 24 when he came to Australia. He went out west and he worked out in the west here until the First War broke out when he was at Cunnamulla and he went to war from there. He served in the Light horse and served on Gallipoli and in the Sinai peninsula. He was discharged in 1919 and he took up a soldier's settlement,

01:30 pineapple farm here in 1920. My eldest sister was born in 1921 and only lived 9 months. So I was effectively the eldest in the family. When I was about 2, he, in common with a lot of other people, decided it wasn't a go and he just walked off it. He went up and started a farm in the Mary Valley, which was southwest of Gympie. That's where I grew up until I was about 8. Then he bought another place,

02:00 500 acres of standing timber and carved that into a dairy farm during the Depression years. Being on a dairy farm in the Depression is hard for anybody to imagine now, I think. That's where I was. That picture I showed you of my brother feeding the cows was fairly illustrative of what the situation was. I left home early in 1939 and worked on a few different farms.

02:30 I was working in a sawmill when the war broke out in September 1939. So I trotted in and enlisted. At that time you just put your name down. Nobody called me up so I went in in a few weeks' time and I said "What's going on?" They said "Your father came in and said you are underage." So that was that. I was 17. I'd been in the Light Horse since I was 15 and

03:00 we used to do a fortnight's camp a year. When war broke out we did a month at Caloundra and then three months at Beaudesert, which was south of Brisbane, probably know where Beaudesert is if you come from Brisbane. It's a bit out of order, but at the end of that camp we did a brigade mounted march through Brisbane. That's 1,500 mounted troops going through Brisbane. I don't know whether there's any footage of that

03:30 available, but that would be really good if there is. Our minister persuaded my parents to let me join up. I actually got into the army 2 days after my 18th birthday. Then went overseas just after Christmas 1940 and landed in Palestine towards the end of January. That was the first time I came under fire. We went from Sydney

04:00 to Colombo in the Aquitania, which was an old 4 funnelled luxury ship. It wasn't all that luxurious when we were on it. Then we changed ship at Colombo and went into a boat called the Christian Hagen, which was probably 15 or 20,000 tons and went up the Suez Canal, anchored in the Great Bitter Lakes at Ismailia and that's where we were first bombed. They didn't hit the ship luckily, but they tried it.

04:30 We went into a camp called Khassa . On Anzac [Australian and New Zealand Army Corps]Day 1941 we went up the desert and I was at Mersa Matruh. Mersa Matruh incidentally is where Cleopatra died. We were there until about September, came back, we were bombed I think every night. Again, they didn't hit us. Came back to Palestine. Early in 1942 I got the

05:00 mumps of all things and they put me into hospital. My battalion went up to Syria without me and I joined them there about the end of March. Got leave to Beirut in the beginning of May. I had my 19th birthday in Mersa Matruh, 20th birthday in Beirut. Then I got amoebic dysentery so they put me back

05:30 into hospital. I got out of that and by that time Rommel had got as far as Alamein and was knocking on the door of Cairo. They threw the Australians in to stop the gap, which they did. I joined them there and that's where I was wounded. Back to Australia early in 1943, up to the Atherton Tablelands camp and trained. Went to

06:00 New Guinea in August 1943, went into the attack on Lae in September 1943 and they bombed the ship. This time they hit it so I'll give you more detail about that if you want it later. They put the ship out of action and after about 3 o'clock in the afternoon and that night after dark they towed us ashore and we got into another one and went onto Lae. We were a month at Lae and went up to Finschhafen. We

06:30 were there 6 to 8 months. I came back to the Tablelands. I was discharged in the army from October1944. Then my father bought a piggery and we had a piggery at Pomona. I left that. My brother came back from the war then, he'd been in the occupation force in Japan. He came back and he took it over. I contracted with a tractor and rotary hoe for a couple of

07:00 years. In that time, I'll give you more detail later, I got a job selling insurance with T&G [Temperance and General] and then decided that I can probably do a bit of education in my spare time. I sat for a scholarship in 1924 and failed so I left school when I was 13. As I say, it's not chronological. Left school when I was 13 and went to

07:30 work on my father's dairy farm. Then I studied in my spare time while I was selling insurance and sat for my senior, forget the name for them now, at the end of 1950 and passed it. I started medicine in 1951, graduated in 1956, did my residence at base hospital in Rockhampton in 1957,

08:00 went to New Guinea and stayed there for 6 years. Came back, did a little bit of time as a locum in Cairns, about 8 or 9 weeks, and came down here and bought a practise. I've been here in practise ever since.

Tell us your earliest memory.

My earliest memory, probably,

08:30 is of what they now call a radio I suppose. I can just remember the buck jumping horses. It's one of my earliest memories. Another one, almost as early as that, is going for a holiday to Noosa. Have you ever been to Noosa? We stayed at the Laguna boarding house, and I can remember them putting us in the spring cart and driving us down through Noosa woods and getting in the boat to

09:00 get back up to Thornton because there was no road between Thornton and Noosa. That's one of my early memories. I went to school at Thornton for a while. I stayed with my auntie at Gympie Terrace. There was still no bridge over Lake Tenella, you know when you go down through Thornton there's a bridge? Used to have to go round a very rough road round the Lake Tenella. So we used to go to school in a boat, on a ferry.

09:30 In stead of a school bus we had a school boat from Gympie Terrace up to Thornton.

Your parents, can you go into more detail on their story?

About my parents? My father grew up in London. I know so very little now, because he was 24 when he came to Australia. What he did from when he left school to when he came to Australia I don't know. He was one

10:00 of 7 and his father was an Italian and worked in an Italian warehouse they called it, which really was a paint cellar. In those days all paint was white. If people came in, they'd bring a board with a piece of paint on it and they'd tint the paint. He told us later how he can still remember how sore his arm got from mixing the paint because it was all mixed by hand. My mother,

10:30 she was a Londoner too. Her father was an engineer. She had a better education, she matriculated. She was a VAD during the war, a Voluntary Aid Detachment person. Before that she sold insurance for the Prudential Insurance Company. My father was evacuated sick from Gallipoli and evacuated to England. So he must have been pretty sick. He met her there.

11:00 He was discharged in Australia and he wrote to her and asked her to come out and join him, which she did. The difference between now and then, she never saw her parents again because it was 50 years before she got back to England. So she didn't see any part of her parents. Communication was by letter, which took 6 weeks each way, so it was 3 months before you get an answer to your letter. Obviously no telephones, no airmail.

11:30 Airmail started in 1938. They brought the flying boats in at that time and they used to fly out to Australia with the mail. Used to take about a week. Those flying boats used to fly over our farm. The transition from London to this soldier settlement must have been staggering. For her, farm live we had where there was no electricity

12:00 and no aids and nothing in it, she did her washing in her copper. She had a rubbing board where she used to rub the clothes on a board with wrinkles in it. Not even a mangle, not even a hand turn wringer. Things were pretty tough for her.

Did your father talk much about his transition?

No. He was too busy working to talk about

12:30 anything I think, trying to stay alive or trying to stay silent.

How did he learn his skills?

He was in what they call the Territorials in England, which was a mounted regiment, and he learned to ride there, I think. Then he came out to Australia, he already knew how to ride and I suppose he learned as he went. Pretty competent with his hands. He was naturally left handed, but they wouldn't let him be a

13:00 left hander at school, so he became ambidextrous. He could drive a nail into the ceiling with either hand. Most people couldn't drive a hand with either hand, he could drive a nail with. I think he learned as he went. He taught us too as we were kids. We learned to do things. Most kids grow up nowadays are pretty useless really. They can work computers better than I can.

13:30 They can't do much in the way of manual things.

What chores did you have to do?

Milk before and after school every day. We didn't have milking machines until after I left school so I helped with the milking. We grew bananas as well. We used to pack them into timber packing cases, which we used to make ourselves. You bought the boards ready cut and you nailed them together.

14:00 So I learned to use a hammer fairly early in my life. A little bit in the house, a little bit of cleaning up and washing and so on.

What impact did you see the Depression making?

It was all we knew. So I don't think it bothered us very much. We didn't have

14:30 shoes, but then we didn't want shoes anyway. We didn't have much in the way of flash clothes, but we didn't want them either. It was all we'd ever known, so I don' think. We had enough to eat because we killed our own baby calves and we killed our own chicks. We managed to grow a few vegetables, although not many. So although I suppose it was tough, all the other kids at the school were in the same situation.

15:00 Nowadays you've got one parent families living on the dole and other kids going to the school have got two parents, both of whom have got a $500 a week job. So you've got some kids have got heaps of money and some kids have got absolutely none. There wasn't that contrast at out school. Nobody had any shoes and nobody had any money. So we accepted that as how life was. It didn't bother us very much.

15:30 Didn't bother us at all I don't think.

What did you get up to on weekends and in your spare time?

We wandered around. There was a bit of timber cuttings in the area, so we all had our own little trolleys we used to make and gocarts. We didn't call

16:00 them gocarts, but things you sat on and rushed on down the hill and pulled back up the hills again. When I got to about 12 I got a rifle and then I used to go shooting. When I was 15 I joined the Light Horse, not the cadets, but the proper Light Horse. I was very interested in that.

Had your dad talked much about his experiences?

Practically nothing. I remember not long

16:30 before he died, he mentioned on Gallipoli he was a signaller. The colonel came along and he was looking through a telescope at the Turks on the other side. The colonel came along and said "Give us a look through that" and the colonel had a look through that and a Turk shot him dead immediately. Right alongside him. So the practise then was to auction the clothes of people who were killed.

17:00 He said he bought the trousers and there wasn't a bug in them he said. They were normally full of lice I guess. He didn't talk about it much other than that. Mum did a little bit, but she didn't know, she reckoned he should have got a medal. I don't know for what. I think he took a wounded man through the Turkish lines into a Turkish hospital at one stage of the game.

17:30 I don't know any more details than that. I've got his war history from the army. The most notable part of that was when he got 7 days field punishment for not being able to produce his tin of bully beef on demand.

What had he done with it?

Probably eaten it. I don't know. He might have sold it to the wogs, I don't know.

18:00 **Your mother never talked much about her experiences either?**

She did a bit. She talked about the trip out and how they came out in what was relative luxury on the boat. All transport then was by ship of course. Nowadays they hop on an aeroplane, sit in one place for 36 hours and get off the aeroplane again. It's more interesting coming out on boat no doubt. She said very little really.

18:30 She was a swimmer in the days when women didn't swim much. She had a lifesaving certificate. Not surf lifesaving, but swimming lifesaving.

Tell us about your schooling years.

I started school at Kandanga, which was a town southwest

19:00 of Gympie in 1927 it must have been because I was 4 years and 8 months old. The school teacher there used to tie me up in bandages to amuse the rest of the kids. I stayed there for a couple of years and then went to a new school called Yabby Vale, which had 18 kids the day we started and 1 teacher and 18 kids in the school. She taught them all.

19:30 Stayed there for about 2 1/2 years until we moved to Imbil. The move, although it was from Kandanga to Imbil, which is about 7 miles apart, was really over the top of a hill. It was just that the little place where we grew bananas was closet to Kandanga and the new one, which was only walking distance away, probably a mile and a half was closer to Imbil. So we moved from Kandanga to Imbil by moving about a mile and a half. So I got to

20:00 Imbil and there were two teachers in that school. That's where that picture was taken just after I moved there in 1930. I was always an outlaw, which I think had its beginnings with that teacher when I was in the baby's class at Kandanga. I was younger than the other kids, which meant that I had a bit of a bit of a butt. I went to school at Imbil until

20:30 the end of 1934 and sat for my scholarship and failed it. No kids passed the scholarship from our school. So my parents sent me to Gympie the following year, 1935, and I used to board and go to school there. Went to school in a railmotor on the Monday and came back on the Friday and boarded in school. The board was five and sixpence a week by the way.

21:00 I hated school. So I begged them to let me leave school and go on the farm, which I did in June 1935, a month after my 13th birthday. I was always a reader. Classically you read the labels on the jam tins and that's what I read everything I could get hold of, which was why I was able to resume my education

21:30 15 years later. When I resumed my education I took a course with the International Correspondence School in radio for some reason or other. I changed as a senior, but that wasn't proceeding quickly enough for me, so I did junior French and I got the necessary books.

22:00 I moved down to Brisbane where I was able to do practical physics and chemistry and got a couple of tutors and then I was nominated for the senior by the end of 1950. I didn't go to junior at all. Didn't go to high school at all, just nominated for the senior and passed. I got an A, a B and two Cs. I got an A for chemistry I think, a B for

22:30 maths and C for English and physics, passed my junior French. That let me into university to do medicine.

What did you think of your early schooling years, of the schooling system?

School teachers were very authoritarian in those days. Nobody liked school. Physical punishment was frequent and severe.

23:00 So I hated school. I just lived to leave school, which I did at the earliest possible opportunity.

So you joined up with the Light Horse?

Yeah.

What were your reasons for doing that?

My father had been in the Light Horse. It just represented one way I could entertain myself I suppose. I really liked it.

23:30 **Were you feeling patriotic or was it more that your father had done it?**

It was probably that. It was an interesting thing for me to do. You could join in with the men and you could fire rifles and machineguns and so forth.

Did you feel you had a lot of other options?

No. The scouts didn't exist where we were at that time. There were no other organised activities except,

24:00 each town had its own little football team. I was younger than the other kids so I didn't do much good at that. It was just an entertainment. I liked doing it. I had my first class machine gunner's badge before my 16th birthday. Had my first class rifleman's badge within a year after that. So I was naturally a good shot. Because I'd been using a rifle anyway from when I was 12.

24:30 it's different from nowadays. Most kids, once they grew up, had a rifle and were taught how not to shoot one another and themselves.

Can you describe the uniform you were issued with?

I've got a photograph of it there. We were a delight... We had dress uniforms, which had red

25:00 stripes down the side of the trousers. Sort of khaki with red stripes. Working uniform was just khaki stuff. We had jodhpurs, which are the things […]

You were telling us about your uniform. You had jodhpurs.

Yeah. It's hard to remember. Hard to describe it. I've got a photograph of it there.

25:30 That was the Light Horse uniform. We had a hat with a union feather, which we used to call kangaroo feathers.

Why did you call them kangaroo feathers?

Just because they weren't. That's like Australians saying the opposite quite often.

How did it feel when you'd get all dressed up in your dress uniform?

26:00 Don't really remember. Wasn't the uniform that attracted me. It was what we did. Fairly adventurous sort of thing. We had machineguns on packhorses and you'd gallop up to a spot and everybody would jump off, put the machineguns up on pack and get them together and start firing at the

26:30 target. That sort of thing. That's the sort of thing my father had done for real some 20 odd years before.

What other kind of training did you do?

This is getting close to 70 years ago. It's not all that easy

27:00 to remember. Basic training, basic drill. We did foot drill as well as mounted drill. We had to look after the horses of course, that was quite a job too. The horses were tethered in. They had long parallel lines and the horses were tethered by a halter to the front and by heel to the rear line. When we watered them each man had

27:30 to take 4 horses, 2 in each hand. They all got away one day and there was an enormous stampede went up the road. Just up near Buderim. About 100 horses. They had another one later at Gympie when I'd gone and my brother was in The Light Horse at that time, and one got away at Gympie too, went through Gympie and Ratsbin [?].

28:00 **How long were you part of the Light Horse?**

2 1/2 years exactly. On the 6th November 1937 to the 6th May 1940. I was still in my Light Horse uniform when I went in to join the AIF [Australian Imperial Force]. I'm not sure what happened with my uniform. Then I was in the AIF. We were camped

28:30 firstly at Greythorn, which is near Enoggera. Then I was in the reinforcements for the 2/9th infantry for 6 months. They transferred me eventually to the machine gunners. I did a couple of weeks out at Grovely, the camp there. Then moved to Redbank and joined my unit, which left a fortnight later. Down to Sydney by train and then onto the Aquitania.

29:00 **What can you remember about Menzies making the announcement that Australia was involved?**

I didn't hear it. I was working at a sawmill at the time, I didn't have a wireless. We didn't have a wireless at all until after I left school at our place at home. I didn't have a wireless. I don't even remember how I heard that the war started. I've heard the announcement many times since, but I didn't hear it then.

29:30 I can remember thinking to myself "I've just got a job and now war has broken out." I was working in the sawmill.

What work were you doing at the Sawmill?

I was cutting case timber, little docking saw. A docking saw is one that cuts the timber crosswise. You have a bench saw that cuts the timber into boards and a docking saw that cuts it into

30:00 lengths. I was operating one of them. Cutting case timber. Everything's packed in cardboard boxes nowadays, in those days it was all packed in wooden boxes. Timber was made in specified lengths so that it could be made easily into cases. Therefore it was called case timber. It was mostly made from smaller logs that weren't big enough to

30:30 make long timber out of. In those days the timber all came out of virgin scrub. So beautiful pine timber that we were cutting. We used to cut boards 30 feet long and 18 inches wide without a knot in them. That timber's unattainable now because it's all gone. Only timber comes out of plantations now and that has knots every three feet. They cut one

31:00 special order. 8 by three. So that's 8 inches by 3, 45 feet long. That's a fair size board. It's about that by that, 45 feet long. If you are used to metres, that's every 10 feet is 3 metres. That's a bit over 13 metres.

When you

31:30 **joined up with the AIF, did they immediately accept you because you had been part of the Light Horse?**

I don't think it made any difference. They probably were a little bit harder on me than the others, they expected I'd know what I was doing. Otherwise it really made no difference. A lot of the AIF came out of the militia. A lot

32:00 of them had part training. Some of them were fairly well trained. Most of them could handle a rifle. A lot of them had handled rifles and those that hadn't had been taught during the militia.

Was the training a lot different?

Different from the Light Horse? No, not really. A bit more advanced I'd say.

32:30 A bit more advances, a bit more rigorous I suppose, but not a lot different, no.

When you joined up, what was your understanding of what was happening in terms of the war?

I guess it was an adventure. We didn't really understand much about what the war was about. We went partly because that was the thing to

33:00 do I think. Your country was at war, you were expected to go.

Can you remember there being any direct social pressure on you?

No, there was no pressure on me. There may have been later in the war, pressure on people, but there wasn't any at that time. I just joined because I wanted to join. Because

33:30 my father had been in the previous war and my uncles had been in the previous war. My father fought for the Australian army, one uncle fought for the South African army and one fought for the British army. Scattered. I don't know to what extent there was social pressure later, because I wasn't there anyway.

34:00 **What can you remember about the training days in AIF?**

I suppose there were three different kinds of training. There was training in basic drill, the ceremonial sort of stuff, slope arms and order arms and present arms and marching straight line and wheeling and dealing and that sort of thing. Then there were manoeuvres out in the paddock where

34:30 you practised it for real. Then there was rifle training, which was separate again. We went onto a rifle range and fired at a target. Sometimes you were allowed to take your time, others you had to get a certain number of shots away in a certain time. Sometimes you were given a certain amount of time to run from one mound. The mounds where they fired from were

35:00 100 yards apart, from 100 up to 700. So they may put you on a 600 yard mound and say "You've got 40 seconds to be up to the 500 yard mound and fire 5 shots at the target" or something like that, which was pretty testing because to fire accurately you've got to be pretty still. If you're still puffing because you've run 100 yards you're carrying a rifle, it's hard to be still enough to fire accurately. That sort of thing. That was rifle training.

35:30 **Did you have a natural inclination for any particular area?**

I was a good shot from my early days from childhood days. I'd trained as a machine gunner in the Light Horse, so I wanted to be a machine gunner. I knew how to handle them. I was reasonable with things mechanical which is what a machinegun is.

36:00 Strangely enough, towards the end of the war, I became a signaller. My father was a signaller in the Light Horse. The unit he was in was the one Ion Idriess was in. Have you ever heard of Ion Idriess? He was a well known Australian author. He wrote a book called "The Desert Column" which was about his experiences in the Light Horse. He wrote a number of other books. He wrote "The Great Boomerang" which was

36:30 based on an idea of getting the water from the coast into the forest. He wrote "Flynn of the Inland", which was a biography of John Flynn. He wrote "Drums of Mer" which was a story of the Torres Strait islanders. Very well known author. Used to write for the Bulletin in the early days when the Bulletin used to run as a different magazine altogether from what it is now. Used to run stories. Most of Australia's good authors got a start with the Bulletin.

37:00 I know Banjo Patterson used to write for the Bulletin in his early days. "The Desert Column" is a very good book about the war. It's one you ought to read if you're interested in anything about the First War. It describes life on Gallipoli and the Sinai Desert very well.

37:30 **Was it in Brisbane you started your first training?**

Yeah. Greythorn, which is just past Enoggera, just as you go north.

How long were you based there for?

Started there in May and left Greythorn and went to Grovely about the end of November. Then transferred over to Redbank to the 2/2nd Machinegun battalion

38:00 itself early in December and left Redbank on Boxing Day 1940 and then went down by train to Sydney and went aboard the Aquitania on the 27th and sailed on the 28th. I think we went straight off from training onto the ship. Didn't stop anywhere in Sydney, just got off the train and went aboard the ship.

You didn't have pre embarkation leave?

No. I had

38:30 leave at times during the year, but no, we didn't have any pre-embarkation leave. Not that I can remember. I was only with the unit a couple of weeks before they sailed. I would have gone to England in June except that we were all vaccinated in smallpox. My vaccination didn't take so they put me off the draft so I didn't go to England. I thought "Well, I'll go with the next one"

39:00 but that was the last lot of Australians went to England. After that they went directly to the Middle East.

When were you put with the 9th division?

Our battalion was what they called a corps battalion when we were at Matruh. The 9th division was in Tobruk at the same time, which is about 200 miles further along the African coast. The Australians came out of Tobruk from

39:30 September to November 1941 and we came back from Matruh in September 41. Then they made us divisional troops. We joined the 9th division as a battalion somewhere round about November, December. Probably December 1941. Then we were with the 9th division from then on.

Tape 2

00:34 **Did you get to talk to the guys who had been in Tobruk when they finished up there?**

The way a machinegun battalion functions, it doesn't fight as a battalion. What they do is attach a platoon.

01:00 There's 12 platoons in a battalion. They attach a platoon of machine gunners to a battalion of infantry. So you get to interact with the infantry fellows in that way.

What did they tell you about Tobruk?

I can't remember really, because we knew what it was all about.

01:30 I suppose here you still do when you talk to Tobruk people, you hear about individual episodes of when they went out and what happened. Who got hit and who didn't and what they managed and what they didn't.

02:00 We joined the 9th Division then. They went up to Syria as occupation troops. Syria was taken by the 7th Division from the French in the latter half off 1941. Early in 1942 the 9th Division went there as occupation troops. The other two Australian divisions were brought back to Australia early in 1942. 9th

02:30 Division was in Syria until things became desperate in the Western Desert when it looked as if the Afrika Korps was going to reach Cairo. If they had reached Cairo and as they intended, send another pincer down through Turkey and Palestine and got hold of the oilfields in the Middle East. So it was a pretty serious situation.

03:00 When the 9th Division went up to Alamein we were with them, or part of them. We were part of them. We travel as a battalion, but when we got into action or into a position, each platoon was attached to an infantry battalion. We were attached to the 2/28th Battalion at that time, which was the Western Australia battalion.

03:30 **You left from Sydney. What ship did you leave on?**

The Aquitania.

What was that trip like?

Went round south of Tasmania in stead of going through Bass Strait. It was very cold even though it was Christmas time. We didn't have a bad trip across the Bight. Then we went to Fremantle and we were too big to dock. So we were

04:00 out in the ocean there, anchored off, for a while. I think they put more troops aboard. We went over to Colombo in Ceylon. We got 8 hours leave ashore, about that, then we changed ships because they didn't take the bigger ships any closer to the war than that because they didn't want to lose them. We trans shipped to this little Dutch

04:30 ship. That was much more comfortable because we had 4 people in a cabin built for 3, which was good. Previously we'd been a great stagger of us on the mess decks. I remember the trip home better than the trip over. I came home in the Queen Mary.

What were the sleeping quarters like?

I can't remember them on the trip over. I remember them on the trip back because

05:00 they had mess tables and there was one row of people sleeping on the tables and above them there were hammocks running at right angles to the table and people sleeping in the hammocks. We had 11,000 troops on the Queen Mary coming home. 11,000 troops and 2,000 crew. So 13,000 people on the same ship. They used to feed us in 4 sessions of 2,500 at

05:30 a time, all in the one big room. It went from side to side of the ship.

What was the food like?

It was fairly good at that time. Food wasn't too bad in camps. When you got up into the front it was quite often bully and biscuits. A tin of bully beef and a packet of army biscuits, which was to last one man for a day. You split them up.

06:00 3 men would have a third of a tin of bully beef each and a third of a packet of biscuits for each of the meals. That was pretty standard. If things were tough that was standard. If it was more static they'd get a few vegetables through. But mostly tinned meat. I don't remember ever getting any fresh meat in the desert. We got fresh meat in New Guinea. We got it 5 times in 9 months. The rest of it was tinned. The tinned bully wasn't

06:30 too bad. But then they had dehydrated mutton, which was pretty shocking stuff. They had meat and vegetables which came in tins and it was pretty dreadful too.

Did the dehydrated mutton, did you have to re-hydrate it?

Yeah. Boil it and serve it up as a stew. Not very tasty. In Mersa Matruh we

07:00 had what I can remember was tinned bacon, which was Canadian bacon. It was very, very fatty. About 80% fat and they'd run it out in a strip about 3 feet long and perhaps 3 or 4 inches wide, roll it up and then pout it in a round tin like that and put a lid on it. So when you pulled it out, out came this rasher about 3 feet long and about 4 inches wide and mostly fat.

07:30 That wasn't very tasty either.

What were the creative ways you cooked up your bully beef?

We had cooks that made a stew out of it, which wasn't too bad. When we were in the platoon there was a platoon cook. If we were split up into smaller groups, which we did sometimes in small posts particularly at Mersa Matruh, then we took it in turns to cook. Some weren't too bad and some were

08:00 dreadful. I was never much of a cook. Hard to remember the food. It wasn't exciting enough to remember I guess. I remember the bully beef all right. That was pretty bad too, but it wasn't too bad.

How long did it take for you to go over on the Aquitania?

A calendar month. We left Sydney

08:30 on the 27th of December, or the 28th and we got to Ismailia in the Suez Canal on the 27th January.

Can you remember how you spent your pastime?

Played cards and had big gambling dens full of smoke where we played crown and anchor and two up. Played two up with dice. Two up is traditionally played with pennies, but you can get heads and

09:00 tail dice too. A lot of gambling. We gambled heavily. I gambled heavily in those days. You only had crown and anchor, under and over, which was under and over the 7 and it was played with dice. Some played pontoon. I played pontoon too. All for money.

Any stories of men who didn't know when to stop?

With the money?

09:30 You stopped when you went broke. When you ran out of money you stopped. Till next payday.

Did that happen to you?

Oh yes. Happened to me for months. I did a lot of gambling. I went for 12 months without drawing my pay because I was winning all the time. Then I went for several months got broke every payday. Funny time. Didn't really matter because money was only pocket money. You were provided all the essentials. You had your food,

10:00 clothing and housing was provided. I stopped gambling when I got out of the army. So I'll never win Lotto because I never take a ticket.

There's a big culture of gambling in the army.

Oh yes. Everybody gambled. The only legal game was housie housie, which they now call bingo. Everything else was played. There were big two up rings round the outskirts of every army camp. Boxers arenas. The people who ran the game

10:30 were called boxers. They were the only people who made any money. I played a lot of poker. My father played poker in the First War, I remember him talking about that. He was good at it and I was good at it too. I don't play it now.

Where did you land?

At Ismailia, which is a town on the Suez Canal on

11:00 the Lake. Then we went ashore there. Immediately moved up to Palestine. The Egyptians wouldn't have Australians camped in Egypt because the Australians took the Cairo brothel area apart early in the First War and just about burnt it down. I don't think the Australians did anything but good, but they wouldn't have them back. The only time Australians were in Egypt

11:30 was in the fighting line. They didn't have them camped there at all in the Second War. We all camped in Palestine. We were in what is now the Gaza Strip. More peaceful then than it is now.

What were your first impressions on arrival?

I think it was just another camp. I remember being very excited, I didn't realise what war was at that time. Very excited.

12:00 We went ashore and went up into camp. The camp was already erected. It was all tents, we were never in buildings. It was all tents. Went straight into training.

What kind of training?

It was rally a continuation of what we'd done in Australia. Go out on manoeuvres. Trying to get

12:30 your gun into action as soon as possible. Try and get into working out positions where we were hidden as much as possible. Firing at an imaginary enemy and that sort of thing.

How long were you in training when you first arrived?

In Palestine? We arrived there on the 27th January and we left on Anzac Day, 25th April, to go up the desert.

13:00 Some of our time we were on leave. You got little bits of leave, usually for 2 or 3 days at a time. We'd go to Tel Aviv or Jerusalem.

What would you do on leave?

Brothels got a fair bit of patronage. Other than that, go round the sights. There was a lot to see in Jerusalem of course. A lot of conducted tours of all the various traditional holy places in Jerusalem. Tel Aviv there were cafes. You'd go into

13:30 cafes and go down the beach. Later on they had what would have been holiday camps I suppose. Don't know that they called them that. There was one called Netanya, which is about halfway between Tel Aviv and Haifa. They had a camp there where you could swim. They even had lifesaving teams in Palestine, the Australians. So there was a fair bit of

14:00 surfing down on the beach. The beaches were quite nice.

Were there any lectures about sexual education on the way over or when you arrived?

The idea was to try and prevent them getting a venereal disease. They had little kits, which were with condoms and

14:30 antiseptic stuff. In Beirut in particular they had set up a little place staffed by doctors where people could go if they'd been to a brothel. They had a special hospital which was for treating venereal diseases.

What was the biggest venereal disease?

Gonorrheae

15:00 was the most prevalent.

It would have been a culture shock for the men as well.

I don't think so. It's a pretty tough lot.

15:30 The Depression was just over. A lot of those people had been carting their swag for years. There were brothels in Australia too. It wasn't all that different for most people.

Were there different brothels for officers or were everyone equal?

I think probably

16:00 the officers found their own entertainment elsewhere. They probably had access to higher classed establishments. There was a lot of places were out of bounds for anybody below the rank of a sergeant. One of our Little Audrey jokes was "Little Audrey saw a sign that said "Nobody lower than sergeants allowed in here" but Little Audrey laughed and laughed because she knew nobody was lower than a sergeant."

16:30 Lots of them.

You had a month of training?

We had more than that. We trained all the time. The army trains all the time, never stops training. You're either actually in action or you're training. Unless you're moving or setting up a camp or pulling it down or something like that. In between times you train all the time. You never

17:00 stop. A lot of the training is going over stuff you've already done of course. Trying to get a gun into action more quickly than you've ever done it before or get it out again. Get it out before you're shot and move it from one place to another before they find where you are, before the enemy find where you are and so on. You never stop training. They had what you called training battalions, but that was

17:30 for people who were temporarily out of their unit for any reason. For example, if you went to hospital, you go from hospital to a convalescent camp where you recovered, got back to your normal state of health. Then you'd go to what they called a training battalion. Training battalions were really only depots where people were kept until they could be sent back to their own units. They didn't send them back one at a time because

18:00 they'd wait until they had a number together and then send them back. If you were going up the desert where the whole division was, then every battalion would be on the same train or draft or vehicle, convoy or whatever that went up and the training battalion, although they did some training, were really a place where they got everybody together and sorted them out and then sent them back to their units. Or, for

18:30 that matter, back home or wherever the next step was. If they were no longer fit for service they'd send them back to Australia. That's what the training battalions were.

When did you go into your first action?

Went I went back up to, if you exclude Mersa Matruh, in Mersa Matruh we were really garrison troops. We were ready to fight, but nobody came to fight us.

19:00 So they bombed us at night time and sometimes during the daytime. During the day we'd stand to before daylight, stand to the guns in case, because we weren't that far from the frontline, a little bit of an advance and they'd have been there. Then during the day we'd train or clean our gear or whatever. Then I went back to Palestine.

19:30 After I'd had the amoebic dysentery I went to the convalescent c amp and the training battalion as I just said. I was sent up in a draft then and I joined my battalion on about the 20th July 1942. I was in what we call Don 1 platoon, which was number 1 platoon in Don company, D for Don. Then we were with the 2/28th Battalion.

20:00 My platoon was with the 2/28th Battalion. We had a few little skirmishes over the next few days when we just going to go and put a gun in somewhere and fire a dew shots and try to get it out again before the Germans found out where we were and shelled us or whatever. There was a bit of sporadic shelling. The Germans had a gun called the 88, which was an 88 millimetre multipurpose gun. Probably the best

20:30 artillery piece in the war on either side. It's pretty mobile and they use it as an anti-aircraft gun and they use it against troops. They fired an airburst, which was a shell which used to explode in the air about 70 feet up and the shrapnel would come down in all directions. There was a bit of that. Then we went into action on the night of the 26th of July.

21:00 There was a minefield, which they had cleared a path through it. We went through that and my crew, there were 4 machineguns for each platoon. The crew I was in, I was in the back of a utility and an 88 millimetre shell hit the front of it or landed underneath the

21:30 front of it. That wounded the driver and the corporal that was along side him. The corporal got out and I

heard him saying “The truck’s gone, boys.” So we all jumped out and I was the last to jump out. As I hit the ground a shell, I didn’t see it fired, but I felt it. A piece of shrapnel went through my right arm and entered my chest there. As

22:00 I found out later, it went through my liver and finished up attached to my heart. So that put me out of action. I managed to find my way over to where a few other fellows were taking shelter behind a mound of gravel.

22:30 There was a fellow they were patching up a few other wounded fellows that were there. Eventually a bloke came and helped me into the front seat of a 1,500 weight vehicle that was going out. They got me back out to the RAP,

23:00 Regimental Aid Post. They gave me a shot of morphine and put me onto the next vehicle going back to the main dressing station. I was more comfortable sitting up than lying down because at that time I had a belly full of blood. So I sat on a seat of some kind while they looked after everybody else. Because I was sitting up I wasn’t regarded as being very seriously wounded.

23:30 So when they’d cleared all the rest out of it, I wandered across to where the doctor was and I lay down and I can still remember him taking one look at me and saying “Take him down to resuscitation.” Then they operated on me within the next hour or so. I spent the next week down in the main dressing station on a stretcher before they moved me back. I went back to Mersa

24:00 Matruh to a British hospital, which was again only staging. I stayed about 2 days there. Then back to another British hospital at a place called Genefa, which was on the Bitter Lake, the Great Lake. I was there for about a month and they transferred me to the 2/6th Australian general hospital near Gaza. So I was there until I got better. I was in a convalescent camp, back to the training battalion again, back to the

24:30 battalion and arrived there early in November just about the time that we now know the battle of Alamein was finished.

You spent a fair bit in hospital.

Yeah.

Were there mostly British or Australians?

In the British hospital they were nearly all British. Five Australians in the whole hospital which would have had probably 600 or 700 patients.

25:00 Very strict discipline in the British hospital. They used to do an inspection every day and the patients who weren’t confined to bed used to stand up in front with their elbows at a right angle like that and a board coming up there resting on their shoulder with their notes on it. We were supposed to lie to attention in our beds, but I can remember the officer

25:30 who was making the inspection having a look at me rather quizzically and the nursing sister saying “He’s an Australian, sir” which accounted for the fact that I wasn’t quite so respectful as the British I guess. They treated us quite well. They were very wary of us because they heard about the wild Australians. We had an Italian prisoner orderly, he was more wary still because he’d heard about the wild

26:00 Australians too.

Were the wild Australians living up to their reputation in the hospital?

No, we were well behaved I think. We weren’t subservient, but we were polite. We didn’t upset anybody. Once they got used to the idea that we were a little bit different everybody got along fine.

Were there other differences in the way the British and the

26:30 **Australians worked within hospitals?**

I don’t think so. Medicine’s the same the world over, the same sort of protocol.

Australians have a reputation for not paying attention to the chain of command.

27:00 You don’t really behave. It’s not really justified. Australian battles were excellent. No, they don’t salute and show the same signs of respect to officers as the British do I don’t suppose. Some of the Australians on leave of course got drunk and got into trouble. Probably more trouble than the other nationalities did. We were a bit less

27:30 inhibited.

Were you finding it frustrating being in hospital whilst your mates were out there?

I think I accepted the situation. I always wanted to get back of course. The frustration came later when we got into the convalescent camps and into the training battalions and

28:00 particularly when we went out of hospital. I was in hospital later with malaria up in the Atherton Tablelands after I came back from New Guinea. I can remember asking to be sent straight back to my battalion instead of being sent to the convalescent camp. They were insisting I go to the camp. That was frustrating because you always feel a bit fitter than you are when you come out of hospital. You want to get back to

28:30 you mates. Your mates are your mates and there's a tremendously close bond between people who have been in action together.

What did they tell you about the battle?

I can't remember really. I remember we used to listen to the Turkish radio in English as much as we could, because we reckoned that's where we got the unbiased opinion.

29:00 First casualty of war is the truth. That still applies. There are as many lies in Iraq as they had in the Second World war no doubt. So we used to listen to Ankara, which is a Turkish radio station. Tried to get what they said. We had a pretty fatalistic approach really, to the war. We were concentrating on our own little patch.

29:30 We were supremely confident of course. Misplaced confidence I think, but we were supremely confident that we would win the war. That wasn't based on logic, it was based on emotion I think.

What about the other men in the hospital?

The Australians kept together as much as they could. Other than

30:00 that we were all friendly. I remember I used to play whist with them, which again is a gambling game and I couldn't play it so I used to get the others into trouble. I'd lose money and they'd lose money. They'd say "It's all right for you fellows, you get 5 bob a day and we only get a shilling. You can afford to lose money and we can't." We were looked on as the rich cousins those days at 5 shillings a day, which was not a lot of money, but it was more than the British got.

30:30 **When you went back after hospital, what happened next?**

When I went back to my battalion they'd pretty well won the Alamein battle by then. So I didn't go into another attack. They were still bombing us

31:00 and shelling us, but they didn't hit us. I remember diving into a slit trench at one stage of the game. We had slit trenches, which were about the size of a coffin. It's a dig in into the desert and that's what you slept in. If there was a bit of flak flying around you'd dive into your slit trench. I can remember doing that. There was so much a part of everyday life

31:30 to have this stuff flying around that you don't remember it in detail.

Can you describe what it was like sleeping in slit trenches?

You'd lie in a slit trench and you were pretty safe in a slit trench because they couldn't get you unless it was a direct hit, unless the shell actually landed on your slit trench, which is pretty unlikely. Possible

32:00 that they did land in the slit trenches, but there's a fair space between shells between the places that they landed. So if you got into the slit trench you felt fairly safe. A lot of noise and the ground would shake. You just sort of shut up your senses and wait for it to end I guess.

32:30 […]

How did you actually sleep? When would you sleep?

We slept when we could I guess. In the desert most of the action was at night. How could you see? Well, you could see in the dark.

33:00 Never completely pitch dark. If there was no actual attack on, then you did your turn on picquet, your turn on guard, which is usually for an hour and the rest of the time you'd lie in your little slit trench and hope that nothing came over. Sometimes they'd fire sporadically at you with shells. That's what they call harassing fire, which is just intended to

33:30 keep people awake. They didn't often hit anybody. They'd keep you awake. The flies were pretty bad in the daytime anyhow. You couldn't sleep then. In daytime you'd wander around, sit with your mates and have a bit of a chat. Night-time you'd lie in the thing and eat and sleep. Used to bring the food up in hot

34:00 boxes, which was like a big esky, metal. The food would be cooked further back and mostly it'd be stew. Bully beef stew or something like that. They'd bring that up and it'd be served up into your little dixie, a little rectangular thing about that size. You'd eat that mostly with a spoon. It's hard to remember these details because they were so much part of everyday life that they don't

34:30 stand out as a memory. It's only the unusual things that stand out as a memory. You adapt to things just the same as people in town adapt to cars rushing passed, so we adapted to life as it was.

When you had come back to the slit trenches, did you have to continue dressing your wounds

35:00 **or had they totally healed?**

They were totally healed by then. We had RAP staff who dressed minor wounds and ulcers and that sort of stuff. They were always present. There were a lot of tropical ulcers or desert ulcers because there was a lot of infection. Even little scratches would get infected. That was probably worse in New Guinea.

35:30 They did have what they called desert sores, which were ulcers, infected wounds. The major wounds you didn't get back to your unit until they were well and truly healed. When you'd been returned to normal health, or as near normal as possible. You don't get back to what you were before either physically or psychologically. Once you've been hit you've lost the illusion of

36:00 immunity which most people are born with. A bit like motor vehicle accidents. Everybody is convinced they're not going to have one. Once they have had one they get a bit more nervous.

What weapons were you issued with?

I was a range taker at that stage. So I had my range finder which is a machine a metre long. You measured the distance between you and whatever they wanted to know

36:30 the distance of, which was usually the target , or was thought to be the target. I had a rifle. The actual people on the machineguns had revolvers, as their personal weapons. Later on in New Guinea when I was a gunner by myself, I had a revolver. And bayonet. If you had a rifle you also had a bayonet.

Did you say it was a range machine?

A rangefinder, yeah.

37:00 **Can you explain how that works?**

It works on a fairly simple principle really. It's a metre long and it's got a lens at each end. One of those lenses is movable, it can rotate on the horizontal axis. So if you look through it and you see an object at a distance, you move a little wheel and that rotates the lens in at the end of it.

37:30 You can see an image from each lens. When they come together as one then the instrument measures the angle which you've had to rotate the lens at one end. That is related to the distance away of the object. That's a triangle. The further away it is, the less acute will be the, you've got

38:00 a right angle triangle. One lens is looking straight ahead. So a right angle's got a side and a base and a hypotenuse. Do you understand what I mean by a hypotenuse? All right. So the angle at the other end of the base of the triangle will vary according to the height of the triangle. The machine measures that and converts it into yards or metres. Into yards in our case. We dealt in yards. So you

38:30 just read off the dial the distance the object was away in yards. Your accuracy depended on the accuracy of the machine and the accuracy of the operator too, because he had to get these two images exactly superimposed for the range to be accurate.

What were you measuring up?

We were measuring distances.

39:00 **What kind of things were you measuring?**

If you could see a position and fortification or something, that's give you a nice straight line, that'd be easy. Mostly you'd be measuring the distance to a ridge or something like that. You'd have to pick a little unevenness on that ridge which you could concentrate on. You'd

39:30 get the two images of that to coincide and that would give you the range.

How far away could you measure?

That one would measure I think up to about 5,000 yards from memory. But the machineguns' range was only a mile, 1,700 yards, so that's the distance. Sometimes we'd get a request from the infantry to measure a distance. They might be patrolling at night and they'd

40:00 know that they got to where they wanted to be by counting the number of paces so they'd ask you to measure the distance to a certain spot they wanted to patrol to. We'd give them a range for that. Mostly we were taking ranges for our own guns.

Tape 3

00:31 **Can you tell us about the CO [Commanding Officer that you knew from before the war?**

The CO of which?

The CO that you knew from far North Queensland.

Clive Williams? He was the platoon commander, but he was in the 2/14th Light Horse before the war. When we camped at Beaudesert

01:00 we had a brigade camp. I was in the 5th Light Horse and he was in the 2/14th which wasn't the 2/14th in the same sense as our was the 2/2nd. It was a combination of the 2nd and the 14th. His parents owned the Yungaburra Hotel, that is Williams Hotel in Yungaburra. I've been out there since, it's got their name emblazoned on the glass doors. He was quite a character.

01:30 I only knew him because I met him down at the Beaudesert camp. I can't remember quite how I met him. Then he became our flotilla, platoon commander . Flotilla is the coast guard. He was greatly liked. Quite a character. They sent him somewhere else as a company commander after that. His brother I knew

02:00 also. He was Sid Williams. Sid Williams became the originator of the country airways of some kind up in north Queensland and later organised Trek Back. Have you heard about Trek Back? In 1996 Clive Williams and others organised a reunion of the people who had been

02:30 at the Tablelands in 1943. He organised that and we went to Trek Back in Cairns in the Tablelands in 1943. Hard to describe people, isn't it? Make sure other people can understand what you're talking about.

Did you have any close mates that you joined with that went through with you?

I'm a bit of an one outer, as you can see. A bit of a one out as you can see in the picture where I'm sitting right outside the

03:00 end of the line as a little fellow. They were all close mates, but the night that I was wounded our platoon was wiped out. The whole battalion was wiped out there, either killed or captured. The whole battalion and that happened to our platoon. There was one man from our platoon got out unhurt that night. One man out of about 30 odd that went in. I was pretty good mates with a number of them, but I didn't see them again until after the war and some of them I never

03:30 saw again. A couple of them died going across the Mediterranean. The ship they were in. One I was pretty friendly with they called McBeath, we called him 'Matey' McBeath. The ship they were being trans shipped across the Mediterranean in was sunk by a British submarine or something like that and they didn't get out. So we never really became the same again after that. I had some fairly

04:00 close mates.

Did you ever contemplate being captured?

You get a sort of feeling of immunity when you start off I think. I don't think it ever occurred to me that anything could happen to me. I can remember working out the night we went into action with the 2/28th saying to myself, about 10% of people will be casualties, so I've got 90% chance of finishing all right. Those figures didn't work

04:30 out very well. I did have other mates. They're nearly all dead now. Nearly all the blokes I was friendly with.

There's a story about you being caught on Anzac Day at Mersa Matruh with the sticker bombs that didn't go off.

Yes. We were bombed in daylight, probably by the Germans because the Ities [Italians] didn't come out in the daylight much. There was sticker bombs, we

05:00 had our kitchen dug in there. Everything was underground or level with the ground if possible. This sticker bomb came over and one landed either side of us. Neither of them went off. In fact I don't think any of those went off. Next morning we gathered round. By the time he'd dug it up and disarmed it. Interestingly. Another thing that happened to me was that I was in an underground tunnel

05:30 which the wall were sandbagged to keep them from falling in. That led into a tunnel that was boarded. I remember just seeing the sandbags starting to move. So I smartly ran out of that bit into the board and it just fell in behind me. Just straight out of the blue. There was no particular reason, we weren't being bombed or anything. You'd just see

06:00 sandbags bulging. Just moving inwards. That didn't look right. I didn't have time to think. I just ran into the boarded bit and whoosh, down she all came. Probably as close a call as I had actually. Another 10 seconds and I'd have been in the middle of it all.

How hard was it to dig slit trenches?

That varied greatly because the desert

06:30 consists of sand and rock. It's not exactly sand like sand on the beach. It's really very sandy soil. Very sandy loam. It's not hard to dig, but in a lot of places the rock was only a few inches under the surface.

That of course was pretty impossible. We had picks and shovels. We didn't use any entrenching tools. They made little shovels you can unscrew and turn them into a little hoe. They didn't

07:00 have them. We had picks and shovels which we used. We could dig pretty quickly if there was anything flying around.

Digging in that sandy soil, would it cave back in?

It does if you are digging in any depth. That's why the ones at Matruh, we dug full blown dugouts there. 6 feet deep in Matruh. Then we covered them to camouflage them. In Alamein we only

07:30 dug these little slit trenches and they were only a foot deep so they would hold all right for that depth. If you dug the 6 feet deep without boarding them, I think they'd have fallen in.

What did you use to cover them?

Mostly a sort of ordinary wire netting and covered with Hessian and then you throw little bits of dirt and stuff over it. It was camouflaging. That was really the beginning of

08:00 camouflage as a science. I know one fellow was so good at it that they commissioned him and sent him up to Tobruk to show them how to do it up there. Whether that was a good thing for him or not, I don't know. That's what they did.

On the receiving end of an artillery barrage, what would be the first sign of it?

Mostly those shells came faster than the speed of sound. So you wouldn't hear

08:30 the shell coming. Sometimes you would. Bombs you could always hear coming. They don't fall very fast. But shells often would just be a burst. In air bursts you'd be walking along minding your own business and all of a sudden it'd go off above you. They were very fast muzzle velocity apparently, the 88s. That's be the first sign. I knew at one stage of the game we

09:00 were on a reverse slope of a little ridge and we ventured out in front of it and set up our machineguns and fired a few rounds off just to annoy the Jerries [Germans] I suppose. Brought it back and there was retaliation pretty well afterwards. The infantry blokes sang out "What the hell did you do that for? Why didn't you leave them alone, the weren't bothering us." That was known as 'drawing the crabs'. I remember that sign from my

09:30 father's talking about the First War. Not that he talked about it much, but that was one of the things he, drawing the crabs was one sentence. Silly game was another one. That was to make the jester. Stick the heads up for no reason.

Were there blokes going out on patrols in front of the position?

There were from infantry. We didn't patrol like that as machine gunners. You can't patrol with a machinegun, it weighs about 40 pound. The infantry always patrolled.

10:00 That was the big strength of the Australians. They didn't rely on fixed fortifications, they had a line that they patrolled in front of it every night. That's the secret of maintaining your position was active patrolling. I don't think the Yanks have learned that yet.

What was the water situation?

In Matruh we got a gallon a day for all purposes. The cooks took half

10:30 that so we got two quarts. That two quarts gave us our bath and shaving water and drinking water and everything else. So we weren't very clean. I can never remember, even at Alamein being completely out of water. We had a water bottle which held about a pint. We kept that full. There certainly wasn't any water to spare. Then we learned how to conserve it.

11:00 **What about maintaining the machineguns as fas as dust and sand went?**

If you looked after it, it was all right. We had sandstorms. When you had them there was a lot of sand because you couldn't see more than 5 or 6 feet. If you went anywhere you had to come back on a reciprocal course pretty accurately or you'd miss and get lost.

11:30 Every day you'd clean them. Pull the to pieces and clean the individual parts and put them back together again.

Would that be the role of the entire gun crew?

Yeah. The entire gun crew would take it in turns. Although you had a number 1, number 2 and number 3, number 2 was potentially a number 1 and so on, right down through the crew. So everybody had to be able to do it.

12:00 If the thing didn't work properly everybody was in the same boat so to speak, so we didn't need much urging to keep our gear in good order. Same applied to rifles too of course. You had to pull the bolt out of your rifle and clean it thoroughly every day. Clean it and oil it. Make sure it was a goer.

Can you recall how much ammunition you'd carry around?

The gun fired 500 rounds a minute,

12:30 but you wouldn't fire for minute in one burst. You'd fire bursts of 20 or 30. You'd have a belt fed into a metal container about a foot long. That held one belt. No, I don't remember exactly.

What about aircraft?

Our aircraft or theirs?

Both.

13:00 Had the Stukas of course. You know about the Stukas? Stuka [Junkers JU]87's. They had a fixed under cart. They were a very pretty defenceless sort of aircraft carrier. They could only operate if they had pretty good air supremacy. They weren't very fast, except when they stood on their nose and gravity helped them, then they came down pretty fast. They had a siren that made a bloody great noise.

13:30 **What effect did that noise have on the fellas?**

The noise was frightening, but again you adapt to it and sort of pretend it isn't happening I suppose, after a while. They were more frightening than they were damaging. If you were in a slit trench they had to get a direct hit to hit anybody. So you felt pretty secure. You learn pretty quickly what's dangerous and what's not.

14:00 **Would they strafe as well as bomb?**

Not the Stukas, no. The ME-109 did, fighter aircraft, they did. The Stuks weren't made for that. They weren't suitable for that. They had to get in and drop their bomb and get home quick, otherwise somebody'd shoot them down. They're pretty vulnerable.

Were you close to any aircraft battery?

No. We weren't.

14:30 They were further back. The artillery and the Ack-Acks [anti-aircraft] were back because they weren't suitable. They would be too vulnerable close to the frontline. If we fell back a bit, they would take too long to move and they'd be captured.

What would be the action in the event of an air raid?

You get into your slit trench and hope it didn't hit you. We had Bren

15:00 guns you could use, but mostly you just get into your slit trench, because your chances of hitting an aircraft in motion are pretty slim. In Syria, just for fun, the boys used to throw stones at them, at their own aircraft of course. It did actually happen that a routine order was issued saying "Troops will cease forthwith the dangerous practise of throwing stones at aircraft." That was an actual order that was issued.

15:30 **Did you see much friendly Allied air forces?**

There was a team called the Football Team of our bombers that used to go over as Alamein progressed. They were 18 of them which is a football team of the southerners standards. That's the number in Australian Rules team. They used to call them the Football Team as they flew over. Mostly they came back intact. We didn't see much of the fighters. They'd be come and gone so

16:00 quickly, they were so fast. One of our fellows actually got hit by a bullet from aircraft from a dog-fight that was going on. The bullet went down behind his collarbone and lodged in his chest and he didn't know about it. He just got sick. After a while they evacuated him and x-rayed him and there was a bullet in his chest. You don't feel a soft tissue wound. You only feel the ones that hit bone.

16:30 I didn't feel the one that actually did the damage because another piece slid along a rib . Went along tangentially about there and left a groove that I could put my thumb in. That was the one that hurt because it hit a rib.

When you got hit did you think you'd bought it or did adrenalin kick in?

Did I think I was going to die? No. I don't think so.

17:00 I was very frightened because I'd been hit and the game was still going on. I was very frightened. I was very pleased to find this little heap of dirt I could lie down behind. I didn't at any time think I was going to die. That was probably misplaced confidence too. By the time I got to them and they operated on me I can't have been too good

17:30 because I can remember walking over and lying down on a stretcher and the doctor just taking one look and saying "Take him down to resuscitation." He didn't even have to feel my pulse or take my blood pressure or anything. He just looked at me and that was that. So they took me down and gave me a blood transfusion. Operated.

Since you've become a doctor, have you thought back on everything that happened there and thought about the

18:00 **medical procedures?**

Yes, I haven't had a look at them for a long time, but I got the actual notes at the time and had a look at it. When you're the soldier you've got blind faith I suppose. I didn't realise at the time that things were as bad as they were. I've thought of it again since, because I've operated on people with a belly full of blood when I

18:30 was in New Guinea. I have seen it from the other side of the table now.

Can you tell us about General Smuts?

I didn't know him, but when we were at Mersa Matruh, General Smuts was well known. He was Prime Minister of South Africa. At that time I think. He was

19:00 previously one of their leading generals in the First War. There was a South African division. South Africa at that time was still a part of the British Empire and were fighting on our side. There was a South African division in Mersa Matruh and we were attached to them. General Smuts inspected the South African division and us with them. They took a photograph which is showed in the

19:30 battalion book. It's just coincidence that I happen to be in the picture. I wasn't on talking terms with him. I was a private soldier and he was a general.

What did you think about having to turn out?

It was one of those things that you don't like, but you put up with. And the parades, I didn't like parades. Some people didn't mind them, but I'd dodge them if I could. I couldn't dodge that one.

In what

20:00 **ways could you dodge them? Could you get yourself put on another duty?**

You could show that you weren't very enthusiastic, because they didn't take everybody. Somebody had to stay behind and do the chores and look after the camp. Some people prefer to do that rather than go on a parade.

What odd jobs were you doing?

There was mess orderlies. The cooks were the cooks and they always had mess orderlies in rotation. They had to do the cleaning up and the putting out

20:30 and the handing out and so forth.

Was there any benefit in that?

No. Might have got a bit more food. I don't think so. When you were in camps there were always camps to keep in order. Tent ropes to tighten up and emu parades. You're familiar with emu parade I suppose. Parade and general cleaning up and things.

What about correspondence

21:00 **from Australia?**

I wrote to my mother fairly frequently and I've brought the letters up. She kept them. I've got the letters I wrote when I was in Matruh, which are pretty uninteresting because you weren't allowed to talk about anything that was of real interest. Mail wasn't too bad until Japan came into the war. There was airmail until them. After Japan came into the war there were none of our

21:30 aircraft that could fly across to the Middle East because the route was through Indonesia, or the East Indies as it was then. So once December 1941 had passed, mail took 6 weeks to get there and equal time to get back. So we didn't get much mail then.

How did you hear about Japan entering the war?

22:00 I can't remember the actual announcement. When we were in Matruh, the news used to be condensed. We didn't have radios, but the battalion used to get the news from somewhere and they'd print it out. The printout would go to every platoon and somebody would be selected to read it out. First of the newsreaders.

22:30 It was usually a day or two old of course. I can't remember hearing about Pearl Harbour or hearing about Singapore for that matter. We knew about them, but I can't remember actually being told about them or whatever.

Do you know what you thought when Japan entered the war?

23:00 We were over there fighting the Germans and that was our patch. We thought we'd left this one to the ones fighting here. Although we got our turn in due course, but we were more concerned about the

Germans at that time than we were about the Japs. We didn't regard the Japs as the general pinion at that time. I think we thought the Japs weren't all that good anyway. We learned better later.

23:30 **What was your opinion of the German soldiers you were facing?**

The Germans were held in very high regard. We knew they were good. We knew we could beat the Ities without too much trouble. This is an aside, but I can remember actually seeing, I'm wondering what concept, probably when I first got to Alamein, a

24:00 truckload of Ities guarded by one Tommy soldier. He was standing right at the back of the vehicle. He handed his rifle to one of the Ities when he climbed off the truck and he handed the rifle back down to him. I saw that happen. It's not a story that I've heard. I saw it happen. There were a whole convoy of them. There must have been 10 of these lorries all full of Ities.

24:30 Each with one lone Tommy guarding them. The Ities weren't showing any sign of running away really.

What effect did seeing that have on you?

I wonder. I think we just accepted it as the order of things. By that time, the first Australians

25:00 who fought in the Middle East were up against the Ities when they took Bardia and those places at the end of 1940 the beginning of 1941. So we knew that the Ities weren't hard to beat. The majority of them anyway. So we weren't surprised. […]

25:30 **When you were in garrison in Syria, how was the day to day running of things changed there?**

We were still training. Every day we'd be training. Still maintaining our weapons for a start. We were still training. We would go out on little patrols and be told "That's your target, that's where you're going to set up your gun." Then they were great thieves the Syrians. They got in and pinched

26:00 a couple of our Tommy guns one night. Things got very serious then. Went through all the neighbouring villages and searched house by house trying to get our Tommy guns. We didn't have the gun back. I wonder who had the Tommy guns. I think the NCOs [Non Commissioned Officer] must have been armed with Tommy guns.

What did you think of the Australian NCOs?

They were mostly pretty good. They were part of us. They were promoted from

26:30 our ranks. We knew them pretty well and the majority of them were pretty good. Of course they varied as people always do. The officers weren't too bad either although it was part of the culture to decry them. They had their duds and we knew who were the duds and who were the good ones. It very soon became evident anyway. Even before we got into action you could tell who was any good,

27:00 who knew what they were doing. There were a lot of fairly intelligent people in the ranks. There were a lot of people who had held pretty good jobs in civvy life and didn't want to make the army a career and were quite happy to go through it as private soldiers, get the war over and get back to what they were doing before.

Did you have any idea at the time how long you thought the war would go for?

I remember the end of 1941 betting a bloke a pound that it'd

27:30 be over in a year. That was misplaced confidence too.

Not one of your better bets.

No, that's right. He never got his pound, because he was captured within in that year and at the end of that year he was a prisoner of war and I haven't seen him since.

Did you get anything from the Red Cross parcels or things like that?

Yeah, we had Comforts Fund. We didn't get Red Cross. The Red Cross supplied

28:00 the prisoners of war. There was a Comforts Fund. I think all the Australians had Comforts Fund. People used to donate and we'd get balaclavas and cakes and socks and that sort of stuff. It'd come through and that'd be issued.

How good was it to get stuff like that from home?

A lot of it was pretty good because we didn't the same sorts of things on issue. Particularly balaclavas. Because people don't realise how cold it gets in Palestine in the wintertime. It snows in Jerusalem.

28:30 It snowed in Syria. Syria was a pretty cold place. So we were pleased to get balaclavas. Warm socks were good too.

When did you find out that you were going to be returning to Australia?

29:00 I don’t think we knew. We were never told where we were going. Everybody had a guess. We were sent up to Syria in the beginning of 1942 and the others went home. So we knew we weren’t going home because we were going north. But you never knew where you were going. You were told to get on the train, when the train got where it was going you got off the train and said “This is where we are.” So you never knew. So we didn’t know we were coming

29:30 back to Australia, really, until we got on the boat. We had a fair idea because we came back in the beginning of 1943 and the other two divisions had come back in the beginning of 1942. So we had a pretty fair idea that the Australian politicians would be wanting us home. But we didn’t have any official notification. We were just told “Get on the train,” “Get off the train,” “Get on the boat.” I don’t suppose we really knew we were coming back to Australia until

30:00 we got here.

What sort of furphies would fly around?

Everything. “You’re going to Tobruk,” “You’re not going to Tobruk.” When we left Matruh we didn’t know whether we were going west to Tobruk or east back to Palestine. They brought us back by road then, so we climbed in the vehicle and back we came. We didn’t know which was we was going.

Was it still a relief to be in transit to anywhere as opposed to actually being somewhere?

You always wanted something to happen.

30:30 We knew we couldn’t fight the war in Palestine. Most of us wanted to fight the war. Something’s happening to break the boredom.

How did you find the bonding of blokes? Would country blokes gravitate towards each other as opposed to the city blokes?

I think that pretty soon broke down. That was probably right in the first place.

31:00 I think that pretty soon broke down because after a while you’re all doing the same thing anyway. You’re all working together. Particularly once you got into action, nobody’s an army on his own. You’re all dependent on one another. For example if somebody's on guard, he’s the blokes that’s on guard and everybody else is dependent on him. So you very soon mould together.

What about interstate rivalry?

31:30 In our battalion there were two companies of Queenslanders and two companies of New South Walesmen. We were separate until we joined the battalion, until we actually joined the ship to go overseas. There was a bit, but that soon broke down because again we worked as platoons or as companies. You didn’t really see very much of the others. Being a machinegun battalion we were split up into platoons and attached to

32:00 infantry battalions. So we didn’t even see much of our other platoons for quite a while at the time.

Was there rivalry between infantry and gun crews?

I don’t think so. Again, you’re dependent on one another.

I was thinking along the lines of friendly rivalry.

I don’t think that happened. Wartime army is quite different from peacetime army. You get that sort of thing in the

32:30 peacetime army, I know. But in a war, well, the war’s pretty close and you haven’t got time. You’re too busy uniting to defend yourself against the enemy to have fighting against one another or even being rivals with one another.

Did you get opportunity for sports in the rear?

There was mostly football.

33:00 We didn’t have much over in the Middle East because there was something going on. When we were up in the Tablelands they had football teams. I swam. I was a swimmer so I used to go down to the Barron River. I got a special permission not to be in the football team. My brother was a footballer. Finished up having a hip replacement many years later because of his football-ing.

You’re

33:30 **on a ship coming back to Australia.**

We didn’t officially know where we were going. We reckoned we were coming home, but we didn’t know. We came back on the Queen Mary. Got on at Port Tewfik this southern end of the Suez Canal. That was crowded. They chased us up all on deck so that they

34:00 could inspect the cabins. When everybody was on deck there was no room to sit down, you all had to

stand up. There were so many people.

What was your impression of the Suez Canal?

Suez Canal was just a big ditch. Except there's lakes in the middle of it that runs on the canal from end to end. It's a canal from Port Tewfik at the southern end to the Bitter Lake, which is so big you

34:30 can't see across it. It's like an ocean in itself. Then the canal starts again. They put pontoon bridges across. When we first went over there we had to go across in barges. When we came back down to go up to the desert, they had pontoon bridges and we drove across it.

Did you see much defences?

No.

35:00 The Germans used to drop mines in it. Magnetic mines. They had an aeroplane with a big circular magnet that went round from the nose to the wings to the tail. They used to fly that up and down close to the water to try to set the mines off. I only saw the Suez Canal two or three times. Only saw it when we crossed it.

35:30 **When you were in the desert, were landmines a problem?**

Oh yes, it was mined out in front and our minefields and their minefields. So you couldn't advance until the sappers [engineers] had cleared a path. That was one of our problems the night that I was wounded. That's one of the reasons the infantry battalion with us attached to it were surrounded and

36:00 they were all captured. One of the reasons for that is that the British tanks wouldn't come through the gap in the minefield. I think a tank might have strayed out of the gap and got blown up and they wouldn't put any more across it. So we'd been promised. You'd been told what the plan was before you went into battle. "You'll go through and British tanks will come up" and so forth. British tanks

36:30 didn't come up. By that time I was out luckily. If I hadn't been wounded I'd have been caught. So I didn't have much chance of finishing the night successfully whatever happened.

How did you feel about the fact that a lot of your mates had been captured?

I was cross about that. I'm pretty intolerant of those sorts of things. I didn't know about it for some time. I was in the main

37:00 dressing station for a week until they reckoned I was fit to take back. We didn't know what had happened. I don't know when I found out, but it was quite a while afterwards before I found out that I'd lost all my mates. Our platoon sergeant came back in the same lot of wounded as I did. He was hit in the elbow. I spoke to him. He died a month or so later. I'm not quite

37:30 sure what happened to him, but he died. Maybe it was more than just his elbow. I don't know.

At what stage on the ship were you told you were making for Australia or did you suss it out yourself?

I can't remember. I think we worked it out for ourselves where the ship was going. We stopped at a place

38:00 called Atu Atoll which is in the middle of the Indian Ocean. We stopped there to refuel to re-service or something. We knew where we were. We were told where we were. We thought "We've come this far, we must be going onto Australia." But you weren't officially told. I suppose the major reason was security. If you knew where you were going and the ship was torpedoed and people picked up by the enemy, then.

38:30 You're only told what you had to know.

Did they play radio broadcasts on the ship?

No, I don't think they could receive them.

Were you escorted?

Going over we were escorted. The Queen Mary was in the same convoy and it suddenly steamed off by itself. Yes, we were escorted.

39:00 The Queen Mary used to cross the Atlantic on its own depending on speed and the fact it was only 3 days anyway. We were escorted. There was usually destroyers and cruisers in sight from the deck. We'd have a convoy of about 6 troop ships.

Tape 4

00:35 **Were you ever concerned about being out in the ocean in a big ship like that?**

No. Didn't bother me.

Were you worried about U-boats or anything?

Not consciously, no. We knew they'd get us if they could. We have a pretty good record. They never sunk a troopship in the whole war. Not one of ours.

01:00 We were fatalists, we didn't take it.... We did lifeboat drill but we never thought we'd have to use it. They must have protected them pretty careful because they got a lot of tankers and freight ships in the same time. The surface radars, they didn't have much of a chance because we'd have a fair number

01:30 with us. It'd have to be submarines.

Did they have any depth armaments or anything like that?

No, not that I ever saw. We used to zigzag every ten minutes because they reckoned that's how long it took for submarines to line up and fire. Don't know how true that was, but they certainly used to zigzag on convoy.

02:00 **At that stage, how did you think the war was progressing?**

We heard about all the reverses. Looking back we were foolishly confident I think. We'll win in the end, sort of thing. Didn't have any good reason to believe that, but we did.

Did you get niceties onboard that you hadn't had in the Middle East?

Not that I remember.

02:30 We used to buy meals from the kitchen sometimes. We'd play poker nearly all night and then early in the morning when they were going to knock off we'd buy something from the English steward. Buy a meal.

Did they encourage you to do PT [Physical Training] or lessons?

They did on the way over. We even had boxing matches on the

03:00 way over. But the ships weren't as crowded then. There wasn't room to do anything on the Queen Mary on the way back because there were just so many troops. So many people. Imagine 11,000 troops on one ship. There just wasn't room to do anything. Even then they had the little recreation room, which is were all the gambling went on. Housie- housie was an official game,

03:30 official recreation. I think there was a library. I think there were books available.

With 11,000 men how did you have enough room to gamble?

It was pretty crowded. I don't know. Pretty crowded. Very smoky. I was a non smoker.

You would have been as good as a smoker.

Just about. Passive smoking hadn't been spoken

04:00 about at that stage.

Was there drinking onboard?

There probably would have been limited alcohol available at the canteen. Australian canteens were never dry. You could always buy alcohol. Later on they had the Lady Blameys. Have you heard of Lady Blameys?

How did you make yours?

With a hot wire. You got an ordinary 26 ounce beer bottle and

04:30 hotwire, heat it up and then dip it into water and hit the neck of it. Then file it down a bit so they'd be smooth enough to drink from.

How would you file down?

They had files. I think we used an ordinary file.

Did blokes personalise their Lady Blamey?

Not that I can remember.

Making handles or decorating?

No, I can't remember anybody doing that. Some might have, but I can't remember

05:00 that happening.

Where did you first make them?

Up in the Atherton Tablelands. We didn't have them in the Middle East. We didn't get any beer in the desert. We got beer in the camps, there was beer available. But you didn't get any in the desert

Was it cold or warm?

I think it was probably warm. I don't think they had any

05:30 refrigeration.

When you arrived in Australia, was it exciting? Was there a reception for you or anything like that?

We came straight off the boat and onto the train, we Queenslanders. There were people waving to the train.

Where did you land in Australia?

In Sydney. They stopped at Fremantle while the Western Australians got off. Then we came direct from there to

06:00 Sydney and off the ship and onto the train. We didn't stop in Sydney.

Were you on deck when you came through the Heads?

That's a good question. I would think I was, but I can't remember it. There was only just enough room for the Queen Mary to get through the boom nets. They had boom nets right across the Heads and just a little gap in the middle, which was a gate. Sailed out through those heads again 40 years later.

06:30 **Did that bring back memories?**

It did indeed. 1983. Went in on the Queen Mary and sailed out in a Ness Ness 34 [?], a 34 footer.

When you sailed out the first time, did you watch Sydney disappear?

Yeah.

What were your thoughts?

I was excited on where I was going. It was all a big adventure to me at that time.

Did the thought cross your mind that you mightn't see that again?

07:00 Not as a possibility for me. I'm a bit like the modern car drivers, it can't happen to me.

What about coming back?

You think of your mates that didn't come back. In Don 1 there were only probably half a dozen out of the 40 of us that went over that came back together. There was some of us had been wounded and a few

07:30 that had been let out of battle. There was always a nucleus let out of battle to reform the unit if need be. So there were a few of them. We thought of the blokes that went over with us and didn't come back with us.

Was the mood on the ship sombre or excitement?

When we came back? Excitement. Pleased to get home. We'd been away over two years. Went away in December 1940 and came back in March 1943.

08:00 **You get off and jump on a train?**

We did. I can't remember the exact details, but I know we didn't stay overnight in Sydney. We got straight onto the train.

Up to Brisbane?

Up to Brisbane. Went into camp at Brisbane. I went in at Kalinga, which is sort of on the other side of the north coast railway from Toombul and Nundah. Then we got leave pretty well straight away. We got about 6 weeks' leave.

What did you do on

08:30 **that leave?**

I went home. My parents were at Thornton by then. I can't remember really in detail. I got malaria. Oh no, that must have been the next time. Yeah, that was after I'd been to New Guinea I got malaria. The next time. The unit went up by train to the Atherton Tablelands.

After your 6 week leave?

Yeah. By train

09:00 to Keerai.

When did your division reform?

You had your leave and then you went back to the showgrounds in Brisbane. There was a sergeant major there who was the marshal. He called people out by category “So and so form up over there” and then we were drafted. Our

09:30 battalion was still in Brisbane at that time so we were sent out to the battalion. Can’t remember exactly how, but probably by army transport of some type.

Brisbane must have been different to when you left with the American forces.

I don’t remember it as that. We got off the train and into camp. I don’t suppose we saw any Americans for a while. We hadn't seen any Americans when we were

10:00 on leave because the camps were separate. Yes, they must have been there by then.

What was the train trip [North] like?

About 3 days. Didn't have any sleepers. Lucky blokes slept in the luggage racks. The rest of us just sat and tried to sleep.

How would they feed you?

10:30 I just can’t remember most of these things. I don’t know. I suppose we probably stopped at stations and lined up and got a meal. That must have been how it was done. Be pretty impossible to feed you actually on the train, to produce the food and distribute it on the train. So I think they must have had it ready prepared for the troops that were coming through and stopped at various stations.

11:00 But I can’t remember.

Where did you go to?

We went to Keerai. Where we went into camp there is now underneath the water of the Teneri Dam [?]. That's where we went in the winter of 1943. Then we went down to Cairns. While we were in Keerai we did some exercises on Lake Urumu [?]. We did an amphibious exercise there. Then we went down to Cairns and

11:30 Trinity Beach just out of Cairns for about a fortnight, did a bit more training. On and off landing ships.

How were the blokes physically?

They were pretty good. Got into pretty good nick pretty quickly when I get back into camp and started to train. Training was pretty vigorous.

12:00 **The LCT [Landing Craft Tank] landing craft training, how was that?**

We were on little LCVs[landing craft vehicle], little 30 foot barges. They’d run them ashore and let the ramp down and we’d run off it. We actually attacked Lae from LSTs, Landing Ship Tanks. Then we went from Lae to Finschhafen in LCVs, little fellows.

Did the

12:30 **fact you trained on smaller ones make a difference?**

We knew what was going to happen. The LSTs have got vertical doors that open outwards like that and then a ramp that comes down so they can run the vehicles and the tanks off.

The LCVs were just a single front?

Yeah. It had a flap that came down.

13:00 We were bombed on the way up to Lae. That time they hit us. I can remember that one fairly clearly because we were all on deck talking and playing cards. I wanted something out of my haversack for some reason or other. So I went down the vertical ladder to my bunk and I’m just getting something out of my haversack and I heard a “Boom” and the boat seemed to jump up in the air. I scampered back up

13:30 the ladder. There were blokes lying around all over the place, wounded. One bomb had hit the bridge and gone off and wiped out all the Yanks because the Yanks owned the ship, we were just the passengers. Another one went through and exploded in the engine room or the tank deck or somewhere and stopped the engines. So we were just lying there dead in the water. A torpedo went under our bow and hit the stern of the one next-door. The

14:00 LSTs only draw a bit of water at the back. They’re a very shallow draft up front. So it went under our bow and hit the stern of the one next-door and blew the stern off it. When I got up on deck there was a plane burning about 100 yards away that had come across us. Our anti-aircraft fellows had got it as it

went over and brought it down. Anti-aircraft machineguns I think. They'd have been machineguns. It would

14:30 have been too low even for the Beaufighters. Brought her down.

What did you do when you got up on deck?

There was a fellow there wounded, just right near the hatch so I did what I could for him. Then there was a little bit of a bridge on the.. I remember it had a little roof so I hopped under the roof. Quite useless of course. The thing was only tin thick.

15:00 You'd hide behind a sheet of paper if you had a chance to feel a bit more secure.

You were still under attack?

There was a plane flying around. But by that time our own fighters had turned up so they didn't. I suppose we were probably still under attack but they weren't actually strafing our ship.

What convoy were you in?

15:30 LSTs. I can't remember how many, but there were several LSTs. I can't even remember whether we had naval escort. We may not have. Aircraft would have been the main threat. By that time most of the naval battles were fought by aircraft.

16:00 That was after the battle of the Coral Sea which was the first big battle fought by aircraft I think. So I think they were depending on aircraft for defence. This lot of Japs got through it. They caught up with them pretty soon afterwards. Started to bring them down.

Where did that happen?

That happened off the coast of Morotai. Morotai's about 50 miles or so south of

16:30 Lae. The Lae landing was to be on the 4th of September. That was the 4th of September. We weren't to be in the first wave. We were to land later. About 3 o'clock in the afternoon on the 4th of September that happened. They towed us. We lay around there until after dark.

17:00 They brought something in and got a tow on board and towed us into the shore. The next day we unshipped from that one and got onto another LST and they took us onto Lae two days later. So we finished up at Lae on the 6th of September. I remember at Lae we went ashore there fairly early in the morning. We just went into the shore,

17:30 let the ramp down and we went in a couple of hundred yards or so inland. The shore was deserted. I was a swimmer so I thought I'd go and have a swim. I went back down there and there was nobody on the beach. I wondered why. I just got back to the camp and the Japs came over and bombed the beach. So I realised why there was nobody on the beach.

In Australia, how long did you do your

18:00 **landing craft training in Cairns for?**

We were in Cairns for a fortnight. I can't remember the detail. I remember we all went down to go to one of the American picture shows. The guards stopped us from going in. It was only when our platoon commander assured him that we hadn't been in a malarial area that we were allowed in to have a look at the pictures.

Did you believe that was the real motive for keeping you out of there?

18:30 I don't know.

Was that the fist interaction you had with Americans?

I think so. First time I seen them I think. The only Americans I'd seen before that was when I got sick in Beirut. They put me into a casualty clearing station there. Then they transferred me south to the Australian hospital and they had American volunteers. This was before America

19:00 had got into the war officially. They had Americans there who were volunteer stretcher bearers. They carried me out of the casualty clearing station and put me on the ambulance. That was the first Americans I actually met. After that, the next lot of Americans I met were the crew of the LST. They were quite nice blokes. Individually they're nice people.

19:30 When we got onto the second LST I was assigned to help the anti-aircraft machine gunners who were Americans. I was astounded to find they didn't know how to cure stoppages. They'd been put into the guns and even if you're not a machine gunner you must realise that if a machinegun stops you've got to be able to get it going again. That's called a stoppage.

20:00 There are different reasons for the gun stopping. You're taught a drill to deal with each type of stoppage, 1, 2, 3 and 4 to recognise which stoppage it is in the first place and how to deal with it. These blokes hadn't been taught that at all. They could fire the gun. The gun stopped, the gun stopped. I was

staggered by that.

Can you go through the 4 stoppages?

There were 4 stoppages, that's right. You must know about that because you got in first. But I can't remember them.

20:30 I remember the first one. The drill simply was to re-cock the gun. When you cock the gun you pull the belt with your left hand and you pull the cocking lever back with the right. That was the number 1 stoppage. I can remember that.

These blokes did know.

They didn't know anything. I think the last one might be changing the barrel. I know one of our blokes was showed how to change the barrel of the gun with the Germans about 100 metres off, 100 yards off at one stage. Fellow called Maxi Banner, he's dead now too.

21:00 He had to change the barrel of a gun in action in the desert.

Must have been hair raising.

You have to keep your cool. That's what training's all about.

Did the Americans entering the war change anything?

I don't think it changed our attitude very much. There were no Americans at Alamein for a start. That

21:30 was entirely fought by British and British dominions. So we didn't really know anything about the Americans. We were a bit like Muhammad Ali. We reckoned we were the best. That was that. The first Americans I met were the crew of the LST.

When you got in to the

22:00 **picture show in Cairns, can you recall what you saw?**

No.

Was it newsreels or an actual film?

It would have been a film. In those days, if you went to the pictures anywhere it started with a newsreel and then went onto the main item. We'd have had much the same. The films were outdoor ones. They had outdoor screens. Something like a drive in really, except you sat down in front of them. There'd be one crowd in front of the screen,

22:30 there'd be another crowd at the back of the screen. You could get places at the screen at the back and you saw it all in mirror image. There'd be a crowd of blokes on both sides of the screen.

How long did you spend up at Atherton Tablelands.

I was up there for my birthday, which was the 4th May. So I must have got up there some time in April. We left there early

23:00 in August. We either left Cairns or got to Milne Bay, I'm not sure which, on the 14th of August. We went from Cairns to Milne Bay and we spent a fortnight in Milne Bay. Then we got on the LSTs to go to Lae. So we must have been in the Atherton Tablelands in 43. We must have been there from some time in April to the early part of August or maybe the end of July.

Did you do jungle training?

Yeah.

23:30 **Was that all done at Atherton?**

Yeah. There was plenty of scrub there. We did some exercises at Lake Urumu, which is similar to the other greater lakes, but smaller. At that time it was entirely surrounded by scrub. There was no way into it except by getting a way through the scrub. So we played around with some inflatables and stuff like that. I was always a water person. I was in

24:00 lifesavers even before the war. I was in the Noosa Lifesavers in 1939. I became their captain. A few years later.

Was there ever a thought of joining the navy?

No, navy was remote to me. The Light Horse were there. There was a troop of Light Horse at Kandanga. So that's what I joined. My father was in the army, my uncles were in the army.

24:30 Even though I didn't know them. It was army from the start.

From Atherton did you know where you'd be going?

No. We knew we'd go to New Guinea, because that's where the war was, but we didn't know what part. I think by the time we left Milne Bay we knew we were going to Lae. When we left Australia we didn't know what

25:00 part of New Guinea we were going to. They put you on a transport and when you got off they might tell you where you were. They probably told us once we were at sea I'd say.

At Atherton did you see blokes coming back from New Guinea?

No. We were camped as a division. That was in 1943. I don't even know where the other division were at that time. Whether they were on the Tablelands

25:30 or still up in New Guinea. Probably a bit of both I suppose.

At that stage were they pumping you with drugs for malaria and that sort of thing?

No. I don't think we started to take them, we took Atebrin in those days and I think we might have started taking Atebrin just before we left Australia, but we didn't take it while we were still on the Tablelands. They used to have Atebrin parade. You all line up and they go along and you had to take your Atebrin tablet in front of the officers. Atebrin made you yellow.

26:00 The rumour was, as rumour always are, that Atebrin would make you impotent. You didn't want that. You didn't want to take Atebrin. After a while that was scotched. Everybody took their Atebrin pretty religiously because they didn't want malaria either. I got malaria while I was still in New Guinea so I must have got it while I was still taking Atebrin.

What was the scene when you landed at Lae?

26:30 By that time the battle had been going on for 2 days and it had moved away from the landing spot. We went ashore and through a little bit of scrub to where the blokes were temporarily camped. We didn't have any tents, we just had groundsheets and there we were. I can't remember the details from then. We moved

27:00 up towards the front. The coast at that point runs east and west. So you go inland you go north. To go to Lae we had to go west. Lae was maybe 20 miles away. So we started to go there. Mostly we were carrying at Lae. We didn't do any fighting to speak of. Lae was taken in a month anyway.

Did you make any comparison

27:30 **to the Middle East?**

Conditions were entirely different. We came from the desert to the jungle. Just about as opposite as it can be. Came from too dry to too wet. We knew what we were going into up there because we'd been training on the Tablelands. I grew up in scrub. The farm we had when I was a boy was 300 acres of what we now

28:00 call rainforest, we called it scrub and 200 acres of standing forest. So it was 500 acres of standing timber. So I was at home in the scrub. We knew that New Guinea would be similar.

The difference of having scrub as natural cover, did that make you feel safer or more dangerous?

More dangerous probably because you can't see the enemy. The enemy can't see you but you can't see him

28:30 either. So ambushes were much easier to arrange in the scrub than in the desert. Couldn't have an ambush as such in the desert because there was nowhere for ambushers to hide. Whereas in New Guinea you'd advance with two scouts, a forward scout and another scout. He'd creep ahead a bit at a time and wave people home, forward and you'd hope that if there was anybody there he'd have seen them. So that was

29:00 quite different.

What about your job on the gun? Had that changed because you were unable to use rangefinders?

No, when I was wounded I was the range taker. By the time I got back I'd been replaced as a range taker. So then I became a gun number. I was the number 2 on the gun when I was on the ship, but the number 1 was wounded in that attack. I was down below when it came off,

29:30 but the other blokes were all up top. So 8 or 9 of them were wounded, including my number 1 who incidentally is the only other member of the battalion who's now a doctor. So I went up a step so I became the number 1. The number 1 is the bloke who sits behind the gun as you can see in the picture there.

Was that always everybody's ambition on the gun crew, to become number 1?

Yeah.

30:00 Number 1's the number 1. That's right.

Did you have to do much practise because you hadn't fired the gun a lot on other positions?

No, I hadn't, but I done a lot while I was training before I became a range taker. Even back in the Light Horse days I'd fired a lot. So I knew it all pretty well.

30:30 We were talking about Clive Williams a while earlier. I remember him at Beaudesert putting the lock together and putting it together blindfolded. The lock is the actual firing part of the Vickers machinegun. It's the bit that actually removes the splint casing from the gun and another one's fed into it from the

31:00 belt and it goes back into the bridge. Fairly complicated bit of equipment of about 20 parts. We used to learn to pull that to bits and put it together again. I remember him doing it blindfolded. I can see him in front of me. He'd dropped one of the pieces and he's chasing it round the ground blindfolded trying to find it.

Did you have to learn the same thing?

Oh yeah.

31:30 Practise makes perfect so we knew the name of every part and where it went. I remember one part which was called "Pin split push access side levers". It was a split pin, that was its name. "Pin split push access side lever. It was the pin split that went in the push access on the side levers.

32:00 I can remember that from my earliest days in the Light Horse.

Were they water cooled?

Yeah.

How did that go in the desert?

You might even be able to see it in that picture. There was a tank of water and in the front of it we had a condenser can, which was a can with water in it. A tube went down from the steam exhaust of the gun, which is up near the muzzle of the gun. That goes down into the condenser can. So that the steam is

32:30 actually discharged into water do that it then condenses. If you use it without that you'd have a great cloud of steam, which would be a real giveaway of course.

So there was never any problem with having enough water to operate the gun?

It got first priority. I suppose at a pinch you could use salt water in the actual condenser can.

33:00 **You landed at Lae at night time?**

We landed there early in the morning in the daylight.

Did you see much damage from the landing that had gone through ahead of you?

33:30 There was an LCT, landing craft tank, which is different from landing ship tanks, about half the size. There was one of them lying there that had been put out of action. Alongside where we landed. Other than that it doesn't show much. Damage won't show much. They might dig a few holes in the sand with their bombs and knock a few trees down, but it's not very apparent. It's not like when you bomb buildings.

34:00 For example, at Mersa Matruh, every building had been damaged by bombs, so there were bits of buildings and buildings that were still standing had craters in their wall. All that sort of stuff. A bit like a earthquake. That damage is apparent. But damage in jungle isn't so apparent. A few trees knocked down and a few holes in the ground. This disabled landing LCT was there.

What happened when you caught up to the rest of the

34:30 **battalion?**

Our whole battalion was in that convoy. I don't know how many of us was on our LST or what happened to the rest of them. I don't know the answer to that. We might have only had a company. We probably had more than a company on the LST. We didn't fight as a battalion anyway. We'd have been attached as a platoon. We'd have been told to join a certain

35:00 infantry battalion.

Up to that point, was the bombing of the LST the hairiest thing you'd lived through?

Id' say so. Yes, it was probably the most frightening. Being at a ship at sea that's being bombed, you had no place to go.

How far off the coast were you?

The coast was out of sight I think.

35:30 We were a bit concerned in case they came back and sunk us.

Is there life rafts on an LST?

Yes.

Had you gone through routines for that?

We would have. I can't remember that. We certainly did when we went over in the Aquitania. I don't know whether an LST carries boats, but they certainly carry Carley floats, which are in places so that they float off. If the ship

36:00 sinks they float off so that you can hope to be able to swim to one.

Did they evacuate the dead and wounded?

Yeah. How did they get them? I think something came ashore. The navy have got stretchers which are made out of metal. You can put a rope on them and lower them over the side

36:30 of the ship. That's what they did. They must have transferred them to somewhere. I don't know who, we didn't have a sickbay on the LST. So I don't know quite what they did with them. They did shift them. They must have shifted the dead too I guess. When everything's going on at once you sort of don't, but I can remember putting

37:00 people on these navy stretchers and lowering them over the side. There was about 6 or 7 of our fellows in my platoon that were wounded. One of the fellows was wounded the second time. the bloke who was supposed to be my number 1, he'd been wounded when I was wounded in the desert. They got him a second time. He was evacuated.

37:30 **When was the first time you saw one of your comrades get killed?**

Probably the night I was wounded. I didn't see any of them dead, but I saw this fellow who had been hit in the elbow that later died and others.

You had an illusion of immunity, how did that impact you when you realised you're not infallible?

It just made me frightened I think. Where previously I hadn't been

38:00 frightened. I wasn't, a bit foolish to say so I suppose, but I wasn't frightened under fire until I was wounded. My father had gone through the First War and I suppose I has the illusion that I'd go through the second one. That made me more frightened. But I got much more frightened when I got to New Guinea after having been

38:30 bombed on the way there. I hadn't even gone ashore.

Did that shake you up more than being wounded?

Yes. I wasn't particularly frightened when I got on the ship to go up there. When I got onto the LST I knew we were going into action, but I wasn't particularly frightened then that I can remember. But after that I was. When I got ashore and planes came over,

39:00 I took a lot of convincing that they were ours and not theirs. Later again our CSM [company sergeant major] was killed in an attack after Finschhafen was pretty well over and we were really only occupying troops at that stage. The Japs came over one night, most the bombing up there was done at night. They did a lot of harassing bombing, they just send one plane over and they fly up and down, up and down. Keep you awake, then eventually drop a

39:30 bomb. There was a small number of us, probably about 6, camped in one little grove of trees. Our company headquarters was camped in one about 300 or 400 yards away. Bombers came over and we heard them come down. They missed us, but they hit the other lot. On the field telephone they rang us up to say that the bloke had been killed. I remember that

40:00 by that time I was pretty frightened of bombing. I'd hear planes come over and I wasn't really convinced. I'd know that they were ours, but I didn't believe that they were ours, which is better than the other way around I suppose.

Tape 5

00:31 **Tell us about fighting your way into Lae. It took two weeks?**

A fairly broad track had been cut through the scrub and laid with corduroy. Corduroy is little poles laid

01:00 alongside one another sort of thing. It was all on foot. We had to cross the Busu River, which flooded. We did most of the carrying, we didn't fire any shots.

How did you cross the flooded river?

Let's see. The 22nd and 28th attacked across it and they got quite a few people drowned getting across. There was a little side branch that we walked across on a log.

01:30 Can't remember how we crossed the river. Don't know whether we could ford it somewhere. We might have been able to ford it, make a dam. The flood only stayed up so long, they were only short streams, like the coastal streams. That's interesting. We didn't have much to do except carry gear. We called ourselves the

02:00 white bungs. We carried the gear up the river somewhere where the commandoes were one day. I remember what they wanted was canned heat. Have you ever heard about canned heat? Canned heat was a little tin of flammable stuff that burned without smoke. They didn't have to light a fire. It was about as big as a round salmon tin full of flamatory material

02:30 they used to take the top off it and light it and burn it in a little stove.

Did it give a smell?

Don't think so. Pretty well undetectable I think. Must have been American to be called 'canned' wouldn't it? We'd have called it 'tinned heat'. That's' what it was called was canned heat. Then we got across the Busu

03:00 and there were dugouts the Japs had been in. they were full of faeces. They must have been too frightened to get out of their holes. They didn't like being shelled. Nobody liked it, but they liked it less than we did. They were great hole-diggers. They used to dig little round holes , we had our slit trenches. They used to dig little round ones about 2 foot across and 3 feet deep

03:30 and sit in them.

How was the machinegun broken down so you could move it?

Barrel and a tripod. Barrel weighed about 40, that was the main part of the gun, pound and the tripod weighed about 50. Although the tripod weighed more it was easier to carry because you carried it across your shoulders with two legs down like that and

04:00 one down the middle of your back. The number 1 carried the tripod and number 2 carried the gun. When you went into action number 1 put the tripod down and number 2 ran across and fitted the gun to it. Fitted it through a couple of pins.

The pins would remain attached to the gun?

They were attached to the tripod with a chain. They were about as thick as your

04:30 little finger and a bit longer and a little arm on them. One of our blokes got burned in the desert. He picked up the gun while it was still hot and carried it on his shoulder. He had scars. He was a half-caste fellow from New Guinea called Budo. He had scars on his shoulder forever from where he carried the hot gun. They got very hot. The barrels got full of boiling water. Very hot.

05:00 **You mentioned the guy in the desert who changed barrels. Were you supplied with gloves or anything to assist you in doing that?**

No, we didn't have gloves, so how he managed to handle it, I don't know, it must have been a bit hot. Maybe he could get the old one out easily and the new one would be cool. He carried a spare barrel. Barrel was just what it said, just a bare barrel. two foot six inches long with a little

05:30 square bit at the butt end where it sat into it and the other end was a thread and something screwed onto that. They had a, you wouldn't call it an extinguisher exactly, but, the explosive followed the bullet through the barrel of course and came out and it used to come up against

06:00 something a bit like a mushroom to look like with a hole in the middle. That used to, to some degree, conceal the blast when you're firing in the night time. Didn't matter in the daytime. Our books called it muzzle blast. That was muzzle blast.

In the Middle East, what uniform did you

06:30 **have?**

We wore khaki shorts and shirts in the desert.

Did you always wear your shirts or was it too hot?

We didn't always wear our shirts. Our artillery were the classic blokes. They work in shorts only the whole time. They were doing very heavy work throwing 25 pounders [shells] into the gun. They used to literally throw them in.

How did blokes go

07:00 **with sun awareness, they must have got burned?**

The were pretty tanned all the time. They didn't wear a shirt at all. They were a bit like, nobody took any notice of the sun in those days. They were tanned. They wore shorts and socks and boots and tin hats. Didn't wear tin hats in New Guinea they were too cumbersome in the jungle.

07:30 **I've seen the 9th divvy wearing slouch hats. Did that happen often?**

They wore them in New Guinea. You didn't wear tin hats in New Guinea, but they wore tin hats all the time in the desert in action. There was a lot more stuff flying around in the desert than there was in New Guinea. The fear factor in New Guinea was the fact that it was concealed. There wasn't a lot of artillery and there wasn't a lot of

08:00 bombing. Mostly it was small arms fire at close quarters. In the desert there was a lot of stuff. Even the stuff falling down from anti-aircraft fire was a hazard. And nose caps. Nose caps were about 3 inches in diameter. Nose cap on a shell. That fell on your head.

What about the uniforms you

08:30 **had in New Guinea?**

Jungle greens they had then. Long trousers and long sleeved shirts that were green. The camouflage clothes they wear now hadn't come into being at all. KD was the ones in the desert, Khaki Drill, the others was called JG, which was Jungle Green.

Were you made to wear the sleeves down as a repellent for insects?

Yeah. It was compulsory. I don't know how much is was obeyed, but that was the

09:00 rule. Anti-malaria drill, which was strictly enforced until one day they found a couple of officers having a swim with no malaria protection. It was less strictly enforced after that.

Tell us about Billy Beach?

09:30 He was in the Light Horse with me, Bill Beach. He came from Millawondi. Millawondi's a little siding halfway between Kandanga and Imbil on the Mary Valley line. Just a little shed where the train stopped. Billy Beach and my brother Phil were together at a driver mechanic's course down around Ipswich somewhere. They were younger than

10:00 I was. So they were later getting to the war. My brother was only 14 when the war broke out and he still got there. They were there and my brother passed the exam so he went onto a higher exam and Bill Beach got drafted into the army. He went into the 2/13th Battalion, which was 9th Division. We were standing on the beach at Lae waiting to get onto these landing craft to go up

10:30 to Finschhafen and I met him there. So I was talking to him and he only lived another fortnight or so after that. He was shot in, I wasn't attached to his battalion. He was killed in Finschhafen. When I went back on leave next time I had to go and talk to his father about it. I heard somehow he put his head up at the wrong time and got shot.

11:00 **Was it hard speaking to his parents?**

I guess so. It was something that had to be done so I did it.

They would have been informed otherwise?

They'd have had an official notification. Nobody would have gone and personally talked about it. They just get a telegram.

Was it an unspoken agreement that blokes

11:30 **would do that for each other?**

Not that I know of. Probably we did where we could. It was never actually even put into writing, except for practise as far as I know. I got the opportunity so I went.

What was their reaction to you coming?

They were pleased that I went to talk to them. They'd

12:00 wonder what happened and did they suffer before they died and did they lie around there for hours waiting for somebody to come and help them. All that sort of thing. So if you can go and relieve their mind a bit, that helped.

As you moved onto Lae you talked about the river crossing.

Yeah, over the Busu. I found a Bren gun

12:30 in the water. There was this log across a little, must have been a tributary of the Busu because we were only 20 feet wide and it was a log across. Some blokes fell off the log and one day I walked across the log and found a Bren gun in the water. So we took it back. We didn't have Bren guns, but we took it back, pulled it to bits, cleaned it up, put it together again and had it work.

That became your personal weapon?

13:00 Not mine personally, because I was a machine gunner. Couldn't carry both. Somebody that didn't have anything else took it. Extra weapons are always handy.

One of the guys in your gun crew?

Yeah. I can't remember who.

Did you get engaged in fighting on your approach to Lae?

No, we were just carriers in the

13:30 Lae attack. It happened very quickly the Lae. It only lasted about a fortnight or so. The story is that the 7th Division sent a signal over "Please tell your artillery to stop its firing on Lae. They're stoping us getting in there." They landed at Nadzab by , you'll probably speak to 7th divvy blokes somewhere in your travels, they landed at Nadzab from aeroplanes.

14:00 When we went back to Trekbak [?] they had little organised shows for us. One was up to Mareeba and they flew a plane up from Sydney and the paratroopers all jumped out. So we're talking to the paratroopers and one of the fellows from Trekbak, was a bloke that had parachuted into Nadzab. He was saying one of these fellows, this was his first parachute jump into

14:30 action. At Nadzab. They landed at Nadzab, which is inland from Lae. They came down towards Lae to attack Lae from one side and we attacked it along the coast from the other side. Their complaint was that we were stopping them getting into Lae.

How much American support did you see there?

Didn't see any. I don't think there were any Americans in it. Americans were just a crew for the ships that took us in, that's

15:00 all. Again, when we went into Finschhafen they were American landing boats. They were just crew of the boats that's all.

Did you have to backwards and forwards [into Lae]?

We went backwards and forwards carrying gear up to the forward troops.

Besides canned heat and ammunition, do you know

15:30 **what else you carried?**

Food. We'd have had food.

Was water sourced from Lae itself?

We had purifying tablets I think. There was plenty of water. You wouldn't want to trust it, especially the Busu because it had Japs floating down it. They would have contaminated it a bit.

Did you see plenty

16:00 **of dead Japanese?**

Only saw the ones that were floating down the river that I can remember. Might have seen a few on land, I can't remember now.

Did you find any souvenirs?

Probably in Lae I found a brass vase about

16:30 so high. Very nice thing. I've given it to my daughter since.It'd had a booby trap attached to it, which I detached and put it in my pack and brought it home.

How was the booby trap rigged up?

I can't remember the details. I think it was a sort of thing that when you moved, relying on shaky memory now. The idea was that if you moved the thing it pulled a string.

17:00 So I removed it without pulling the string. Our own blokes used to make booby traps out of a bully beef can and a grenade. You're familiar with grenades? With the grenade with the handle held up against just fitted nicely into the bully beef tins so you could tie a string to the grenade and it fitted into the bully beef tin, pull

17:30 the pin out of the grenade and put it into the bully beef tin so that the handle couldn't fly up. That's how they worked. If you pulled the pin out you held it down with your hand. As soon as you let go the handle flew up and the pin came down and hit the detonator and off she went. I brought a couple home and went fishing with them later. Put them in the bully beef tin, attach the bully beef tin to something and the string from the grenade to something else,

18:00 so that anybody who touched the string would pull the grenade out of the bully beef tin and off shed go.

Did you do any fishing with that method?

Not up there I didn't. We got a fair few fish in Finschhafen harbour one day when the bombs hit the harbour. Missed us and hit the harbour. Had a nice lot of fish. We used to fish in the Middle East with explosives. In the Mediterranean.

18:30 I was the bloke that got to throw the explosives, had pieces of it about that long. Have you seen plugs of gel ignite? These were much bigger. These were about a foot long and two inches in diameter and you put a detonator in it and a bit of fuse and throw them before the fire hit the fuse.

What fish would you catch there?

Can't remember. I remember one day one fellow said "I'll cook all the fish you catch." I got

19:00 39. So he spent a fair bit of time cooking. What sort of fish? They resembled Mullet I think. I don't remember. Something about the size of a Mullet. They were very nice. That was at Mersa Matruh. The diet at that time was bully beef, so a bit of fresh fish was a good change.

What were sleeping conditions when you could grab a

19:30 **bit of sleep?**

In the desert or in New Guinea?

In New Guinea.

In New Guinea? In the scrub we had a groundsheet which was roughly rectangular, to quite because it was used as a cape as well. Roughly rectangular and it had eyelets. If you got a bit of thin stick and you put it across you could hold it out almost flat. So we'd put a piece of stick longitudinally along

20:00 a stick each end of the groundsheet with the longitudinal one going through it, so that gave us a bit of a roof. Then we'd build a little bed of sticks underneath it. A bit like the chimps make. Camp on them.

Was it possible to stay dry?

Wet a good deal of the time. I had a blanket when I started, but it got too heavy to carry I threw it away.

20:30 But it wasn't cold.

How much personal equipment would you carry?

there, I carried a haversack with a jerry can in it. We didn't carry spare clothes. Leave the kitbag behind somewhere and pick it up later. Just your personal weapons and a haversack with maybe a shaving kit. I didn't reckon I had

21:00 to shave. I remember the platoon commander lent me his shaving kit because I'd left mine behind. Mostly just your pannikin and a mess kit. I don't know whether they still use them, but rectangular mess kit. Two pieces that fit one inside the other. We'd throw one bit away. It was too heavy to carry both. Just carry one of them. Spoon was all I carried. It was all you needed. It was all slop. Didn't

21:30 need a knife.

There wouldn't have been any fresh rations?

No. We got fresh meat 5 times I think in the 7 months we were there. Mostly it was bully beef and then M&V, meat and vegetables, or dehydrated mutton.

How long did you spend at Lae?

We were there a month from when we got there to

22:00 when we left. A fortnight of it was the campaign and we were there another fortnight and we went. Others went before us. C company went before us. So they did quite a lot of shooting in Finschhafen. We did very little. They did very well. So we got into Finschhafen about a fortnight after their campaign had actually started. Our 1 company, as soon as the campaign at Lae had finished, they put them straight on the boats and took them up there.

22:30 We stayed in Lae for another fortnight and then we went up there.

The second fortnight in Lae, what was your day to day routine?

I can’t remember really. We went into Lae and picked up a Jap rifle from somewhere that I carried for a long time and eventually sold to one of the Yanks. We just wandered around. We had nothing very much to do.

What was left of Lae?

23:00 I can’t remember any standing buildings. There was a ship aground at the end of the Lae strip. That was still there when I went back there in Lae years later. The fellow who did medicine with me was a fighter pilot and he told me they used to line up on that boat to strafe the strip while it was still in Jap hands. The strip went right

23:30 down to the sea.

In the second 2 weeks there, did you see much aircraft?

Not that I can remember. There would probably have been some. I think our fighter pilots were pretty well on top of the situation by then. They kept them away.

What about Finschhafen?

24:00 We landed at night there in these LCVs all lined abreast and we went in together. We went ashore there. By that time the fighting had moved away a bit so we were garrison troops. We pushed out to the perimeter with our guns to get ready. But nobody came so we didn’t have to shoot anybody. I remember from Finschhafen seeing a plane coming back

24:30 from New Britain with a great stream of smoke coming out behind it. All of a sudden it just plunged down into the sea. There was another incident where the, Tomahawks they would have been, Tomahawks ran out of fuel. They all landed. They ran out of fuel and crashed in the dark. One of them hit one of our fellows. I don’t think

25:00 it killed him, but it knocked him about a bit.

How tired were blokes getting?

You got used to being tired. You learned to sleep.

25:30 At one time the artillery, there were four 25 pounders about 100 yards behind us. They were firing harassing fire every now and then. In the daytime it was so loud that it hurt your ears with the shells flying just over your head. Night time came and they kept on firing, but you just went to sleep. They didn’t wake us up. Yet, we did an hour’s picquet. I

26:00 know the fellow that used to come on picqet after me was called Metho. Don’t quite know why he was called Metho. Everybody would be sound asleep and I’d just go up to him and from about that far away and say “Metho” [Methylated spirits] . Up he’d get and he’d been sound asleep the second before. So you learned, I’ve forgotten how, you learned to sleep and yet wake instantly.

26:30 It’s really quick and the dead sort of thing.

Was that carried over into your civvy life?

Yeah. I remember the nurses saying to me one night that I was the only doctor in the night they could call and they’d get sense out of straight away.

Do you find you get a restless sleep?

Perhaps to some degree now, but only recently. Most of my professional life I’ve spent in somewhat

27:00 similar conditions where I have to wake up in the middle of the night and do without sleep. Work at night and then work the next day. I’ve delivered babies many times in the middle of the night and then back to a normal day’s work the next day. It’s a carry on in a sense.

Was the landscape at Finschhafen different to Lae?

Yes,

27:30 Lae, where we were anyway, was flat. I lived at Lae for a year later. You could see the mountains but they were a fair way away. At Finschhafen the mountains come down fairly close down to the sea. There was a place called Sattleberg there which was one of the battlefields. We went up there. We hitchhiked rides with jeeps and things like that. It was

28:00 within a mile of the sea and the mountains are 3,000 feet. At Finschhafen there’s a bay called Langemak Bay [?], which is quite long and narrow, more like a fjord than most harbour are. There’s very good harbours in New Guinea in some places because they’re volcanic. A lot of them are

28:30 actually volcanic craters. Port Moresby and Rabaul for example are both very deep and very good harbours. Haven’t got an in Australia like them.

Did you ever worry about crocs and sharks and things like that in the bay?

No. Crocs were new to me, but sharks weren't.

29:00 Had too much else to think about. We knew they were much less likely to kill us than the Japs were.

What was the worst thing about fighting in those conditions?

The water and the mud. I remember a bomber coming over at one stage. I took a dive into my slit trench like I used to in the Western Desert and landed in water and mud. Had my

29:30 pay book in my pocket. It ruined it forever more.

Worse than sand?

In a sense yes. You can brush the sand off, the mud sticks.

Were there protective pouches you could stick your pay books and that in?

We had the pockets on our webbing.

30:00 Mine might have been in my pocket on my shirt I think at the time. We had pockets in the webbing, reasonably waterproof canvas. […]

How long did you spend at Finschhafen?

There for several months. We got there in October

30:30 and didn't leave there I don't think until April.

You missed most the fighting?

No, the fighting lasted 2 or 3 months. I'm not sure. It was fairly tight because we needed reinforcements and MacArthur wouldn't send them to us. He reckoned where the Americans were was more important than where the Australians were. So it was fairly dicky for a while in Finschhafen.

31:00 It ended and the Japs went on their way and we stayed there until they got ready to bring us home. When we went back down to the beach where we landed off the bare beach in these little landing craft tanks. There was a bloody great wooden wharf the Yanks' CB, Construction Battalion had put up in the meantime. We just walked onto this and went straight onto a Liberty ship.

Did it amaze

31:30 **you that something like that had been built so quickly?**

Impressed us a bit. They certainly had their good years for building things.

Did you see other Americans there?

No. There were no Americans at Finschhafen as such. They was only the crew. It was entirely an Australian show.

The vehicles that were there, were they all American?

We had jeeps. That's all I remember seeing was jeeps.

32:00 The jeeps were all American at that time.

Can you remember incidents of having to fire your machinegun?

No. We just got set up waiting for the Japs who didn't come to where we were. Don't know whether that's a good thing or a bad thing. We thought it was a bad thing at the time. It might have been a good thing.

32:30 **Frustrating?**

Oh yes, because your gun always has to be in constant readiness. Had to do pickett every night. Always had to be someone awake at the gun ready to fire it. That goes on for days and weeks, nobody to shoot at. You get sick of it.

What does that do to the blokes?

They got cranky. We could be used and were not being used. "Why can't they give us a job to do? They're not using the machineguns as much as they should" and all that sort of thing.

33:00 They used infantry mostly. Infantry and artillery. We thought there was a job there for machineguns, or a role for machineguns. The powers that be didn't. We disagreed with them. It's when you really do get frightened when somebody's shooting at you and you can't shoot back. We were still being bombed. That was the worst part about the ship after the bombs

33:30 hit us. They were still flying around and we were defenceless.

Did you have slit trenches in Finschhafen?

Oh yeah.

Were they the same construction as in the desert?

Yes, except they'd fill up with water and mud.

Was that from underground water?

It rained a bit part of the time so water ran into them.

34:00 The danger wasn't as great in New Guinea as it was. The casualties were much lighter in New Guinea than they were in the desert. The whole of my platoon got wiped out in one night in the desert. In the desert in three days we lost three complete battalions. You didn't lose complete battalions in New Guinea. Your forward scout would get shot and you might have a fight and a few people get killed. But they didn't get killed on the same scale as they did in the desert. It was in a sense more

34:30 frightening because you couldn't, you were frightened of ambush all the time. You couldn't see them. The casualties weren't as high.

Did you do patrols or did you set up permanent?

As machineguns we set up a permanent. You can't patrol with a Vickers machinegun. The blokes on patrol carried rifles and Tommy guns. By the time we got to New Guinea they were Sten guns and all that sort of thing.

35:00 In the desert we used Tommies, which were Thompson machineguns. In New Guinea they had lighter versions of the same type of thing. I think they fired 9 millimetre bullets.

Did you get issued hand grenades as well?

Yeah, we all had hand grenades. We all had access to them. You never knew when you might have hand to hand fighting.

35:30 Again the same thing that although you might have a mounted machinegun you wouldn't have a clear field of fire for very long. Particularly at night time, if they were good at it, they could creep up on you and get in close. The same thing could happen in the desert to a degree, but you'd have a better chance of detecting them. Whereas they could creep in among the. That accounted for the fact that our own

36:00 side, two of our blokes got shot by the Papuan infantry battalion. We were wondering, we were a bit pleased we didn't have the Yanks because they were a bit trigger happy.

What was your impression of the Papuans?

We didn't see much of them, but they had a good reputation.

With Japanese sneaking up on your position, were there any tricks you did to

36:30 **guard against that?**

We could put out these booby traps I was talking about with the string and hope they hit the string. Other than that you just had to stay alert because they could send out a small detail. They travelled a fair distance and creep up through the scrub. You couldn't lay down in a complete

37:00 encircling position like you could in the desert.

When you set up your machinegun, would you check in the immediate area in front of you and clear the scrub?

yeah, we would as far as we could. Yes. As far as we could. We couldn't clear very much, but we could clear a bit..

How nerve-wracking was

37:30 **it being on a machinegun in the middle of the night?**

Again, I think you get used to it. You have to learn to depend on one another. After a while you tend to get a bit blase too. "I didn't get killed last night, so I'm pretty safe tonight" sort of thing. I think that's just part of human nature. After a while you tend to forget, that sort of

38:00 protective reaction built into you. The mind learns to cope.

With the actions at both Lae and Finschhafen, were you kept informed of how the battle was progressing?

We had what they called a sit rep, a situation report, which came in, as far as possible that was distributed, with

38:30 what was happening and a, what do you call them? I forget what you call them. You'd have a 6 figure number.

Grid reference?

Grid reference, yeah. That's right. You'd have one of them and what was happening, so you could look at a map and have a fair idea of what was going on. It's not entirely practical to keep everybody informed, but as much as they could they did.

39:00 We'd get fairly regular sit reps and tell us what was happening.

Tape 6

00:38 **What rank were you at this stage?**

I was a private.

Were all the blokes in the gun crew privates?

Yes, in the crew they would be. There would be a section corporal, but he'd have two guns. He'd be in charge with two guns. There'd be two section corporals and then there'd be a platoon sergeant and a platoon

01:00 commander.

The section corporal wouldn't be a gun number?

No. There'd be a range taker for each two guns. Two range takers for a platoon.

Could you use range takers in the jungle?

No, well, you could if you could have cleared enough room, which was one of the problems with the machinegun because it's really designed to fire

01:30 1,000 or 1,500 yards range and you didn't often get that. Probably one of the reasons it didn't get much use was that although C company used it in Finschhafen, the Japs attacked en masse there. Making lots of noise and so forth. They virtually sacrificed themselves and C company got into them and killed them by the hundreds as they came up a bit of a slope. They were

02:00 good for that because they could sustain fire. You could fire up to 50 in a burst if you wanted to and you could keep the gun moving as you fired them. They were made for that. Mostly in the jungle you're firing at pretty close quarters and you needed something more of the nature of a Bren gun or a sub machinegun, which is pretty easy to move from one position to another. With the Vickers, you set it up and then you're pretty well restricted to about

02:30 45 or 50 degrees of front. If they come at you from the side it's very difficult to swing them round to the side whereas a Bren or a machinegun you've just got to swing to the side and you've got it there.

Did you get a chance to move around your own position to see other blokes that you knew?

Sometimes you got down to other sections of company headquarters if there wasn't much doing. I wasn't a range taker in New Guinea, I was only a range taker in the desert.

03:00 I can't remember the range takers in New Guinea, so maybe they did dispense of them. Because we'd be firing at ranges mostly where you could judge the range pretty accurately by eye anyway. There wouldn't be much trajectory either. At that range the bullets go pretty well horizontally. Where as

03:30 firing at long range, and we had mark 8 cartridges in the desert, which fired almost like a Howitzer. But we fired a range of a bout 4,000 yards, almost like a Howitzer. Got in the air and came down like that. They were said to have got Germans out of slit trenches with them because they were coming down at such an angle that they had no protection from them.

04:00 You could fire them from the map too, or from an observation post, by just using triangular geometry. You get an observation post and he could give you a bearing. He could apply that to a triangle and fire from that.

Would you have to fire on a trajectory as well?

You'd set it on the range and the range would determine the angle of the bullet lifter.

04:30 **Did you do much of that sort of firing?**

Did a fair bit in the desert. Sometimes you were firing at relatively long range there.

What ammunition were you using?

Was all the ammunition from Australia?

As far as I know it was. I wouldn't know really.

05:00 What we had in the Middle East might have come from Britain. I wouldn't know really. They used the same sort of thing. They all used the .303 Lee Enfield rifle.

Did you always feel well supplied?

I think so. We didn't have any real complaints. We had enough ammunition. We had good guns.

05:30 **Looking after the guns with all the mud, would moisture cause problems?**

Yeah. It's the same sort of thing. You had to clean them every day. Clean them and re-oil them. You didn't get mud on them unless you dropped them in the mud. The Sten gun was pretty free of troubles. It was designed so that it would

06:00 work when it was muddy. But we didn't have Sten guns. We had rifles and the Vickers. If you look after them well enough, clean them every day. Pull them down and clean them, put them together and re-oil them. They would keep going.

Would you take turns at doing that?

Yes. I guess so. I don't really remember that sort of thing, but it sounds common sense. You wouldn't have them both out of action at once. And you'd

06:30 have a spare lock that you could do up while the other one was in. You could just change them over, which only took seconds. You'd clean the inside of the barrel every day. Check it, make sure they all worked smoothly.

Was there an armourer that could come and fix it?

Not immediately on hand there wasn't, no.

07:00 You'd call for spare parts.

How did you go with mail once you were there?

Mail would be pretty erratic I suppose, but I don't remember the details. We got some mail. We were a bit short of writing paper to write out on. I remember writing letters on the wrapping of the chocolates undoing the wrapping of the chocolate then sticking them down with rubber from the

07:30 rubber trees. Had to be a bit resourceful.

Did you have regular correspondence with anyone?

I wrote to a number of people. I didn't have a girlfriend of my own at that time. I was too young when I went away. I wrote to a number of people. Pen friends and wrote to names that I got from the Comforts Fund parcels and that sort of thing. Wrote to my parents.

Where did you get this chocolate?

We got issued

08:00 with it occasionally. Must have come through from the Comforts Fund I suppose.

What happened after Finschhafen?

We came out of Finschhafen and back and I got malaria. Came back to Brisbane, had leave. Then I got malaria and went into hospital at Ipswich and up and went to a convalescent camp at

08:30 Warwick. I was at Warwick when D-Day happened on the 6th June. Cold as … dreadful, 7 blankets with newspapers in between them and it was still freezing cold. Only time we warmed up was when we were in the hot shower. We had hot showers there. Then back to the battalion.

Did you think it weird to go from New Guinea to somewhere like that?

Yeah. Back to the battalion, which was up on the Tablelands. I managed to claim my young brother into the battalion, but shortly

09:00 after that I got outed to join my father on the farm. I'd been nearly 5 years in it by then. They let me out. My brother stayed in. He went onto Borneo with the battalion.

Did you ask to get out?

I didn't, no. My father approached the authorities to ask them to relieve me, send me out. Mind you, I was quite happy to accept the opportunity.

09:30 I didn't say "No, I want to stay in it". I was pretty sick of the army by then.

Was that one of the hardship cases because he was on a farm and needed you?

Yeah, you can call it that I guess. Manpower. Manpower was very strictly controlled by then. They needed farmers because there was too many people in the army, really. A big part of the Australian army didn't go to war. They were held in Australia.

10:00 They really had far too many people in the army.

Were you back in Australia when you found out about that?

I was camped on the Tablelands again, at a different place. About halfway between Ravenshoe and Mount Garnet. That was in September 1944. I came back from Finschhafen about March 1944.

Were you surprised when you came down with malaria?

10:30 No, I don't know that I was surprised. Maybe a bit. No, we were told we wouldn't get it if we took Atebrin, but that was only relatively true. I took Atebrin every day. You're supposed to take it 6 times a week and I took it 7 times a week. I happened on a stock of Japanese Atebrin, so I had some spares. I took them every day.

11:00 **Can you remember the mosquitoes up there?**

No, mosquitoes weren't all that obvious. But often a mosquitoe doesn't hurt when it bites. Doesn't make a lot of noise. They don't buzz round your ears like the others do.

Can you tell us what malaria is like?

Malaria is a very high fever. You get aches and pains that go with it. I know I had it and I

11:30 went back to the unit. I got sick again and I didn't tell anybody because I didn't want to leave the unit. I stood up from my bed and they found me unconscious on the ground. They didn't let me argue anymore, they just sent me off.

Is it something that sticks with you?

It does for a while. I had it again after the war. I was in the Veterans Affairs hospital at Greenslopes. No it wasn't at Greenslopes.

12:00 It was somewhere not far from where the general hospital, Rosemount. It was at Rosemount and I went into that after I was a civilian. I went into an army hospital unit of some kind and said "I think I've got malaria" and they just put me in. No doubt they took a blood test and proved it, they wouldn't entirely take my word for it. I thought they did. They put me into hospital.

12:30 It dies out after a while. There's four kinds of malaria. Plasmodium Vivax is the one that causes recurrent malaria.

Which one did you have?

I had that, Vivax.

How did the army treat it?

Treated it with quinine. Mixture of quinine, which must be the worst tasting stuff in the world. It tastes like a very dry wine. It just dries your mouth up. You taste it and your whole

13:00 mouth feels dry. Shocking stuff. I had better treatment later when I was in New Guinea as a doctor we had chemiquin and chloroquine. Now it's become chloroquine resistant and I hear it's quite a major problem again.

When did you first find out that your dad had pulled you?

They just came to me and said "You're out of here hubbie". I can't even remember

13:30 who told me "You're out of the army". My brother was away from the unit somewhere. So they gave me leave to go and find him. He was doing a course somewhere as a driver. So I found him and told him I was going.

What did he say?

You took things as they came. The army sprung surprises on you every day. You stop being surprised after a while.

He made an effort to catch up with you and as soon as

14:00 **he caught up with you, you were going back out again.**

That's what happened. We were in the same unit about 3 months I suppose. Then I went and he stayed on.

Did you see much of each other in that 3 months?

Yes, in that time we did. We were in camp together. We spent our spare time together.

Before that he had stayed on the farm?

He went into the Light Horse about 1941. Then he went into the AIF and

14:30 they put him up the tip of Cape York, which is where he was when I called him in. At various units I think, up there. Then I had a driver and I called him in. He joined our unit as a driver then. I'd become a signaller. While we were still at Finschhafen they called for training signallers so I took that on. Then he later became a signaller, but after I'd left.

Where did you do that course?

Started in

15:00 New Guinea. Started training within the unit and then I did a conventional signalling course after we came back to the Tablelands.

By the time you got out you were signalling and off the machinegun?

Yeah. We had a signal platoon, but they used to attach one signaller to each platoon then.

Were you still in the

15:30 **same platoon?**

I was transferred out of the machinegun platoon into the signal platoon, within the same battalion.

Who were you attached to then?

I can't remember. We did manoeuvres. I didn't go into action as a signaller. We did manoeuvres and I was attached to one of the battalions, but I don't remember which now. I think it might have been the 2/15th.

Can you remember the radio set that you were using?

Had what they called 109. We didn't use radios much.

16:00 They were too unreliable. Mostly we used telephones and lines or lights. Light semaphore. In the desert they used to use heliographs. I had a heliograph after the war, but unfortunately I've lost it somewhere. They had heliographs there, which are quite good except that they're slow. You can only send about 6 words a minute.

16:30 So we used this morse on the telephone lines. The transmission wasn't very good, the reproduction wasn't very good for voice, so we used morse a lot of the time on the telephone lines. Then we used morse by light. Even in the daytime. Used semaphore quite a bit.

Was morse easy to learn?

I was fairly good at it. If you practise it, you can learn it pretty well.

17:00 **Would you know how to do it today?**

I did get some tapes some years ago and just practise it up again. I remember most of the letters I think. It's a bit like other things. Once you learn it thoroughly you don't forget it. I wouldn't have any speed now. You've got to write it down as you get it. Once you get behind you

17:30 never catch up. You've got to learn that if you miss a letter you've got to let that letter go and write down the ones you get. If you're trying to recapture the letter you've missed, you miss another dozen.

Once you were going home, were you happy?

Yes, I was glad. I remember going round to the other boys saying "I'm learning to raise my hat."

18:00 We'd all had the army by then. Everybody would have accepted a discharge if you could have got it. I would have got it before much longer anyway because once you'd been in 5 years you could apply for discharge and they'd usually discharge you.

What did you do with all your gear?

I just handed it in. It was all on issue. Except the uniform. The

18:30 grenades, I'd used them when I was on leave from New Guinea the first time. I took them and shot them in the local creek to catch some mullet.

Was someone with you?

My brother was with me.

Before he was in?

He was in Light Horse at that time. He hadn't been away at that time.

He must have thought it a lark?

Yeah. Then I came down.

19:00 I was discharged on the 27th October 44.

That was from Atherton?

Not at Atherton. They sent us down to, I think I was actually in Redbank or somewhere. Somewhere around Brisbane when I was actually discharged. In the meantime my father had bought a piggery at Pomona. So I went and joined him on that.

What did you get on discharge?

19:30 They gave us over £10, an order to buy tools. I think an order to buy civvy clothing. An order that you could take into a shop and buy X pounds worth of clothes or a suit and that sort of stuff. Deferred pay. The deferred pay was 2 shillings a day the entire time I'd been in the service.

Some guys have said the army offered education courses.

20:00 Yes, that was through the repat [repatriation]department. I did a few courses while I was still at Finschhafen. I did one on farming and one on pig raising, correspondence courses, while I was still there. After I got out I went and did a course in beekeeping at Gatton for about 3 months.

20:30 In 1947 they had refresher farming courses at Gatton so I did an 8 week course of that. That rendered me ineligible for assistance to do my medical course because I'd done a course and completed it. So that 8 weeks I did there and completed, rendered me ineligible from repat course. So I had to fund that in other ways.

21:00 **You went straight back to the farm?**

I went up to the farm. Had my leave and went up to the farm at Pomona. Then I went and did this short course in beekeeping. I never did do any beekeeping, but I learned how to do it. Then back to the farm again.

21:30 **When did you decide you wanted to study medicine?**

That's a hard one. Really, I'm not sure. What happened in actual fact was that I got a tractor and I started contracting with the tractor and a rotary hoe and that took me all around the place with my tractor and my rotary hoe. I rejoined the lifesavers and in due course I became the club captain at Noosa. I used to organise dances to raise some money. This is a bit long and boring,

22:00 but a fellow that used to run the dance was a bloke called Bill Shepherd. He used to run the band. He was the leader of a little 3 person band. He'd flown bombers out of England over Germany. His job was selling insurance. So I needed an accident insurance policy because I was self employed and not covered by workers comp. So I went along to him and said "I need an accident policy".

22:30 So he talked about insurance for a while. He said "You seem to understand insurance fairly well. Why don't you come and sell insurance for me in stead of working that tractor?" I just laughed at him because up until then I'd only worked with my hands. I'd never done anything that required any knowledge. He came along one day and said "If you come out with me on Saturday afternoon and take me around to the farmers you know, I'll give you half the commission I get." So I said "Right, that'll do." So

23:00 on Saturday afternoon we went out. I got £5 for my share of the afternoon's commission. £5 was about the average weekly wage at that time. So it was a substantial amount of money. I went out again with him the following Saturday afternoon and I got £9 for my share. So that made me thing. So I sat down and thought "With the down time with the tractor, with weather and breakdowns, I can sell insurance and I can pretend to be

23:30 fulltime and sell insurance." So I did that. So Bill Shepherd recommended me to the next fellow up the tree. I can remember when he came round to employ me. I was on my tractor and I had nothing on except a pair of shorts. No boots nothing. So I climbed down off my tractor and Bill said "This is Maurie Cave this is who I want to be my insurance agent." So he said "All right, OK." So then I was an insurance agent. I went round all the farmers who, even

24:00 if I didn't know them personally, I looked like a farmer so I could get through the gate, whereas the city slickers that were selling insurance were identifiable by these farmers who aren't as stupid as they look. Miles away and they never got to talk to them. I got in there and I started making money hand over fist selling this insurance. I said to myself "I'll do my secondary education now." So I did that as I said earlier. I

24:30 started off with a correspondence course and midway 1950 I moved out to Brisbane. My mother bought

a flat down there and I moved into that. Got a couple of personal tutors and did the prac work at the tech [technical] college, which was down near the gardens at that time and just nominated for the seniors. Anybody could nominate for it, so I nominated for it and I passed it. So I was eligible to go to the

25:00 university without ever having gone to high school.

Did that surprise people?

Lots of people. I remember the chemist that my wife, I was married at that time, my first marriage. I remember the chemist said to my wife "He's stupid, he'll never be a doctor." She was greatly offended by that of course. Other people, 10 years after I got through, one person said "What are you doing

25:30 now?" I said "I'm a doctor." He said "Did you get through?" They never believed it. I believed it. I wouldn't have done it. I'm losing the thread a little bit.

You don't know what moment in your life when

No, I don't remember the moment. There was a doctor in Cooroy who became my idol. He was a fellow called Toyne, who I think is the father of the Philip Toyne that you hear about sometimes who was a conservationist.

26:00 I was 28. I said to him "Am I too old to be a doctor?" He said "No, you're not too old. You have a go." So I did. He went and did orthopaedics later and became the Olympic games official doctor after he left Cooroy. I did it and I paid my way through the first year on what I'd saved from selling the insurance and the bit of money I was getting from the piggery because I

26:30 had a share in that. I remember the first year I got what they call a Commonwealth Scholarship, which is something like Aus Study is now, except that you had to win the race to get it. It was competitive. So I got that. When I got into fifth year, they introduced a New Guinea cadetship. They wanted doctors for New Guinea. So again, you could apply to it and they would pay your way through and pay you a wage in return for bonding to go to New Guinea. So I took that on.

27:00 So I bonded myself for 4 years and I got right through the course. I didn't ever have to do a post, 112 started and there were 12 got through without ever having to do a supplementary exam. I was one of them. So the fact that I didn't go to high school didn't turn out to be a handicap.

Had your war experience contributing to your deciding to go back to New Guinea?

Well, I think it was mainly for the money at that stage. They offered this cadetship and I could do with the money, so I

27:30 accepted it. I don't know. Maybe so. I know I was looking forward to going there. At the end of my fifth year medicine I went to Bougainville for 3 months as still a student. I worked there as a medical assistant for those 3 months and that was very interesting. Tremendous amount of experience to be had, not only medical experience, but it's a wonderful country, New Guinea is. So then I graduated and did

28:00 my year in the Bose hospital here as a resident and then went up to New Guinea. In fact I did 6 years. I did 3 terms of 2 years, or 3 terms of 21 months. We used to do 21 months and get 3 months' leave. So I did those three terms and then I came back to Australia.

Could you see changes in New Guinea post war?

All we saw during the war was real primitive jungle. Hardly saw any natives. All we saw was scrub really.

28:30 And Lae, which had been flattened to the ground near enough. So it was a good place to be in when I was there. It wouldn't be now.

Did you take your wife with you?

Yeah. In fact our first child, no - a child was born up there. She didn't like it very much. She liked Port Moresby. That was a different wife. I've been married twice. She liked Port Moresby, but she didn't

29:00 like New Guinea other than that. It's much more interesting for men than it is for women. Men get out and about and see what's happening an women stayed home. Even though a lot of the women had jobs, they still were stuck in the one place whereas the men got to travel around the place, seeing things.

How did your experience in the army affect the way you were as a doctor?

I'd seen a fair bit of life and you're a better doctor

29:30 if you've done something else before you started. You understand the people much better. In the same way as an army officer, my son was in the ranks for 4 years before he got his commission, so he'd have made a better officer than the fellows who went straight from school. I had a better chance of being an understanding doctor when I had a fairly tough bringing up and then even after the war, struggling fairly hard, so I

30:00 can understand other people's situation probably better than those who have gone straight into medicine from school. Particularly when they're fairly well heeled or their parents are well heeled and they go to a private school, have things pretty easy.

Before the war, did you have plans of what you wanted to do with your life?

Didn't

30:30 think that far ahead. I was only 17 when the war broke out. I was working in the sawmill and I was living in the barracks. In the barracks I had a room which wouldn't have been as big as this much of this room. On it I had a little wooden bed, and I filled three corn bags up with sawdust to make the mattress and I cooked outside on an open fire in a little shed with a chain hanging

31:00 down and I had jam tins made into billy cans. I used little S hooks from the jam tins that I used to hook on different links of the chain to get the right amount of heat. I got paid once a month. I booked my food at the local grocer's. I remember the grocer saying to me "Well, Morris. Our procedure is such,

31:30 the system is this; when you get your check, you take it to the bank across there, then you come over here and pay my bill." So I did that.

When you look back on your war service, do you look at it in two different chapters? Like the Middle East is a separate chapter to New Guinea?

I look at it more in one bit I think, with a bit of variety. I remember

32:00 one of our fellows, George Warren, he said "I'm not worried about going to New Guinea and fighting the Japs. The Japs can't frighten me any more than the Germans did."

What did you think of the Japanese enemy?

We weren't all that terribly impressed by them.

32:30 Things were going our way a bit by the time we got back. I think the fellows who had to fight them in 1942, the Kokoda Trail people and the people that worked around Buna and Gona, I think they had it tougher, because at that time the Jap was winning. They had to be stopped and turned. We were in the same situation with the Germans. They were on the winning side and we had to turn them and push them back. While we were doing that, our counterparts

33:00 here were doing much the same with the Japanese. By the time we got here we knew they could be beaten. So we "Right-o, we'll beat em." We had great confidence in ourselves. We'd been fighting as a division for a couple of years and we knew that we were good. We were good and we knew we were good. We were thoroughly trained and we knew that if anybody could do it,

33:30 we could do it. It never occurred to us that we couldn't beat the Japs.

Where were you when you heard about Darwin being bombed?

I don't remember hearing. I don't think we heard about Darwin. I think Darwin was kept very quiet. I don't think it was announced at all, as far as I know. I don't think I learned about Darwin being bombed until after he war actually. We knew about Singapore. You couldn't hide Singapore,

34:00 I don't think anybody was told about Darwin.

Did it shock you when you found out?

I was used to, as I said, truth is the first casualty. I was used to that by then.

What about Sydney Harbour?

I don't think I even heard about that, because that was pretty small time by our standards. They sunk a ferry.

Did the mentality of the war change,

34:30 **suddenly you were fighting the Japanese on our doorstep?**

I don't think it did as far as we were concerned because we knew that if the Germans got down through Cairo and took that, the war was pretty well over and we were on the wrong side. I don't think we were really any more concerned about the Japs than we were about the Germans. That's our particular unit I mean. Country as a whole

35:00 was of course, but I don't think we as 9th division soldiers were. Our attitude was, alright, we fought the Germans over here, we'll go over there and fight the Japs if that's what they want us to do. I think we regarded it all as part of the same conflict. Just different battlefields in the same conflict, which is what it was, really.

What about hearing about the atom bomb?

I was out of the army

35:30 by then. We thought “Bloody good thing, it’s all over.” We didn’t know at that time how badly the Japanese POWs [prisoners of war] had been treated. Would have been even more relieved if we’d known about that. At that time we didn’t know about radiation like we do now. It was just a big bomb as far as we were concerned. Big bomb that was capable of

36:00 wiping out a whole city in stead of part of a city. When it’s all said and done, the bombing by the Allies in Germany did just as much damage as they did in Hiroshima. Just as much blast damage, it just took more aeroplanes and more bombs to do it. Instead of sending one aeroplane with one very big bomb, they’d sent 1,000 planes over with 1,000 smaller bombs. Those 1,000 together would do

36:30 just as much damage as the atom bomb did. So we weren’t all that startled. Technology had been advancing pretty quickly. One of the things that really impressed us was when the anti-aircraft guns learned to fire without searchlights, without having to see the aeroplane. Particularly in Matruh, where we were being bombed all the time and

37:00 there was no ground fighting, we used to get outside and watch the anti-aircraft, watch the searchlights and watch the anti-aircraft firing. We saw a plane brought down by a searchlight one night actually, at Tassia [?]. He must have turned the wrong way at the wrong time and the searchlight got in his cabin and blinded him and down he went. They had to see the plane to shoot at it, whereas once they got directly radar control of the guns, they didn’t have to see it. The radar did the

37:30 job for them. So we were pretty impressed by that. We saw that happening at Finschhafen. When the Finschhafen battle was over, we were further up the coast at a place called Gazika [?], which is 10-15 miles up the coast. We could see what was going on at Finschhafen when they came over us. The Japs used to, at that time, bomb Finschhafen, because that’s where the main base was after Finschhafen was taken. We’d see them firing away with no searchlights. Pretty

38:00 impressed by that.

Do you know where you were when you heard the Germans had surrendered?

That was May 1945. I think that was about the time I started at the beekeeping course at Gatton. But I can’t remember actually hearing the announcement. We knew the war was as good as over

38:30 then, that it was only a matter of time. The Allies could concentrate their entire might against Japan. They were rapidly advancing on Japan. They’d have won the war in another three months or so, even if they hadn't dropped the atom bomb on them.

Tape 7

00:41 **Your brother went on to the Borneo campaign?**

Yeah.

Did he tell you what he did there?

No. He went on after that to the occupation forces in Japan, but he soon got sick of that and he came home then.

Did he have health problems from being in

01:00 **the occupational forces?**

I don’t think so. He’s been pretty healthy since. Football did him more harm than his army service. He played against the poms for a fair while and got knocked about a bit.

Did you ever have any health related problems from your army service?

Yeah, I got the amoebic dysentery. Still got a bit of a problem related to that. I’ve got

01:30 deafness. I think everybody that was really in the war would be deaf from it, so they accepted that as a war caused disability. I got my wound accepted as a war caused disability, obviously. That’s pretty straight forward. It doesn’t really bother me. I think probably I would have been better without it, because it knocked me about pretty substantially at the time.

02:00 I think I made a full recovery from that. Then malaria for 2 or 3 years after the war. It didn’t recur. When I went back to New Guinea to work, by that time we had better medication, so I didn’t get malaria in the time I was there. Nor did any of the kids. Peter was born in New Guinea, the fella that is in the army. He was born at Goroka.

Does he have New Guinea citizenship?

No. We nominated

02:30 him as an Australian after he was born. When independence came we could nominate to be nationals as they call them, if we wanted to, but obviously we didn't. He'd been back to New Guinea once since. When they had some trouble in Bougainville, they've had a lot of trouble in Bougainville, but something was happening in the army there and they sent him up to sort it out. By the time

03:00 he got there they'd sorted themselves out, so I think he spent 4 hours in Bougainville and back to Australia again. That's the only time he's been back to New Guinea since we left there when he was 5 years old. So he is a New Guinean and doesn't know New Guinea.

When you went back, in what way did you look up your past form, having fought there?

I hadn't been back to Finschhafen, but I was in Lae. I had 2 sessions in Lae. I was acting surgeon there for

03:30 some time. About a year altogether in two lots. I went and had a look at Malahang, which is where the crossing of the Busu was and we had a native hospital there. Just walked around a bit and I pretty soon forgot about it and went about my business.

Did you get anything out of going back there?

In relation to the war? Probably a bit. I went to an Anzac Day

04:00 service there one day when Lord De Lisle was governor general. He was a VC. So he came round and spoke to us. But, oh, probably very little. I went to the war cemeteries. I lived fairly close to the war cemetery in Lae. People I knew were buried there including Billy Beach, Billy Boo his name was. Including him and the fellows who were killed

04:30 by the torpedo that went under our ship and hit the next one. They were mostly commandoes. Most of those blokes were buried at Port Moresby, so I went to the war cemetery there. Going to have a look. There's Hughes who was a CSM [Company Sergeant Major] that was killed as I spoke of at the other side of Finschhafen. He's buried there too. So I went and saw their graves. Took photos of the cemetery and so forth. There was a lot of emotion involved in that.

I don't know if you did

05:00 **tell us about the CSM being killed.**

After the Finschhafen war was over, it was round about Christmas time. We were camped north at a place called Gazika [?], north of Finschhafen. Most of the bombing went on at Finschhafen, but this bloke copped a sporadic bomb up there. There were half a dozen of us camped about 300 or 400 metres from the

05:30 company headquarters. They hit the company headquarters and they killed the CSM. So they rang us through on the ground line and told us about it.

The war cemeteries you visited, how were they looked after?

Very well. The war graves commission that looks after war cemeteries. The Australians are buried all over the world. The Americans take them back and bury them in America. Australians are buried all over the world. In fact, I was going to go and have a look at the Gaza

06:00 war cemetery on Anzac Day 1941, but they put us on the train and shot us up the desert so I didn't get to that. There's a war graves commission that looks after the graves all over the world. They're looked after pretty well. Nice and neat.

After the war, did you march on Anzac Day?

Occasionally I've been to them. I don't go to a lot of them. I tend to go to the smaller ones.

06:30 I went to one at Caves one year for example, which is about 20 miles north of here. A little town. I went to one in, I've been to a few in Rocky, but I went to one and they had a fellow leading the 9th division and he was a full as a goog, he staggered off about halfway through the march. That put me off. I don't think it's an occasion for that sort of behaviour. I went to the dawn service down here in the gardens this year.

07:00 They had a service, but they didn't have a loud speaker and a microphone, so you couldn't hear what was on, what was happening, so it really was a waste of time.

What do you think about the celebration of Anzac Day?

I suppose there's two ways of thinking of that. Anzac Day is very good if it's a celebration of all the wars that the Australians have fought in, which is a good thing. But

07:30 what tends to happen is that the public and the politicians and everybody, on a particular campaign like Anzac or Tobruk, or any other, they make monuments to those campaigns and really it's unfair to all the other people. People only went where they were sent. There were plenty killed in other places. Plenty of heroic deeds done in other places, but

08:00 the press and the public and the politicians all tend to concentrate on Tobruk and Gallipoli. Gallipoli was a defeat and Tobruk was a holding operation. Alamein was a major victory, but it's virtually never mentioned now. That was the turning of the war. Churchill said before Alamein "Never a victory before Alamein, never a defeat",

08:30 which is pretty true. Yet it's hardly mentioned as a turning point. Milne Bay was the turning point in the Pacific. That's where we had our first win over the Japs. Alamein was the turning point of the war against the Germans, but neither of them gets much publicity. I don't know that they ought to get more publicity than any of the others either for the reasons I just said.

You went through Milne Bay on your way to Lae?

Yeah,

09:00 we were at Milne Bay for a couple of weeks. Sort of regrouping, getting ready to get on the ship.

Did you see anything there?

Not really. Saw more coming back, we came back on the Liberty ship. We anchored in Milne Bay overnight and it was just full of ships by then. Ships everywhere. We went up to there in the Liberty ship. I can't remember what it was like when we got off the ship and straight into camp.

09:30 **What about children marching on Anzac Day?**

I think it's a good thing in that it keeps the younger generation aware that Australians have fought to defend the country and will continue. At the moment all we're doing is fighting an unprovoked war in Iraq, which I'm opposed to. But obviously there have been times and there will be times

10:00 when we've had to defend our country either here or overseas, so we won't be attacked. I think that the young generation must have realised that we need an army. Unless we have an army we're defenceless. Nations always attack the weak one. They don't attack the strong ones.

Have you talked about your experiences to your own son?

Not to any great

10:30 degree, no. A little bit. I wrote down what happened the night I was wounded. I put that in and sent it to him. I don't see much of him. He's been in the army for 24 years and he's never been stationed in Rockhampton that time. He was in the army for 24 years. Now he's a civvy working for the army. Building bridges to be used in combat for them. So he's working in the army.

Did he ever ask you about things?

He did

11:00 ask a little bit. I lent him the book "Muzzle Blast". He's interested. He obtained the 5th Light Horse book from the library and read it and lent it to me while he had it. He reads these sorts of things. He reads novels, not novels, but books which were written about the Second War. He sends me books about it. So he's interested in military things. But I haven't spoken to him in any

11:30 degree about my own experiences.

Did he seek your approval when he joined the army? Did you encourage him?

I don't think either. He said he wanted to be in the services, so he went and joined up. Before that he was working on the bridges and the railway over west here at Alpha. That was his last job before he joined the army. He did a degree while he was in the army, so he profited out of the army.

12:00 Eventually got his commission and, so he had a good army service. When he got out of the army he had a pick of three good civilian jobs on the strength of his army training and service and successes. So it's been a good thing for him.

Tell us about the 50th year celebrations.

The Trek Back?

12:30 Trek Back was well organised. It was organised by Sid Williams in conjunction with all the local authorities. When we went up there they had, and everybody cooperated well. It's 10 years ago now. They had various outings. They had buses taking us up to the Tablelands, back to the old camping grounds, which you can't recognise now, because there are trees 100 feet high where the camp used to be. One of the things

13:00 I did mention was they took us up to Mareeba and the local chairman spoke to us and they flew this crowd up from Sydney and they all jumped out of the aeroplane and we mixed with them later. Old soldiers talking to young soldiers and so on. They trained up some of the army in Cairns. That was quite good. They trained them to use the old Enfield rifles and do the

13:30 drill as we knew it. So they played "God Save the King", which has long ceased to be our national

anthem and they did a march, which was the same drill that we used, except for one thing. When we did a turn or stood to attention we brought our legs together with our knees straight. Whereas they did what they'd been taught to do, which was this sort of thing, which you see now. It was the only thing they did differently from what we

14:00 did. So somebody must have missed that one. Other than that it was very good. They sloped arms and presented arms exactly as we used to, march. Wore the same uniforms, that was good. That was one of the things they had organised. A number of very good things organised as well. Unfortunately they didn't do it again for the 60th. But by that time Sid Williams was dead and I suppose nobody else had enough

14:30 energy to take it up. They made a video called "Trek Back", which we all got, which might be worth your while having a look at if you want to. I'll lend it to you.

Have you ever thought you might like to go back to the Middle East?

Yes, they have had revisits there,

15:00 but I've never sort of had the initiative to do it. It'd be very different now. The fellow who was chosen to go to the 60th anniversary of Alamein wrote a little article about it when he came back. He said "All the way up to Alamein it's high rise apartments all along the ocean, just like the Gold Coast." When we were there, there was a one lane bitumen strip went up the coast.

15:30 He said "It's another Gold Cost now." Yes, wouldn't mind going back to Palestine. Not a good place to go to now, of course. Where the Australian camps used to be is now the Gaza strip, which has seen a daily bloodshed. I take an interest in it all the time and I've read the stories

16:00 of the war overt here, all their different wars. Read the autobiography of the fellow with the black patch in his eye. Forgotten his name for the moment. His name will come to me shortly. He lost an eye. Interesting enough, this was the fellow that became the minister for defence for Israel. He was their general in the Six Day War. He lost his eye

16:30 fighting with the Australians in the attack on Syria. When the war broke out he was a prisoner in a British prison. He'd been put in there for leading the insurrections against the British. They let him out and he joined their army and helped them in Syria. So I've read all that. I take an interest in Israeli affairs.

Did you find that postwar you

17:00 **felt you needed to read histories about what you'd been through with the 9th divvy?**

Yes. I read the official histories, and I've read other storied about it written by other people about mostly the 9th division I suppose. One volume of the official history is called "Tobruk and Alamein". I've read that and there's other volumes about the Pacific

17:30 war, I've read them. I've read the medical histories of the war too, which are very interesting. What they had to do and how little they had to do it with what they had to do.

Did you, once you had studied medicine, think of rejoining the army as a doctor?

I didn't, but I should have. When I came back from New Guinea I could have joined up here as an officer, but no. Once I got out it took me a long time to reconcile

18:00 myself with the army after I got out. It was really only when my son was in it and started to succeed that I started to like the army again. Army life I liked in the first place, but I got sick of the authoritarianism of it. I was thoroughly glad to get out of it and didn't want to go back into it at any time. I've been a bit sorry since that when I came back from New Guinea I didn't join up here, join the local unit here.

18:30 **What about when Korea started?**

When Korea started was about the same time as I started medicine. So I was a bit too busy with my own affairs to want to join up again. Some of the fellows I knew during the Second War went to Korea. You wonder why anyone would saddle up for a second go, but they did. We had fellows with us who had been in the First War too. We even had one bloke that had been in the Boer War.

19:00 Hew as 62 when they finally caught up with him and sent him home.

What was he doing?

He joined up as a private. He served with us until, I think he went through Matruh. I think it was Alamein they finally caught up with him and said "You're too old, go home." By that time they said he was 62. He was in his third war.

Were there blokes there that were way too young?

19:30 I was the youngest in my company for 2 years. You had to be 20 to join the army at that time and I

joined when I was 18 by saying I was 21. I was 2 years in my company before they brought in a younger fellow and he was only 2 months younger than me.

Can you remember celebrating birthdays?

I remember where I was when I had my birthdays, didn't celebrate them. Had my 19th in Mersa Matruh and my 20th in Beirut and my 21st on the Atherton

20:00 Tablelands.

You must have had a Lady Blamey for your 21st did you?

I expect so. I remember one bloke coming and saying "Have they told you the facts of life yet Maurie?"

You would have been well versed by then wouldn't you?

Yeah, that's right.

The Lady Blameys on the Tablelands, was it all beer or was there jungle juice being brewed up there?

A little bit was in New Guinea where the

20:30 wasn't any beer, but not in the Tablelands because beer was available. They'd never make jungle juice if there was beer available. There was reasonable amounts of beer available in the canteen there. The Lady Blameys were just made into suitable drinking containers.

What can you tell us about the jungle juice?

Really can't tell anything. I didn't sample it myself. They used to make it in coconut shells out of coconut milk. They put raisins

21:00 and stuff like that in it to ferment. They're still doing it in the prisons. They nail somebody now and then making a bit in the prisons. I went down to the detention unit, which is a punishment unit sort of thing in the prison one day. There was a bloke on the bed there absolutely blind drunk. He'd never been out of the detention unit, which was a cell about this big.

21:30 Somehow he'd managed to smuggle it all in and was able to make it.

Did you keep in contact with a lot of your mates?

To a degree. There's only 1 or 2 around here. Most of them are around Brisbane. We have a newsletter. We've got an association and they send us a newsletter. My brother's much more in contact with them, because he lives at Thornton and he goes down to the reunions and the meetings and so forth. I've been to a couple of reunions, but

22:00 not many. Fairly long way to go from here. I'm usually busy with something else. So I haven't kept in contact with them. Most of the fellows who were really good mates with me were lost the night that I was wounded. So I didn't really form much in the way of firm attachments after that.

You got the chance when your son was in the army to go up to Shoalwater Bay to have a look. How was it

22:30 **to go back and be a spectator to the army?**

It was interesting and I thought how little they'd changed. I slept in the APC [Armoured Personnel Carrier] overnight and I lined up for my breakfast with the rest of them in the morning. The brigadier came round to inspect and he saw my ribbons, I was wearing Coast Guard uniform at the time. He saw my ribbons and beckoned me down out of the crowd and that impressed all the officers of course.

23:00 They thought I must be a high ranking officer too. It was interesting. That was just before the lad went down to do his officer training course. He was a crew commander of the APC. He was a lance corporal. He was a higher rank than I ever reached.

What were the similarities you saw between the army now and then?

The type of men, I think. The type of men and their behaviour and the general

23:30 attitude. Soldiers are soldiers. Australian soldiers anyway, I don't know about others. They weren't much different. We sat up at night and talked to them. They were very interested to talk to me because I was a fellow that had been there and they hadn't at that time.

Did you ever see any war

24:00 **correspondents? Journalists or anything?**

No, Frank Hurley took a picture of us at one stage. I was a private and they didn't approach us much. Frank Hurley was a very well known photographer. He took the pictures of Shackleton's expeditions. He was on, you remember the, you know that the Endurance was crushed in the ice south of South

America? Frank Hurley was part of the crew and he too the pictures of that ship.

24:30 Then he was a war photographer during the First War and he was still a war photographer when the Second War broke out. So he took a picture of us at Beersheba, which was where the well known cavalry charge occurred. I didn't see him and I don't think I've ever seen a picture of it. That was as close as I got to the war correspondents. There was only a few war correspondents and an awful lot of soldiers and an awful lot of action, so they couldn't cover them all. They tried

25:00 to cover, I guess, what was representative.

In Beersheba, the blokes that were in the charge scratched their names in the wall, did you see that?

I didn't see that, but the trenches were still there. The trenches that the Turks were defending were still there when I was there. That was only about 20 years after it happened, and that's 60 years ago. So maybe they're not there now. They might have ploughed them up by this.

You were well aware at the time of the military

25:30 **history of that?**

Yeah, I knew the story.

In Jerusalem and places like that, were there any signs of Australians from the First World war having gone through there?

No, not that I could see, no.

You had a look at some of the religious places?

Yes, we went into the well known ones, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and, I don't remember them terribly well. We went

26:00 along the Wailing Wall I remember well enough. That was the wall of King Solomon's temple. The Jews used to go there and put their little prayers in the cracks in the stone and beat their head against the wall and so forth. That was all going on.

Had you had a religious upbringing?

I went to Sunday school as most kids do, but not particularly religious no, not terribly. Some of the other boys were much more interested in the religious

26:30 things in Jerusalem than I was. I went there and had a look around and mostly I wasn't.

Did any of the blokes have cameras?

Yes. I've got a photograph out there of a group of us that I can show you presently when we're finished. Of me in a group. That was given to me by a fellow who became a prisoner of war. I met him again for the first time for 50 odd years at one of our reunions. He had an album there

27:00 of photographs that were taken. That album survived the war because it must have been in his mess kit when he was captured and it would have been sent back to Australia to his relatives. So he had pictures. One of them included me and a little group, which I said I'll show you shortly.

The blokes that were captured, did you feel, at the end of the war, you needed to find out

27:30 **what happened to them?**

Yes. I met a couple of them in a pub in Brisbane. I must have been out of the army because these fellows had got back. One of them escaped from Italy and got into Switzerland. He was there, and the fellow who was our platoon commander the night we were wiped out was there also. They're both dead now.

28:00 I was talking to them there about what happened. One of the stories was that when they were handed over by the Germans to the Italians and they crossed the Mediterranean and went into a campo there, I think he went into hospital one of these fellows and he was in hospital. There were enormous numbers of fleas. So he was killing these fleas with his thumbnail and

28:30 an Italian officer came round and he pointed all this out to him. As an illustration of the fleas and how bad the conditions were. He got roused [shouted] at because of all the blood stains he'd put on the sheets by killing the fleas. He told me about that. That was Hughie Quinn. He was a heavy smoker and he died in due course of lung cancer after he survived the war.

There must have been blokes that

29:00 **you had no idea what happened to them.**

I didn't know what happened to any of the POWs. Most of them survived the war. One fellow escaped. One bloke nearly escaped and he got caught trying to cross the frontline in Italy back to the British. A bit too impatient and tried to cross in the daylight and got re-caught. During the war we didn't know

what had

29:30 happened to them?

Was that hard?

Yeah. We had to accept the fact they were now POWs. We didn't even know of course, who was a POW and who was dead. We didn't know about the two that were killed crossing the Mediterranean, I don't think, until after the war. That sort of information didn't get you.

How hard is it for soldiers when you haven't got a chance to grieve

30:00 **your fallen mates?**

It's hard, but it's the sort of thing you accept because it's happening all the time. We didn't have counsellors. We counselled one another I suppose. We accepted it, because that was the life we were in. We expected our mates to be killed even if we didn't expect to be killed ourselves. The word would come through "So and so has been killed" and that was it. That happened right up until the end of the war.

30:30 Including the fellows that were killed by our own side. That was the sort of thing that used to upset us more than killed by the enemy. You expect to be killed by the enemy. But you hope your own side doesn't kill you. Friendly fire, since the Americans have been doing it, has become a well known word, figure of speech. It wasn't then.

Even doing the river crossing

31:00 **and blokes were drowning, that must be hard to come to grips with.**

That's right. Oh well, one of the hazards I guess.

As a soldier and doctor, you must have a unique perspective on PTSD [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder].

Yes, it's only a recent term. Probably we all suffered from it to a degree. It's only been a recently accepted syndrome

31:30 and it's been accepted in relation to the Vietnam fellows rather than obviously it also applies to everybody from every war. But it's only been accepted since the Vietnam fellows. In their case it was accentuated by the dreadful reception they got when they came back from Vietnam. That I'm sure is why there's so many more of the Vietnamese fellows with mental troubles than there are of the Second

32:00 World War ones. Because we came back to a rapturous welcome as the defenders of the nation. That wasn't so in the Vietnam. They weren't seen by the Australian public in general as being the defenders of Australia. Whereas the Second World war they very much were so, particularly after Japan came into the war and a few people got properly frightened. My father hopped in and bought some land in Thornton when the

32:30 big panic was on. He could buy land cheaply. He bought a couple of houses and an acre and a half of land in the middle of Gympie Terrace. I think he paid £1,100 for the lot.

World War 1 fellows suffered shellshock. Is that a different thing to PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder]?

I don't think so. I think they're the same thing. They've just got a different name.

33:00 We had it in the Second World war. We called it "Bomb happy". I can remember, when I was in the army hospital there were people there who were completely mad, who had gone over there as normal people. So it was the same thing, just got different names. It was "Shellshock" in the First War, "Bomb happy" in the Second War and "Post traumatic" what do they call it? "Post traumatic stress

stress disorder.

syndrome" after

33:30 the Vietnam one. But it's the same thing.

When the Korean War started and Vietnam, did that make you feel what you'd done had been negated in any way?

I don't think so. I think people from the First War were more subject to that. The First War was billed as the war to end wars.

34:00 They didn't end wars. We weren't so disillusioned. We realised that the First War hadn't ended wars and the Second War wasn't going to end wars either. The Iraq war's not going to end wars either. We're rapidly finding that out. We didn't expect there never to be another conflict I don't think. We knew from what had happened after the First War. In fact I remember seeing, in between the wars,

34:30 a placard that one fellow had been given by a grateful town when he came back. "Joe Blow who heroically fought in the war to end wars" and here it was up on the wall. It was pretty obvious to us that

the war wasn't going to end wars. It was just one of many.

You said you reckon everybody suffered some form of PTSD.

I think so, yeah. I don't think anybody could

35:00 go and go into action and come back entirely unaffected. I don't think that's, I think everybody gets a bit emotional and a bit nervous when the events are relived, or even when you see them on the. Probably read about them was a less emotional reaction than when you can see them on the television or on the pictures. There were some pretty

35:30 realistic pictures taken during the war. Movie pictures. Usually of ships being attacked by planes and that sort of thing. There was pictures taken in the First War too, in the trenches, taken of guns and people going in the trenches. I don't think anybody who's been there can be entirely unaffected by that. I think everybody has, it's a matter of degree.

In what way do you feel maybe you had

36:00 **some effects?**

I get a bit excited when I see those sorts of things. More excited than I should be, That's gradually fading, but in the first few years after the war a loud noise of a car backfiring would make you jump out of bed. It wouldn't nowadays. I'd lie still and wait to see what it was. It hasn't' affected my life to any great

36:30 degree, because I've been able to live in spite of it, I haven't let it affect my life. Yes, I think everybody's got to be affected. You can't go through a war and come back the same person you were when you went into it.

Can you watch films about the war?

I can do, but I usually don't because I don't think they're good enough. I seldom watch films about anything, because

37:00 when I see a film that's been made from a book, it's such a poor imitation of the book that it's not worth seeing, usually, in my opinion. I just don't trouble to bother. I'd sooner get the book and read it. Get the detail. There have been one or two good ones made. They made a good one of the damn busters and so on. But in the main I don't think they're good enough. They're made too superficial.

Have you seen any films that

37:30 **in anyway represent what you did during the war?**

No. The Americans weren't at Alamein so we haven't had any pictures made of it. The Americans made most the war pictures. Naturally they made them about Americans. They haven't made any about, yeah.

38:00 **Anything else you want to say that you haven't said yet?**

Not that I can think of.

I saw a film called "El Alamein". It's an Italian film.

It was a what film?

Italian. About the Italians.

That'd be interesting.

It was good because you see another perspective of it. It would be pretty

38:30 **close to be on video by now.**

How did you come to see it?

There was an Italian film festival in Brisbane.

You're more oriented, this is your profession isn't it? It's your living, your bread and butter.

INTERVIEW ENDS