Australians at War Film Archive

Lawrence Lane (Logger) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:32 **Could you begin by giving us an overview of your life?**

I was born in Marrickville, my father was a

01:00 carpenter. When he and my mother married, we lived in Leichhardt straight after the time I was born. And I have an elder brother, who's 88 now, and at present he's in the hospital having treatment.

01:30 We were a rather unfortunate. My mother got TB [tuberculosis] in 1922. I was born in 1919, my sister was born in 1922. In 1922, my mother went to Waterfall Sanatorium with TB. We went and lived with my father's mother, who was our grandma, and unfortunately

02:00 my mother died after two years in Waterfall Sanatorium. So that meant that the three of us, my elder brother, my sister and myself were sent to live with me grandmother in Petersham and my father came there to live with us too. He had a shocking reaction to my mother's death. And he died in 1929, so that we were orphans, living with a grandmother,

02:30 that had had nine children of her own. She died in this house in 1951. She was well over 90, 95 years of age. Terry and I both went to the public school in Petersham until we were sent to the Christian Brothers at Lewisham. Terry was a pretty brilliant scholar – he was dux of the school there and went on to Balmain

03:00 Christian Brothers. I left Lewisham school in 1932. I was 14 in January 1933 and I went to work in a brass foundry that's opposite Australia Street in Parramatta Road, and today it's a garage. We lived with Gran. I got a job. I worked

03:30 in a clothing firm from the time of 1933 until 1939 and my brother didn't have very many good jobs because he stuttered badly. When the war broke, I'd been in with a great crowd of fellas in Freshwater Surf Club. They

04:00 were very great mates, very dear mates, and of course we all had to go to the war in 1940. At the outbreak of the war, the government's action as far as raising a military for it was concerned had to conscript all the kids of 20 years of age.

04:30 Up until that time, we had what they called a militia, which was all the various units, artillery, infantry, field amateurs and they were spread around the state or around the whole country with a military depot at some place in the district. And ours was right there in Petersham. Now, because you were the 20 year age group, you were called up, went into camp

05:00 and you were allotted to a unit that they thought you should be in. When I knew that I'd be in this group, I said to my brother, who was very keen about the militia, he loved them, he did all the history of it and everything else, I said, "What do you think I ought to join up?" He said, "Well you're good at maths,"

05:30 he said, "you'd be a good gun layer." He said, "Ask for artillery." So I went down to Addison Road Depot, sometime in December or January, January 1940 and when I interviewed the person who was allotting the boys to all the different units, he said, "What do you want to be?" And I said, "I want to be in artillery." He said, "You're in a surf club, you'd learn first aid, you should be in a

06:00 medical unit." And I said, "No, I think I'll be better in artillery." So he wrote 'ART' [artillery] across my sheet and he said, "We'll let you know when we call you up." When I was called up I found that I was in an ambulance. And I said, I said, "Look, there it is on the sheet, artillery." And he said, "No that's AMB [ambulance]." So there was the first little difference what guided

06:30 my life. Now, the unit I was allotted to was the 14th Field Ambulance, a militia unit, and we marched into camp in Liverpool on the 15th of January, 1940. The commanding officer of that unit was Colonel

William Morrow.Now Colonel Morrow in civilian life, was regarded as the leading heart and lung

07:00 specialist in Sydney, and anyway, probably in the country. He said to us, one morning on parade, “I have been given control of a second AIF [Australian Imperial Force] Field Ambulance. I’ve been given the command of the second – of another Field Ambulance.” And he said, “I’d like all you boys to join me in the AIF

07:30 when this unit is formed.” And he said, “To that end,” he said, “after this – after we break off, go to the orderly room and if you want to go into the 2nd AIF [Australian Imperial Force] with my field ambulance then put your name down. I went and did this. When I got back to my hut during the break, a very lovely little bloke named Bill Foster, who lived in Glebe, he was an only child,

08:00 and he was a great kid, like all the kids that were there. And Titch said, “Somebody come from the orderly room and said, ‘Lawrie’s joined up.’” Titch said, “Why didn’t you tell us. We’ll all join up.” I said, “Well you go down and join up.” And he said, “Yeah, I will too.” I said, “You’ve got to make up your own mind about that.” I was forever grateful for that little incident and I’ve never forgotten it.

08:30 Also, when we got called up on the 23rd of May to go to Colonel Morrow’s unit we found that we weren’t drafted to a field ambulance, Colonel Morrow had been given second command of the 2/5th AGH [Australian General Hospital]. The commanding officer was Bill Kaye, who was a First World War commander of a field ambulance between ’14-’18.

09:00 So we did that camp and we were dispersed from that camp around about the 15th of May. Then when we were called up on the 23rd of May. We went for a few days to Ingleburn and then after about a week, we went

09:30 to Greta. At that time, I was playing football and I was very keen to go and have a few games with the Newtown Rugby League team where I’d been associated with as a child from the time I was about nine to the time I was my present age. I went to Newtown one night and they told me to come down on the 25th of April, 1940,

10:00 to North Sydney oval, and I played my first game of football with Newtown on the Anzac Day, 1940, in third grade. On the Saturday the game was to be played at Henson Park, in Marrickville. I went down expecting to play in the thirds and a couple of old internationals that were the selectors in Newtown told me I wouldn’t be playing thirds, I’d be playing

10:30 in reserve grade. Well I continued up and down until after the 23rd of May. We went to Greta and I could no longer play with football in Sydney. We were at Greta until the 19th of October

11:00 1940. In that time I served on a field ambulance with transporter, we were running any casualties, any sick people that were in Greta camp – the unit around the corner from me was the 2nd 1st Pioneer Battalion that spent a long time in Tobruk. I had

11:30 a very dear friend in that, a family who looked after me. He was one of the sons in that family. During that time we trained, marched hundreds of miles, put on Thomas Blinds, heard lectures about physiology and anatomy from our doctors. The unit had the cream of Sydney

12:00 young doctors, Vernon Barling, Johnny McNamara, Rose, David Leek from Tamworth, and many others. And an eye specialist named, Kingsley from Newcastle, great little fighter named Orford, Captain Orford. We all got some training and as far

12:30 as I was concerned, I was offsider on an ambulance. Which took patients to Maitland or to Newcastle. And the little bloke that I was with was a bus driver named Jimmy Kettle, had a great sense of humour and I loved him very much. One of the things that I did, in my training there from Greta was I was sent

13:00 to the ordnance building in Leichhardt. And that was 1940. Strangely, in 1923, when I was four years old, my brother and I lived in Leichhardt, our father lived there because he was the first leading hand on building that building in Leichhardt. We used to go down, the two of us, and watch him

13:30 ring the bell for knock off. And of course it’s incredible that you always returned to some place where you’ve been to before. I couldn’t get over it when I went into that building to think that my father had a great deal to do with it and he was long since gone. We had the time in the war,

14:00 I was exactly six years from the 23rd of May, 1940 till the 21st of May, 1946 when I was discharged. After the war, I didn’t feel like going back to the clothing firm I worked for, so I got a job in the government as a clerk.

14:30 I stayed in that through various divisions and various jobs until I was discharged in 1980, till I was paid off. Something that I… My schooling in Petersham, was also and Lewisham Christian Brothers, the primary school, which was

15:00 adjacent to the old cemetery and the Lewisham Hospital. Now, in the last year at school, I sat next to a little mate, named Johnny Keedle. There were quite class of 25 or 30 boys and John and I played football together on Petersham oval.

15:30 One day in a final I went the blindside, gave the ball to John, he caught it on his shoulder with his hand over his neck and he ran the full 70 yards and scored the try. When he went down to place it, he lay down and put it down. He wasn't much of a footballer but he could run like a hare. Anyway, the thing about that is, that John, like me,

16:00 and lots of other boys, were in that call-up in 1940 and he was allotted to one of the infantry battalions. And it often strikes me, I don't know how many of those boys, there was another boy in that class of '32, Pierce Capanis.

16:30 They had a shocking incident. They were the first kids that ever struck the Japanese in New Guinea. I don't know the exact history but I've been told that they were ill equipped, ill trained, and they had to front up

17:00 to an army that had taken half the world. Johnny Keedle and Pierce Capanis are buried in Bomana [War] Cemetery, in Port Moresby. Somebody told me

17:30 they were marching along, somebody called, "You're in action." And they were dead. And that's why they're buried at Bomana. I've been to their graves. I think about them a lot. Meantime, I was a world away. While that was happening to those boys, I was on a

18:00 transport that had left Bombay to go to the 8th Division on Singapore, but we never got there. We were called from the Middle East in 1941. As soon as the Japs come in we went from

18:30 Port Taufiq, we went from Taufiq to Bombay on the Mauritania, we were loaded onto a boat called The City of Paris from Bombay. It had

19:00 first attempted to get to Singapore, but had to come back. So we came back to Colombo, where there were many, many ships in Colombo Harbour, and from there on, we eventually made it back to Perth. But we were on the water from the time

19:30 we left the Middle East, till we got to Perth. We were on the water for 41 days in a ship that had very poor food. There's one thing that Australians should know. At that stage, the Japanese had control of a lot of South-East Asia,

20:00 we had the Americans had come into the war. And [British Prime Minister Winston] Churchill decided, while we were on the water there for that 41 days, he told [Australian Prime Minister]John Curtin that he wanted the 6th and 7th Divisions to be sent into Burma. John

20:30 Curtin refused. He said, "They're coming home and they're going to protect our own country." Churchill said, to Curtin, "Mr Curtin, the fall of the British Empire rests on your shoulders. If you don't do

21:00 as I tell you, you will be the man responsible for whatever happens in this event." The [British warships] Repulse and the Prince of Wales had been sunk outside Singapore, things were grim, but John Curtin defied Churchill. The divisions that went into Burma were three Indian divisions whom I believe had been in the Punjabi Sikhs,

21:30 they'd been in the biggest battle of the war in East Africa at a place called Keren. I understand that those three Indian divisions are still there in Burma. John Curtin has my eternal gratitude. So I think young Australians should know that we had a prime minister that stood up to Churchill and told him

22:00 what we would do. And so our 6th and 7th Divisions came home and they went to New Guinea and they fought such wonderful battles as Ramu Valley, Kokoda Trail, Euna, all these places and instead of being in Burma, doing nothing.

22:30 **Can I come back now and just ask you a little bit of your life before the war, just to find out about Sydney and things like that? Can you share with me your earliest memories of childhood?**

Yeah, my earliest memories were at Leichhardt, where I couldn't have been more than

23:00 four, as I mentioned before. We were at Leichhardt because my father was the leading hand on the big building at Leichhardt, the big ordnance store that's still there today. And it was from there that my mother, after my sister was born in 1922, was compelled, she had TB, which was prevalent those days in lots of areas. She

23:30 had a pretty tough life. She was only there two years and I often think, what a terrible way she died. Waited two years. To know she had three children waiting for her to come home. She didn't come home. So we stayed with our grandma. I used to spend a lot of time in an oval called, Marrickville Oval, where the Newtown Rugby League team

24:00 played their matches and trained on Tuesdays and Thursday nights. I used to go down on Tuesday and Thursday nights, lean over the fence and watch those fellas play football. That was a big thing in your life. But when I was 15, I was very lucky to meet a family named Fleming. They lived in Harbord, in Freshwater, and I went over to spend some weekends, and I started to play

24:30 football with the Freshwater Surf Club. I also trained and got my bronze medallion, though I was a terrible weak swimmer. I managed to get out to the buoys, I think the day I got me medallion I walked to the buoys just about. In that club, were a great lot of fellas and

25:00 I formed a wonderful friendship with them, particularly with the young blokes that were all in the football team. And in the surf club. I wasn't a good swimmer, but I wasn't a bad runner. I rowed when I could get a seat in the boat and I was not a real good rower, but I had very great times in the boat.

25:30 **Can you share with me some of those times in the boat?**

Yeah, in the boat, we'd go for a row on Sunday morning and catch a wave. One occasion, we rowed out, about half a mile out from Freshie [Freshwater], where a crowd called the Cameron-Camelin Fisheries were netting sharks.

26:00 We watched the sharks being taken into the net and it was absolutely amazing. 12 foot bronze whaler, grey nurse. And then we followed them right along to off Fairy Bower point, off Manly Beach, and they pulled in the biggest tiger shark they'd ever caught. He had a belly bigger than any Clydesdale racehorse

26:30 and they had to put the gear out to lift him over the boat by his tail and his mouth. And that was a good experience. But one of the best I think I ever did, I became treasurer for the club and we used to take the boat to Newcastle. Any surf carnival, we went on the truck and took the boat

27:00 to wherever it was, Maroubra anywhere, but when it went to Newcastle it had to be taken up the coast on a little boat called the Erina, that started from Darling Harbour, and the first thing we had to do was to put it on a truck, which cost five pound and take it over to Darling Harbour so as that it could be loaded onto the Erina. But at the committee meeting, I said, "Well, I'll be responsible for getting the boat

27:30 to Darling Harbour, but," I said, "I don't want five pound. We'll do it for nothing." It was a lovely summer day, five of my mates, and best mates, Lindsay Hutchison, Neil McDonald, Jackie Hutchison, Dougie Simpson, we set off from Freshwater on a perfect day. We were so lucky it was

28:00 a perfect day, because if it hadn't been and we had a got a boatload of water before we got out of the beach we could never have got to Darling Harbour. However, it was a perfect day. We took it on turns on the sweep and one having a rest and four rowing, there were six of us. And we rowed out past Queenscliff, across past North Steyne , Manly, past North Head and

28:30 I'll never forget looking up at North Head about 20 or 35 yards out from North Head shore. We came into the harbour and we rowed down the harbour, taking turns on the sweep. We took a whole lot of sandwiches and a few grogs with us and we had a marvellous day. We got to the

29:00 Harbour Bridge about four o'clock when things were starting to get busy with the ferries and we got a lot of honk-honk from boats and so forth. But we rowed around to Darling Harbour, handed it over to the Erina people, I think it was the Erina or some other . Then we ran from there down, we only had football shorts and sweaters on and we run from Darling

29:30 Harbour, through Wynyard down to the Quay [Circular Quay] and got on the half past six ferry. Or about that. We went home. We got a lot of yahoos when we ran onto the Manly wharf with all the locals who knew of us coming home from work. Any rate, that is a day that I'll never forget. The thing is, all those blokes are gone.

30:00 **With Freshwater Surf Club, what other things did you do besides the rowing? Were there other activities as well?**

We went to surf carnivals – I always ran in the beach relay. I would just make the first four in the beach relay.

30:30 There were blokes, anybody was in that time, will remember these fellas, Lindsay Hutchison, Maurie Holiday, they were both pilots and were killed in England. Lindsay's buried near Cambridge University. At the carnivals we'd all go in the

31:00 march-past team to make up the numbers there. Of course the standard bearer had to be a good physical specimen and if you struck the job of carrying the reel it was stiff because you had to hang onto it for a long time on that sand, marching. Any other things with our football team,

31:30 when I was secretary – when I was treasurer, rather – during the week I would go down to Martin Place from where I was working and meet Wally Crane, who was the secretary of the club and a wonderful man who played a great part in the Freshwater Surf Club and also in the SLSA [Surf Life Saving Association],

32:00 association with men like Judge Curlewis and those fellows. One experience that I did have, and it's something that I'll never forget, was I think it was either 1939, or 1938, we had our carnival on Anniversary Day,

32:30 always on Anniversary Day – still do at Freshwater, they still have Anniversary Day. This particular Anniversary Day, the sea was so big the carnival was called off. As a result, most of the people just didn't bother to stay at the club, they took off to the local white house or somewhere like that.

33:00 I don't know why, but the judge of the carnival, or whoever supervised the carnival, asked us to take the boat out and endeavour to lay the boat buoys, which had anchors, kapok buoys. Then, although I was probably the worst rower in the club, and I was staying in the club because I

33:30 was the treasurer, I was there in the office with the secretary, old Jack Munroe, who run Manly-Warringah Rugby League for about 20 years, including the first grade side. Before Arthurson took over. Don Wauchope was the captain of the club. It must have been January, 1939 anyway, they'd see the only year that Freshie didn't have their

34:00 carnival was because of that. Don Wauchope was captain. The boat captain was a wonderful man named George Henderson and his crew were the boat champions of Australia, earlier or later. For some reason, there was only three rowers. Don Wauchope came to me and he

34:30 said, "Come on Lawrie, you're going to go out in the boat with us." And I said, "Not me Don, I can't row. I'm the treasurer." He said, "You're going in the boat, don't argue." So there I was in a boat with a few of the best men that ever had been in a boat, because we pushed – I can tell you that two of the other blokes beside meself. There

35:00 was George Henderson Swift, Donny Wauchope was the stroke, Jack Uren was three, Dougie Duncan was four, I was in the bow. That's the worst place. We managed to sneak out up the north end and got out past the break and I couldn't believe

35:30 the size of these waves. We had the boat buoys in the boat and George Henderson, of course, was determined to take the biggest of the big waves. As we turned to start to row for the wave, we got on half onto it and, for some unbelievable reason,

36:00 the sweeper fell out of the boat with George Henderson. Donny Wauchope was rowing stroke, I stayed in the boat where I was, Dougie Duncan and Jack Uren dived out as this wave following the one we missed, bore down on us. I couldn't believe the size of it, I knew I'd drown if I

36:30 didn't hang onto the boat. I put me arm under the quarter bar, and Donny Wauchope tried to sweep the boat, it just picked us up, Don went flying over my head, I went along hanging onto the quarter bar, under the water like a torpedo. When I came up, I was fortunate I still had hold of the boat. The

37:00 kapok buoys, the boat buoys were all over the place, the foot holes had fell out of the boat, the oars were all gone, but I was there with the boat. It took us half an hour to get in. When we got in the old president of Freshwater Surf Club, old John Besteel, John came down to the water's edge and said, "George Henderson, I refuse to let you take that boat out."

37:30 George said, "You think we're going to let everybody see us miss a wave like that." He said, "You go up and watch us, John." He said, "We're going to get another one." I wasn't very pleased. So we pushed the boat again, up the north end and we went out and here's what you don't realise is that when you fall in the trough after a wave

38:00 has passed, the mass of water is incredible, it's not that it's high, it's that it's wide and there's a mass of water. To make a long story short, we cracked a big wave and George took us right to the shore. So we were very pleased with ourselves, but nobody'd believe that I was one of the blokes in that boat. That's one of the best things that, you know, I remember.

38:30 And the trip up the harbour. We had a wonderful time.

Tape 2

00:32 **So you're a part of the surf lifesaving club, what were you like as a swimmer?**

I was the worst swimmer in the club. You were required to swim four races a year, which I

01:00 managed to do, but on one particular day, the water was like a sheet of glass and you could see the bottom. I was last around the buoys and saw my own shadow on the bottom, it frightened the hell out of me. I was halfway in and the boys were coming out in the boat to pick the buoy up and take it back to the beach, so I got in the boat with them. As we got near the buoy,

01:30 which we had to swim around, to pick it up, George Henderson was on the sweep and he said, "Lift your oars up, stand them up, there's a shark, look at him." And there was the shark with his nose on the buoy. Evidently there was something from our hands that attracted him to that buoy, because everybody grabs that. They don't swim around it – they grab it and push it behind them. I couldn't believe it, as soon

02:00 as we raised our oars the shark must have seen our shadow or something. And he turned and I've never seen anything go like it, his fin on the top of the water, for the next hundred yards, in a split second. But I never got over that, I was there five minutes before, but I got back into the shore safe. So I had a few experiences that I remember all

02:30 my life. One of the other things that I talked about, and talking about Freshie, when we were all kids in the C grade, D grade football, there used to be, the whole football team, would get on the tram that started from Harbord, go into Manly to the picture show and then to come home we would walk the full length of Manly Beach,

03:00 singing songs, having a great laugh, teasing one another and then climb over the hill, back to Freshie, and it's a memory I would treasure and I would hope that some kids would have that same pleasure today. But we used to sing Bing's [Bing Crosby] song, Bing mostly, for those times. And of course,

03:30 they used to really enjoy themselves, but it was a funny trip in too. On the tram from Harbord over the hill back to Manly was a funny old trip, with all the kids laughing and shouting at one another. And it was enjoyable.

With some of the songs, the archive's interested in that sort of social history, do you remember some of the tunes?

04:00 'Love Your Neighbour' was one of them.

Could you sing it for me, for the sake of the archive?

\n[Verse follows]\nLove your neighbour, walk up and say, how do ya?\n Gee, but I'm glad to see ya,\n da, da, da, da.\n

I forget, but what lovely words, that's the beauty of the songs that we

04:30 get today. One that sticks in my mind, about the streets in America, I can't think of it. Sorry, but Bing [Crosby: crooner] was mainly the person there. He was still that during the war, because at the end of the war, when we were in camp nearing the end of the war in 1944, on the

05:00 Atherton Tablelands, we all used to grab our seat and box or something to sit on and walk a mile or so to where the outdoor picture was on. And I can always remember that, Going My Way was Bing's picture and we used to make a joke of it, about you know,

05:30 "What's on tonight? 'Going my way.'" And it just went on and on and on. That's all you had to do, so you did it. I can't… You'll have to get me going.

The surf club, I mean today we have powerboats to save people and we rocket out, did you have that sort of thing?

No. No. The main

06:00 thing, and this depended on good swimmers, take the belt out to the person in trouble, but often… I always remember one incident that the boat was most important. We had two boats at Freshie, the new

06:30 one and the old one. And the old one was a very heavy big boat. And the fellas used to... On the day before Good Friday, mostly they'd want to go fishing overnight. Anyway that wasn't supposed to be, but this particular day, it was a bad summer's day when a westerly was blowing.

07:00 And it was a very tough westerly and there weren't many people down the club. Only a few of us. And people were getting… you surf... the rubber floats, get on a rubber float as big as a pillow and...

07:30 Any rate, two kids were on their rubber floats and before they knew where they were they were long way off the shore. Now all of a sudden we realised that the situation was dangerous, they were out, nearly to the point and going further, it was pointless somebody getting in a belt, particularly, you know, it's a pretty tough swim, so

08:00 we raced down, the boat happened to be on the waterline, the old boat. So we got into it. But two good swimmers swam to these kids without a belt and stayed with them. One I remember was Jack McLaughlin, I can't remember who the others were. Any rate, we got the boat out and pulled everybody into it and got back to the shore, but

08:30 those surfer planes, I think they call them, surfer planes, that was the name of them. They were a menace, particularly in an instance like that. Another thing, kids can be over their head in the depth of water, fall off it, lose it and they're in real trouble. They have a lot of different things now, of course, that big rubber ducky that they've got now, that goes out, it's a marvellous thing.

09:00 The way it handles the waves, I couldn't believe that it ever would, but it does.

So did you have to save many people weekly?

No, Freshie was the safest beach in the place. In the country, I reckon. I can't really remember any

incident with saving, but we never had a fatality there.

09:30 I know that. And Duke Hanamuku's surfboard is still in Freshwater Surf Club. He came to Australia some time in the early 1900s and showed them how to use the board. And it's unbelievably heavy, it's solid wood, it's a very long board, but anyway,

10:00 he taught them something about riding surfboards. To my memory, the only one of the fellas that had a surfboard in those days, was Clive Riley, he had surf-ski that you paddled and it was made by a fella down at Cronulla – forget his name.

10:30 Any rate that was then they started surf-ski races, but the only one about us, about our crowd, that owned a board in those days, was Clive with his surf-ski. He was also the only bloke that owned a motorcar. He wasn't a very rich man, but he was the sort of bloke that knew what to do with his money. A very good rower, too. And his brother,

11:00 we used to call him, Weary, was stroke of the crew that won the Australian championships. There was Riley, Weary, Houghton, Alfie Henderson, George's brother, and can't think

11:30 of the other bloke. I should be able to. They were a wonderful crew – they won the championship at Bondi Beach.

Why did you join Freshwater when you weren't the best swimmer in the club or the best oarsman?

I joined it because of the football. I played with all the kids that lived in Harbord. I lived in Newtown district.

12:00 But when I first went over and played a couple of games with them, they said, "Oh, you know, stick with us, be with us." So that's... The Flemings were such good people to me. I went every weekend to their place. Their father was the boss of the fire station at Harbord. Maurie Fleming, he was a fireman. And

12:30 he had three sons. His son Jack, is still alive – he's in his 90s he's in a nursing home in Beenleigh in Queensland I think it is. He's the second boy Jimmy, he went to South Africa because his father was a South African, old Maurie, came from South Africa, became a fireman in Australia and Jimmy was

13:00 the second son. And he went to South Africa and never came back. He joined the South African air force when the war broke out and young Bill, he was in the 2nd 1st Pioneers and by a strange quirk of fate, he was with the 2nd 1st Pioneers in Tobruk when his brother Jimmy was flying over North Africa and was killed.

13:30 Bill's still alive today, he lives in Mittagong with his family. And that was the lovely Fleming family that took me to Harbord and it gave me a life. If I'd have had to live in Petersham, where I was living with me grandma, there was nothing. The nearest place you could get to swim was Leichhardt Bay. No such

14:00 thing as a swimming pool anywhere in Sydney at that time that I can remember. Occasionally I went to Bondi and had a swim now and then, but had to come home to Petersham. One of the nastiest things in my life was that when I played with the Freshie Surf Club,

14:30 I was, in 1937, I was picked in the Manly-Warringah President's Cup team, which is the Under 21 League competition that was the big thing in those days because it was the only junior sort of a team. I trained with them and the game was to be played on Sydney Cricket Ground

15:00 before the New South Wales game, and I had to get the Saturday morning off from work so as I could get out and play with this team. And I got into the dressing sheds, there was a sort of a silence. I started to get changed, and me sweater and socks, and one of the fellas that played in the Freshie team

15:30 come up to me and said, "Lawrie, you're not in it." And I said, "What's happened?" And he said, "Well the Narrabeen mob have found out you live in Petersham and you can't play for Manly-Warringah because you live in Petersham." And the old manager of the team come over and he said, "We couldn't risk losing this game because you come from Petersham." And just what a joke it is today. Fancy anybody not being

16:00 allowed to play in the district where they live, or in some other district. I'd been awake all night, excited that I'd made that team. I was the youngest bloke in the team. In 1938, I played Rugby Union with Freshie club, we went and played [Rugby] Union for the year, and in 1939, I went back and played [Rugby] League and I played in the President's Cup team against St George at the old sportsground.

16:30 I remember a lot of the players in the St George President's Cup team were later first grade players, a lot of them were, but for me. I missed out because I was gone from here in May. I played my last game for Newtown. I went in 1940, when I was finished the camp. As I said, April 1940

17:00 I played at this North Sydney Oval in third grade and then I played my last game in third grade on the Sydney Cricket Ground and it must be some time around the 23rd of May. I can't remember whether I was in the army or out of it, but I know that after that I couldn't play any more in Sydney because I was

in Greta in camp, but that's the last time. Against St George on the

17:30 Sydney Cricket Ground, third grade. 1940. And I've been very disappointed. I've managed to realise me ambition to get a Newtown sweater on and I think often, 1943, Newtown won the competition, I might have been in that team. But everywhere I went in the army, I

18:00 formed a team. In Palestine in 1941, no 1940, just after we'd landed in Palestine, I struck some Palestine police in Gaza and I asked them did they have a football team. They said, "Yes." I said, "Do you want to play an Australian team?" And they said, "Yes,

18:30 yeah, we could do that." So I went back to the camp and told the boys. So we formed a football team, about 18 of us, and we had a few good players. One player, Jack Eleen was a Balmain first grade player, also played with Newtown. Was a Colts, he played for New South Wales Colts as an opening

19:00 bat. And he was a great footballer. And the rest of us were all runner-up at... I think we beat the Palestine police. Then we found out that the Royal Air Force had a team at a place called Ramley, so we went to Ramley, and we played the Royal Air Force team.

19:30 Then that was the finish of football there.

So you're talking Rugby League?

We had to play Rugby Union. We had to play the Palestine police force at Rugby Union and the... one of our MOs [Medical Officer] was Rex Beddington, he refereed the game both times and he was captain of New South Wales cricket, too, and a famous golfer. He was an E,N and T [Ear,Nose and Throat] specialist ,

20:00 that's why he was in the AGH. And he refereed the game, but we had to play Rugby Union.

Were they proper fields or just dirt pitches?

Oh no. We played, actually the team we played... When we played the Palestine Police, we were camped at Gaza at a camp called, Kilo 89. And the ground was shocking – it was just a paddock. And a million stones on it.

20:30 But we got the whole team to walk backwards and forwards across the field a few times and then moved all the rubbish we could. Actually it is part of Gaza Ridge where the Light Horse were in action during the First World War. The cemetery was only about a mile away, the Australian cemetery, and

21:00 in Gaza was there and of course we used to visit there and go through the cemetery.

Were you playing Rugby Union in your boots?

No sandshoes, we all had sandshoes. But when I come home from the Middle East, we first... we stopped at Perth, was there about a day, we

21:30 came on to Adelaide and the whole of the AIF was housed… There was nowhere to put them. They were billeted in cottages and we, for two days I was in a house in Payneham with a few of my mates. And then I was only there a couple of days and they... our 2IC [Second in Command], Angus Murray was the 2-IC of the unit he said,

22:00 "Get your general duties crowd together." I was a sergeant then. "Get them together, get ten of us we're going as an advance party to go to north Queensland." Anyway, we didn't know. Any rate we spent a day in Melbourne changing trains and when we got to Sydney we found out that the unit was going to camp

22:30 at Armidale. And they gave us seven days off, but to be back in seven days. That was the first leave we'd had since leaving home. We had seven days and we went straight to Armidale, the ten of us, with Angus Murray, and we pitched a camp for the whole of the unit

23:00 and there were sisters, belonged to the 2/5th AGH too. They were housed on part of the racecourse, but there's a marvellous tent called the EPIP [English Pattern Indian Product] and you could house nine people – you'd put five down one side, four down the other where there was an entrance, a door entrance.

23:30 And you could pitch these tents in about ten minutes, and you could put a whole camp hospital up with these EPIPs. They're a marvellous tent. I don't know whether they still... Oh yes, I saw them recently in these camps in India and Pakistan and those places. There was also another tent, called, 'the hospital marquee', Which was a very big tent,

24:00 pretty difficult to put up. But I became an expert on putting up those EPIPs. When I had to put about 20 or 30 of them up, the first thing I'd do is go and line out the situations and drive the pegs in, the four outside pegs. Which was the main thing to pull the tent up. And I'd put all the pegs in, go along, drop the centre pole

24:30 and the tent on top of it. Drop them all and then just go along each one, put them up, you know, and I did a pretty good job at Armidale, I thought, putting all the camp for the whole of the unit. The other

things, the officers were down one end of the showground, their mess was in the grandstand and the men's lines was in another part

25:00 and all the NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] were with them. And they stayed in Armidale until the end of 1932. I can't recall much, but I got very ill in Armidale. And I lost the unit, I got query meningitis. I got into trouble in a fight

25:30 when I shouldn't have been and I had mumps. And it nearly killed me. I didn't know, but I had mumps. And they thought I had meningitis. Meningitis. Anyway I lost a hell of a lot of weight and the unit went without me, which broke my heart. But that started the worst part of the war that I ever had. I was a sergeant, I was sent back to a training battalion at Wagga [Wagga Wagga]. Now they had a surplus of sergeants

26:00 who'd been... fellas like me. And men who'd never been away, they'd been only in camps, round Australia. And then from there I was shifted down to Bacchus Marsh. But I became an instructor. I used to do the stretcher drill. You had a company to call the roll in the morning. Some real funny people there.

26:30 Frank Conglan, who used to lead the band at the big dance hall in Sydney, the Trocadero, before the war. That was 1943 and Frank had been called up he was no chicken, he was fairly old, but he'd decided he wanted to do his bit. And in that camp was two battalions of Indonesians and there was a camp of AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service] and

27:00 in that camp I did this drill. I'd lecture on the long bones of the body. I knew by heart because it was in the manual. Things like... "And at that stage, like me – I'm an old soldier. I was three years in the army then and I was training kids who'd just come in, who'd been called up

27:30 and who'd joined up, never been away. And..." You know, I put that in. But I was so angry at being there and I was very fortunate I found that one of the 5th AGH officers was in Melbourne, Ben Travers, and I wrote to him and I told him that I was thoroughly sick of it. I didn't go back to me own unit because all my place had been taken – the whole lot of the unit

28:00 arrangement had been changed. So I told him I wanted to get to a field ambulance. And he arranged it for me and in 1944 I got transferred to the 2nd 6th Field Ambulance, which was a South Australian unit. They had served in the Ramu Valley and the Kokoda Trail. They were in the famous brigade,

28:30 the 21st Brigade, which is the 14th, 16th 27 Battalions. The 2/3rd Field Ambulance, 2/6th Artillery Regiment and all the attached units. I think the 2/3rd CCS [Casualty Clearing Station] was in that crew. And we moved from

29:00 Brisbane, the unit was in Brisbane when I joined it and we moved to the Atherton Tableland to a place called Kurai, which was just a bush camp. We made the camp. The division made the camp, you know the engineers dug the roads out, we tied our tents to trees if there weren't stakes to put it – the ground was too hard to put them in. But it was the most marvellous

29:30 life because my unit, the 2/6th Field Ambulance, we were a hundred yards from the Baron River. We could fall out of bed of the morning, run down and dive in to the Baron and be back and get dressed. It was a marvellous life.

The beginnings of you getting into

30:00 **the medical side of the army was a result of your first aid back in Freshwater. Can you share with us what you actually learnt first aid wise, back at Freshwater?**

No, only resuscitation, but that's all there is to it, it's what today's... We never had the mouth to mouth in those days, we just had the... so many pumps and

30:30 turn your patient on the left if he was brought in. How to carry him in. And you know, you didn't get a great deal of action in that way. If you were on a very bad beach, you know other clubs could have been more unfortunate than us. I won't say Freshie never had any savings, but you know while I was there there was nobody drowned on the beach. And that was the only

31:00 real training that I had, but what... I've never quite known, whether it was because they mistook AMB for ART or ART for AMB. That I finished up in an ambulance, but I was a bit crooked on it at the time. But then when you get in and meet, you know, all the kids your own age and that sort of thing, you really

31:30 didn't worry about it, you know, you're in a unit. Though I did try, several times, there were a lot of blokes from Freshie and Manly and North Steyne, Queenscliff, there was a lot of those blokes in an artillery unit and there were a lot of Freshie blokes that went in it. Not a lot, but quite a few, you know. And it's... After the middle, after we got back

32:00 from Eritrea, that's another story. I tried to transfer to that artillery unit, because I met the blokes at a football match, playing somewhere, you know. And I was keen to get with them. But they said, "You're in this unit, you're not going, that's all about it." You know. "We've made you sergeant now, you've gotta

do something here." And I mean, as far as first aid went, I wasn't

32:30 really called upon because I was the general duties bloke. The 5th AGH, had about 1200 tons of gear. We carted 1200 beds, 1200 mattresses, 1200 everything. X-ray equipment. The gear was unbelievable and it had to be carried and set up wherever you went. Now when we set up

33:00 when we were in Palestine, first Gaza, Kilo 89, we didn't set up a hospital. The sisters that were in the 5th AGH and the doctors, were sent to different places. The sisters all worked with the 1st AGH, which was right there, where we were camped. And the doctors were sent to all sorts of places. They went onto boats, going up to Tobruk, up to the desert they were sent to

33:30 with surgical teams. There were several little surgical teams formed – there'd be surgeon an anaesthetist, good operation... fellas who could help surgeons with their instruments. And also they had a driver, of course, to take their gear with them. And they worked in an area like our first

34:00 team, which me little mate, Titch Foster, was in. They went to Bardia in the first action. They formed a little surgical team. I would have liked to get in that when Titch did. I'd never driven and I didn't have a licence, but Titch had a licence – used to drive before the war – so he got a job driving the surgical team. And there was only five of them, six

34:30 of them. They'd get to where action was, straight behind where the action was, pick some area, pitch a tent or take over a building and perform surgery or whatever was needed for casualties off that action. Now there was also another surgical team, forget who was in it, but I remember

35:00 there was John Loewenthal, no, Louis Loewenthal, was one of the surgeons that went with Titch and Vernon Barley when Titch was in the team with Vernon Barley, and he was a great fella, Vernon Barley, but I can't remember right. They sent two surgical teams while they were still at Gaza, before the end of

35:30 1940. Now when they moved us, we went to a place called Rehovet in Palestine. And they set up a hospital there. We did all the tent gear – that was where I first learned me bits about the tents. They set up a tented hospital. The camp had been arranged with a building for the cookhouse and all the latrines. We were right beside a big

36:00 orchard of orange and grapefruit and all the men were under tentage. But the rest of the hospital... and they didn't... I think they took a few casualties but I can't remember now, but it was from there we moved to Greece. And the first move was to get your equipment,

36:30 then they... the way the trip went, you got to Gaza Station, down on the train, I think it was an overnight trip, passed El Arish and those places in El Qantara which was right on the Suez Canal, it crossed the canal at the Suez at El Qantara and then you'd go in a train down to Alexandria,

37:00 and from Alexandria you were loaded into boats to go to the scene in Greece. But at that time, the MOs were all still detached from the unit, to boats. I remember four of them were on a boat called the Pentland and it was sunk. And one of those blokes,

37:30 got onto another boat and it was sunk too. Holt was his name. Any rate they had all those sort of jobs. And...

Just before you went away overseas, with your mum and dad, you said your mum died when you were quite young. Were you close to your mum?

38:00 I knew her so little. I was, I loved her, you know. I remember one day, I used to... I wanted a pair of sandshoes and they let her home one night from Waterfall to my grandma's place and she woke me up very early in the morning and gave me a pair of sandshoes. And she said, "Try 'em out." And I ran up and down, we had a big veranda and I ran up and down the veranda and

38:30 I was tickled pink. And I remember, I went in and I sat on her lap for a while, while we had breakfast. That sort of thing. Now my brother and my sister were there too, but I can only remember Mum at Leichhardt. And I must have been younger than four, when we were at Leichhardt, because she went to Waterfall

39:00 in 1923. Yeah, it was either late '22 or early '23, she went to Waterfall. Now I saw very little of her after that, but it destroyed my brother. He took it bad. He was you know, her favourite, because

39:30 you know, the first is always a bit different, the eldest one, but...

Tape 3

00:35 **You were telling us about the impact of your mother's illness on you and your brother.**

Yeah, it... Terry was the first... eldest. He was terribly affected

01:00 by my mother's death. He began to stutter and he was having a lot of trouble with people who used to mimic, those days. It was a terrible thing that went on in those days. And he had a bad time at the Petersham Public School with one of the teachers and he transferred then from there to Lewisham Christian Brothers, where he did quite well.

01:30 He was a year younger than everybody in his class, but he was dux of their school and of course he couldn't move on. The following year he stayed in the same class and he was dux of the school again, but he then went to Balmain. And at that stage it was considered pretty good education if you got your Intermediate Certificate, which he got, but he couldn't get a job. And I remember he only…

02:00 One of the things that he got on with was making radios, but he was always interested in the militia. He joined the militia and I can remember him, it must have been around about three or four years before the war – I know he put his age up to get into the militia – and I think he was 16 at the time and just as things would have it, he was in the Light Horse.

02:30 And I always remember him, passing our house in Petersham with a contingent on its way to Liverpool camp for a three weeks' camp. And here was Terry, riding postilion, on a horse as big as a Clydesdale, and it was carting a gun carriage. I think he would have been about 16 at that time. Now, when the war broke out

03:00 he was keen to get in, but of course as soon as he enlisted and they found him stuttering, they knocked him back. And not only that, he wasn't really strong. He was accepted later on. After 1941 they took him in and he was put into a signals, or an infantry unit, and

03:30 he spent three years in New Guinea. But he had a bad time in New Guinea and when he was discharged he was a real nerve case. He started to drink. He couldn't... He had several different jobs, and he was even given electro... ECT [electroconvulsive therapy] treatment by specialists

04:00 for his nerves. And he was given a 20% pension. Now he's lived his life a bit difficult. He's... you know you can't go through the whole of his years, but his nerves have always affected him and at present he's just starting dementia, I think, and I don't think... As it happens, today he's going to see a specialist

04:30 about his urology troubles.

In those days, why was there such a stigma associated with someone who had a stutter?

I don't know. It was just ignorance. It was just ignorance. And I even remember being in a line-up and when the roll was called, a stutterer'd have a bit of trouble and everybody'd laugh, you know, jokingly, you know. In the army it was different.

05:00 They weren't nasty. They would all make a joke of him or something. Which wouldn't help him.

Did he ever got to speech pathologist or...?

No, but he improved out of sight and there's been long periods where I've noticed he's you know, not stuttering. But just in the last six months or so he's started stuttering quite a bit. Particularly if he's on the phone. And

05:30 any rate, he's 88 now, he'll be 89 in May, and it's been left to me to do things for him and it's a bit difficult.

So how different were you from your brother?

It didn't upset me so much. I was just you know, not affect... Well you know, I wouldn't say I wasn't affected, but

06:00 I never took it like Terry did. But see, Mum died in 1925 and my father died in 1929. And in the last few years of his life he absolutely went to the pack [broke down]. Though he was leading hand on big buildings for the government and everything, in two years he just went absolutely to the packers. He smoked heavily, drank and he used to go up to the pub every day and play dominos

06:30 until you know… It would have been the cigarettes and the life he was leading that brought on strokes. And he died in 1929 at the hospice. I remember the night in Petersham when he had a terrible turn and you know, his two sisters were looking after him and they rushed him to the hospital and he died in the

07:00 hostel at Darlinghurst, St Vincent's hostel.

Did you have much contact with your dad during those years when your mum was sick?

Only, now and then. I can remember one day, he doted on Terry, but he was also in the last two years, he had dementia. And I've never forgotten this. One day

07:30 at the table, they started talking about Terry's success, you know, and Dad said, "You! You bloody goat, you're not dux are ya?" And I was about eight. I hadn't had a chance to be dux. Terry's four years older than me, see. But it never worried much. I've remembered it, I never forgot that, but the day…

08:00 He had five brothers and they were in a club in Newtown called, 'The Newtown Pastime Club'. And their

father was a boxer. He came from Cork in Ireland and he had them all boxing, you know, and they had a ring rigged up at the back of that house in Petersham. And Sunday morning the old blokes from the Pastime Club used to come down and they'd get in the ring with one another and they'd have a bit of a throw of the gloves. And of course

08:30 they were all too old to be doing it. They did it now and then, you know, but that was the way they were. Now the day when he died, he was buried at... where our mother was buried, at Woronora Cemetery, and I never forgot, and I never had such a shock in my life, as when they started to lower his coffin into the grave, it nearly

09:00 killed me. I just went to bits, you know. And it wasn't because... I couldn't work out why I did. But of course all the fellas were pretty disturbed too. And that was it. But it was terrible how the last couple of years of his life... And he was a very aggressive man

09:30 evidently. One day, when he was up at this hotel at Petersham, they used to play for cigarettes. And money too, I think. He got into a fight with three men. Now he was 40. And he came out of the hotel and three of them got onto him. And the old Italian in the fruit shop told us the next day,

10:00 they said, "He was incredible – he knocked the three of them down." He said, "Then they got him and one of them got a rock and hit him on the head from the back and knocked him down in the street." I don't know where the coppers [police] were, but that's... You know, the old Italian in the fruit shop, and his kids went to school with us, and he told us. He said, "He was incredible." He said, "He had the three of them beat and then they got to him and hit him with the rock on the head."

10:30 So there he was in the street. You know. Somebody came up and told us. I don't know what in the hell, where the law was or ambulances or anything. Any rate, you know, two years after that he died.

Was your dad an ex World War One veteran?

No, our family... see he was building the ordnance building in Leichhardt. Oh I don't know what he would have... that would have been after the war, during the war they started. But my mother's two brothers,

11:00 Peter and Charlie, they were in the infantry. And all of Dad and his brothers were all taught a trade. They were plumbers and electricians and Dad was a carpenter and also able to build, you know. But the two, me mother's two eldest brothers, they went to the war.

Did they tell you any stories?

11:30 No, I never had much to do with Peter or Charlie because I went to live with Grandma Lane. And they were the Popperwells. And about three years ago, the phone went here one day and a bloke's on the other end and he said, "Lawrie Lane?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "I'm your cousin and we've never met." He said, "I'm George Popperwell." And he's the same age as me.

12:00 And somebody in the Popperwell family has done the most incredible job of a family tree. And they've got it starting from 1700 right up till today with 3000 names on it. I've got it inside and since then I've been good friends with George, but his father was one of the Peter... went to the war.

You mentioned before that your dad

12:30 **set up a ring and was fighting with some guys from Dublin. Were you guys an Irish family?**

Me grandfather was Irish – he came from Cork. All their sons were born here. And my grandma that I lived with, she was a Walker. Now her father's brother was a Constable Walker, later then boss of the police. He killed Thunderbolt, the bushranger.

13:00 And we had all that gear in Petersham. There was photos of Constable Walker and all the things that attached to... you know, Thunderbolt [notorious 19th century bushranger;outlaw]. We knew a lot about Thunderbolt. I've got all the story of it inside.

What did you know about Thunderbolt?

Well the thing about Thunderbolt was that he was one of these that robbed the rich and gave it to the poor. Supposedly. But the full story, I've got the full

13:30 sheet in there, that I've read it and you know, we never took much notice of it, until later years they're making big of things like this. But what happened with Walker, he was the constable at a place called, Guyra, and Thunderbolt, that's not far out of Armidale. And actually, I went with the Armidale team while I was there and played against Guyra

14:00 But it appears that this particular day, Thunderbolt was in the pub in Guyra and everybody put up with him. And somebody came to the police station where Constable Walker was the constable and they said, "Thunderbolt's up at the pub." So Walker got on his horse and charged up the pub. Any rate, Thunderbolt got away.

14:30 But Walker chased him and they came to a creek and Thunderbolt crossed it and it wasn't very wide –

evidently it was only about eight or ten, twelve feet – and he stood on the other side and he said, "Walker, have you got a family?" And he said, "Yeah, I've got children." And he says, "Well, go home or I'll kill ya." And Walker said, "No, I'm taking you in." So they shot it out. And Walker, you know,

15:00 he wounded Thunderbolt, but he knew he had him. But there was another bloke with Thunderbolt in the pub and he set off straight away because the bloke had stolen a horse. So Walker decided he'd catch him and come back for Thunderbolt, but he never found Thunderbolt again until the next day. They dragged him in on a dray.

15:30 He'd been shot. And he was you know, he'd had it. So Walker got the commendation for that. I've got his full personal story that he wrote about it. I'll give you a copy of it.

So in terms of the environment of Sydney at that point, when war was declared, can you remember where you were?

Yeah, yeah. I was at Freshie, as usual. But on me way home, Sunday night,

16:00 and I went round to Manly Surf Club with a few of the blokes, with friends, with you know, all the Manly blokes, Robin Biddulph – a great swimmer – and his brother Ted and all those blokes, and where I heard Menzies' speech. But I was working in Lowe's on the Friday night when the war broke. And that was when Hitler invaded Poland.

16:30 And it happened about six o'clock on a Friday night. And of course, you know it was… We knew the war was on. A repeat of '14-'18. And my boss, a little Pommy bloke, he said to me, "What're you going to do, Lane? Will you go?" And I said, "I suppose I'll have to." But you know, when you're… The news was what had happened on Saturday.

17:00 They'd cleaned up Poland in no time and then on Sunday night, that's where I was in Manly Surf Club with the radio on. And I can always remember [Australian Prime Minister Robert] Menzies started off, "It is my melancholy duty to inform Australia that Britain has declared war on Germany and because of this, we are at war." So that was it. I thought we'd get torpedoed when I was going home on the Manly ferry.

17:30 **And what was the reaction of the blokes in the surf club?**

Oh, you know, we were all very upset, you know. We knew that this was going to change our life, you know, and didn't it? You know, that's what it did.

Did you discuss enlisting?

Oh yeah, all me mates were talking. They told us that, you know, not to be rushing madly to Victoria Barracks, had to write in an application and

18:00 put it in. And of course, all the Freshie blokes were, you know, straight into it. I'd just turned 21, but the blokes who'd been running the club about five or six years older than us, you know, most of them were straight in. Donny Wauchope, he went straight to the 2nd 1st Field Regiment, but a lot of Manly blokes

18:30 and North Steyne, Queenscliff, all around there, were in a unit called 55 Millimetre Howitzer Gun. And a lot of them were in that and of course there were quite a few of the fellas in the army in that area because there was an army barracks somewhere out North Head, I think. Anyway, things

19:00 sort of quietened down as far as the enlisting was concerned and I put an application, but I hadn't been called up when I got a call up for the UTs, the Universal Trainees that were conscripted as Australia's first action to handle the action, and handle the war. And that's when all us 21-year-olds, went

19:30 into camp. One way and another there was a lot of boys, as I said before, from Lewisham School were in camp at Liverpool. And what I mentioned before, Johnny Keedle and Pierce Capanis, were two of them that were just, you know… It must have been shocking when they were taken in and they weren't trained at all, you know, they'd never been into any action and they were young

20:00 and even their officers were probably the same age as them. And I believe that somebody yelled out, "You're in action." You know, and that was it. They were all gone in no time. They didn't have a chance. And I believe they didn't even have green uniforms, you know, they were in woollen uniforms. I don't know whether that's true, but somebody told me that.

You mentioned before, the enlistment process, that you were kind of interested in going to artillery, but you

20:30 **ended up becoming… in field ambulance. Did you have any expectations at that point about what you were going to achieve by being involved with the war?**

No, not really. Not really, but you know, I became a corporal after we came home from Greece because the unit was.. It was

21:00 a terrible thing that happened to the 2/5th AGH. We landed in Greece and we went to a place called Ekali and there were some buildings, but we pitched tents. And it was a rather wealthy suburb evidently because some of us were billeted in houses and some

21:30 were in tents and some were in buildings. And the sisters were there and they knew from the word go that they had to get those sisters out. They knew the war wasn't going well. And I for the first week or so I was in a tent down with all my mates, with Titch Foster and Murphy and all me good mates. And then they said, "If you're going to answer the mass for Father Galley Grevermorn, you

22:00 better get up there in one of those cottages." And up near him so as that when you wake up in the morning you're together, you know. That sort of thing. And I went into this place, I moved out of the tent with me mates, and you sort of crossed a road, road ran through the camp, there were an air force, an aerodrome, right beside us. And it was unbelievable, they put this hospital beside the aerodrome!

22:30 Any rate, I went up and I was in that cottage. It was an incredibly beautiful home. Terrazzo floors, terrazzo staircase, you know, everything in the bathroom was unbelievable, bidets, they had everything, beautiful. And down in the garden they had every fruit in ripe, the fruit was in ripe and flowers were in flower, you know. It was gorgeous.

23:00 But there were newspapers everywhere and the bloke, the family had got out very quick, because I'd just read all the papers and business that they had. Any rate, you know, where time is irrelevant, but I remember one time when we said the mass, the priest come down and we were in a tent between our hospital and the aerodrome.

23:30 And the Stukas come in, Messerschmitts and Stukas come in and strafed. And the ack- ack [anti-aircraft shrapnel]was falling through the tent roof. I know that somebody got badly wounded there. I forget... I can't remember exactly, but it's in the 5th AGH story.

Did the padre continue the mass?

Yeah we did. I went and put me tin helmet back on. Would you believe it.

24:00 I'd put it over somewhere and went and knelt down behind him and then when that, I could feel this flack coming through, you know it was through you know, it was from our own ack-ack. So anyway, that's the last I can remember of that and then...

Just on that thing of religion, were you Irish Catholic?

24:30 Yeah, I was Irish Catholic. Of course, me Irish grandfather he converted me old grandma Walker, Ellen Mary Walker, her converted her and she was the best Catholic ever of the whole family. I mean, in the finish, poor old Gran was the only one who used to go to mass. You know, that's how it was and...

Did you go to church in those days? Before the war?

Yeah. Yeah. I did

25:00 but I got into trouble for standing outside the church in Harbord when we used to go.

So you had one foot inside and one foot outside?

Yeah, but everybody got religious in a way, when they joined the army, but...

In what way?

Well, they at least go to mass now and then. You know, something like that. But the priest said it every morning. That started

25:30 with me back in just before we left Rehovet to go to Greece. And on the boat going over. And when, you know when the Germans broke through I was in this cottage and all me mates were down in the hospital in the tents areas. And the bloke who was in charge

26:00 of all the batmen, I was virtually batman [servant] to the priest, but the only duty I performed for him was to say the mass. He said to me, "Lawrie, I don't want you near me, you know, I don't want anybody to look after me." And that was just all I did for him was answer the mass. And...

When you say 'answer the mass', is that like an altar boy?

Yeah, an altar boy, but you know, males, you'll find now, there's not

26:30 many altar boys. There's a lot of grown men at that..., but there's altar boys too. Any rate, this fella was in charge of the batmen, charged into the room about three or four in the morning it was and he said, "Lawrie, what are you doing here?" He said, "Come on, the Huns have broken through. Get your gear. You've got... Your Eminence is down on the road. Get your..." I started to, you know, I got me kitbag, "Don't do that," he said, "all you want's your rubber, your

27:00 cyclone cape, your overcoat and what you... your gear, your good boots and that." So I just picked up all me stuff and I walked... you know, walked down the road and I could see all these ambulances lined up and I walked up to one and a fella named Jack Harrison, he was a staff sergeant, he said to me, "You been told to go?" I said, "Yeah." I said, "Where's Titch Foster and all me mates?"

27:30 And somebody said, “They’re up the front there.” So I just got in the ambulance where I was. When I got to Athens, we drove to Athens in the ambulances, to the railway, and when we got out I found that there was only one third of the unit there and my mates weren’t there. Oh, I felt bloody awful. You know, then I thought, “Oh well, they’ll catch up,” you know. “We’ll all get caught here. There’s

28:00 no way they’re going to get us off this land and take us across the sea.” This was how I worked it out. How could they possibly you know, take us from Greece over to Athens... over to Alexandria, see? So that’s how I was thinking of it and I thought, “Oh, they’ll be...” And somebody said, “The 2/3rd, the 2nd group are coming at five o’clock tonight.” We went at five

28:30 o’clock in the morning. The second group were five at night and the third group of the final lot, the next morning. In the meantime the sisters had been taken to boats in Piraeus Harbour. There was a few that were held back that were told. There’s a lovely part about the matron who was in charge, I’ll show it to you later, what her

29:00 problems were, those women. Any rate, we got on a train, and as far, first I can’t remember exactly. We got to Corinth in the train, I can remember that. Any rate, when we got to Corinth, that was the end of the train line. I think they’d destroyed the bridge so as the Germans couldn’t get across,

29:30 see, to make it tough for the Germans. I think that had happened, I forget. Any rate, they came to the garrison they said, “Now go for your life, across and get on that hill over there.” Fairly large hill, you know, almost a mountain. “Get there and keep your face down.” So you know, there were hundreds. We charged over and got down on the ground a bit up the mountain and just laid there. The engine was still, you know we could still see it

30:00 down there by the railway station. And then all of sudden there was a group, there must have been, oh, 30 or 40 planes in formation. And they came down. God, I’d never seen anything like it. And we thought, “We’re going to cop this now.” You know. They went around the mountain twice in that group and then went away.

30:30 Oh God, didn’t we heave a sigh of relief. And any time, you know you’re tempted to look up and everybody says, “Keep your face down!” You know, they can see faces, evidently, from planes, whereas in your khaki uniform and your ground you’re camouflaged.

So what did you do, you just stood there?

Oh, I just laid there until the planes, you just, you know we’re told to lay there and wait. So when they went, those planes, they said, “Now we’ve got to

31:00 march.” I can’t remember how far we marched, but then we joined trucks and we got into these, you know, ordinary three ton trucks and then they started to strafe us. And I remember an officer running to the back of the truck, he said, “Please yourselves, stay in the truck or get off.” So I thought, “Well, I’ve got a better

31:30 chance out in that grass out there, you know on the side of the road.” So I jumped out of the truck. I think that happened two or three times, but I always, I told... What’s the boy’s name that I first contacted? The act of... A man beside me… I shouldn’t record this. A man beside me started to say his act of contrition, you know. Well I was a little bit religious, but

32:00 I couldn’t understand that. I thought to meself, “You should have done this before.” And I saw a damn silly picture once that Chips Rafferty was in and some bloke said that he had his Lord’s Prayer beside him. It’s a lot of rot. If you say any prayers, you say them to yourself.

So this guy was saying his act of contrition to himself?

Very loud, very loud. He was quite carried away. I was scared too, but that was a different reaction

32:30 as far as I was concerned, you know.

Did you know this bloke?

No I didn’t know him. There was a whole lot of units there, you know there were...

And what would you do when you’d jump out of the truck?

Oh I’d just get down and keep me face down, lay down as low as I could. You know, until it was over and they’d say, “Right, get back.”

And what would you think of?

“God, hope we make it.” You know, that’s all. That’s all you’d think of, “Hope we make it.”

You wouldn’t pray?

No, no I didn’t. I think it’s a bit late to be praying when you… you know, that’s not sincere

33:00 is it? When you pray cos you think you’re going to die, that’s not right.

What was the act of contrition, can you recite it?

Oh yeah.

"Oh my God I'm utterly sorry for having offended thee."

Oh God, I hope Grandma Lane's not looking at me now.

33:30 "And I detest my sins and be forever over evil because they displease thee my God. Who for the infinite (UNCLEAR) so deserving I offer my love and I firmly resolve to mend my life."

Or something, can't remember it.

It's changed these days.

Yeah, but

34:00 any rate, from there on, we got to a place called Argos.

Before we go to Argos, I wouldn't mind asking you a couple of questions before you left in the Queen Mary. You mentioned Sir William Morrow, what was he like?

He was a lovely

34:30 man, terrific gentleman and a very, you know, good man. And as I say, he was Sydney's leading lung and heart specialist and a real gentleman, you know. And he was a wonderful bloke. There was some, you know those officers, all the officers except say the adjutant, he'd be a permanent army man,

35:00 you know, to organise and the RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] was a fellow named Don Mould, he was in a militia unit before the war and he became RSM, knew his job, and all those blokes that were in those different militia units, they marched in with their rank a lot of them, you know and... But as far as... When we were at Greta, we did a lot of

35:30 marching and we got a lot of lectures from the… And I did nursing, at Greta, we were on the hospital and you used to go and like… One job I had, was when an ENT [ear, nose and throat] specialist was doing some simple procedure on a patient. You held the tray for him and that sort of thing and then just looked after the patient's needs. That's all it is in nursing, unless you're, you know,

36:00 a very highly trained operating theatre assistant or something like that. And I always remember at Greta one day there was a procedure where they pass underneath the... a cane through the nose and then they punch it... I don't know exactly what the operation is, but I remember the bloke who was there with me, was a big fella about six foot four,

36:30 and he was a trained nurse, but he was trained mental nurse. And the man, the doctor was a fella named Doug Perret, from Newcastle and he was a terrific bloke. Any rate, he's doing this operation and he comes to the part where he's got to thump this steel rod through the anthrop or whatever it is, and this big bloke just went

37:00 flop. Fell and went down. And you know, he was a trained nurse, but he'd never done this, he was in Callan Park Mental Hospital, training there. You know, but I got a hell of a shock that day when I saw him pass out.

He just crumpled because he…

Yeah... it didn't help me much either, but the bloke was well anaesthetised I suppose, but

37:30 he any rate, he fell and it was one of the incidents I remember. But then after that I was actually offsider for four or five months, wait a minute, May until October, oh, I was about three or four months on this ambulance with a little bloke named Jimmy Kettle who was a bus driver from the Manly depot. And he was a very witty little bloke and a very clever little fella, but it

38:00 nearly killed me. When we had to put big blokes up on the top rung of the damn ambulances, and they were old ambulances, you know, I'd have to... poor little Jim'd be up one end and I'd be up the other, you know, like if we were in the camp, if it were me or Bs we could get somebody, but if were at Maitland Hospital or somewhere we didn't get any help. Anyway that was just one part of it, you know.

So how would you get them onto it?

Oh you'd just slide them into…

38:30 They'd be on the stretcher and then you've just got to get them into the position and slide them in. You stand, when you're going to put them in, you stand at the side and put the first part of it on and you work back and you get them back and push them in from there, but if it's got up on the top rung, then it's not very good, you know.

And was Jimmy Kettle too small?

Oh yeah, very small little bloke, Jim, yeah, but he was a driver, see. So

39:00 anyway, we'd go to Maitland and Newcastle sometimes and you know, I was on that for quite a while.

Tape 4

00:40 **You mentioned before that Sir William Morrow gave you a few lectures, you've mentioned a lecture about inspiring people to join his regiment... unit...**

Oh well that was only...

01:00 not so much a lecture. It was a request on the morning we were on parade.

Did he give you any other lectures?

I can't remember. He did, I'm sure, well all the doctors did.

Can you remember any of the lectures that you were given?

I can remember some in the field ambulance, but I can't remember the... no I can't remember any of those.

Just in the initial days before you went, what... how did they actually instruct you, as to

01:30 **things like, hygiene and physiology and the actual stretcher bearing, things like that. How did you... Did you get lectures or...?**

Yeah, but from our NCOs. In the... and from staff sergeants you know, blokes like, who'd been, one fella had been a health worker in a

02:00 council. He give us a lecture on hygiene and all that sort of thing.

What did they tell you in that lecture about hygiene?

Well, now in one... The big thing as far as a limb went – a broken limb – was the Thomas splint. Well I don't know how many times we did the Thomas splint, you know, but we didn't get a lot of that, they might have lectured some of the qualified nurses, but I don't remember

02:30 getting lectures there. But later in the field ambulance in 1944, we had a wonderful bloke named Apps, Reg Apps, and he was a brilliant lecturer and he gave us a lot of wonderful lectures about the system, the heart and everything, but we used to go over the same thing a lot of the time, you know. And he'd come in, you're in the shed up there in the [Atherton] Tablelands,

03:00 he'd say, "Well, we'll go over such and such today." "Boo!" "Well what do you want?" "Sex. Babies, tell us about married life, what... tell us about babies, about birth, childbirth." Well he gave us some marvellous lectures, not so much about sex, but as you know, about things that'd be important in our married life. He was a wonderful bloke.

03:30 Only young, too. And another bloke named Wilmer, Doctor Wilmer, he was from Brisbane, he gave us a lecture... there was... the great drug had just come in. God, my memory's going.

Penicillin.

Penicillin had just came in, you know, so Wilmer got us one day in the shed and he said, "Now I'm going to show you blokes how to give an intra-muscular injection." We were all trained to give a subcutaneous

04:00 injection, but only if you had to, you know, because there's always officers around to do that. But we used to get taught how to and we'd have to do one on somebody who'd just come into the unit, needed his different needles, injections. But Wilmer got us this day and he said, "Now, this isn't subcutaneous because you've got to get into the muscle." He said,

04:30 "A volunteer on the table. You'll do, Pringle." Pringle's one of these cheeky buggers, you know. He says, "Take your trousers off, get up there on the table." He said, "Now, you prepare your needle, you clear it." He said, "But the important thing is that you mustn't hit anything that you're not supposed to hit." He said, "Now you take the man's right-hand cheek of his bum." He said, "And you draw a cross in it." He said, "And then you put the needle on the outside top quarter

05:00 of that cross." He said, "That's where you put it." He said... and Pringle turned round and he said, "You're not going to do it, are ya?" And he said, "No, Pringle." Bang. And he put it in. Oh God, poor old Pringle nearly went through the roof. I don't know whether he had anything in it, but he gave it to him, my God that was funny. Yeah, but that's how you give penicillin, but of course this other, you know, us, you've got a fair bit of muscle on your arm there that you can

05:30 give it in, but he's showing us the safest place for us to learn to put a needle. Now the other thing that... Now I went to that unit as a... you know, somebody who had never been with them, up until 1944, but the CO [Commanding Officer] of my company, a fellow named Ken Jones, he's a lovely bloke, he was doctor and he was a major,

06:00 and I got pretty good pals with him. And he said to me one day, we'd been on the Tableland about six months, you know, and he said to me, "Lawrie," he said, "there's a malarial control school that's being done up division so and so, place next week." He said, "And they want a fella to take charge of the admin [administration], march the school in and out, and just discipline them, you know."

06:30 There was about a hundred fellas from the 7th Div [Division], all the different units, military, artillery all that sort of thing. So I said, "Oh, okay." It was a month. So he said, "Go around and see this major." I went round and he said, "Righto, we'll see you tomorrow morning. Bring your gear and camp over there in the tent." So I got there the next morning, lined all the pupils up that were going and told them we'd be marching into this and time was nine o'clock and everything else.

07:00 So I marched them on into the thing and he got up the front and he started a lecture. And you know, at first I thought I was going to walk out. I thought, "What the hell am I going to walk out for?" So after about a quarter of an hour, I said, "God, this is,", you know, "I'm going to do this school." So I did the school. Took a month and, you know, it was quite a break for me away from me own unit, something different. And

07:30 at the end of the school there was an exam and I got the highest pass in the exam, see. And he said to me, "Lawrie, what do you do around your own unit?" And I said, "Oh sergeant, you know, just a drill sergeant whatever, general duties." He said, "Would you be interested in doing this, the coming… interested in this

08:00 school, you know, this unit?" He said, "You'll go to Brisbane University for a month to learn about entomology, you'll do this and you'll do that, you'll be away a couple of months, but by the time we're ready to go, you'll be in charge of a group." And I thought, "God." And he said, "You'll be a lieutenant." And I had never entertained any idea of being an officer because there's nothing in the field ambulance

08:30 much, there's about one bearer lieu [lieutenant] and a couple of administrators, you know. Everybody else is a trained medical officer. So I went back to me unit and I told Ken Jones. I said, "He's offered me a job." And he said, "Oh you can't go in there, Lawrie." And I said, "I'll be a lieu." I said, "I've been five years in the bloody war and now I wouldn't mind being a lieu."

09:00 So he said, "Oh well, think about it." So the next thing I know, he said, "No Lawrie, you can't go." He said, "This unit, you're trained in this unit." I said, "Well Ken, I'm going to go over your head, I'm going to go to the CO and I want you to parade me to Humphries, our CO, and I want to go." And he said, "Look, we've made arrangements about the…" He said, "You can go and see Humph [Humphries]."

09:30 So he put me in with the colonel and I said, "I just want to appeal against the decision that I can't go to this malarial control unit." And he says, "Well you can't, that's all there is about it." And I said, "Well I want to be paraded to the brigadier." He says, "I've already seen him." He said, " I had a drink with him last night." You know. That's how he was. And would you believe, they had a sergeant

10:00 in it who they didn't like, and he was no dunce. He was a pretty clever bloke, but he didn't like the army. And they sent him to that malarial control unit, he went to Brisbane and did the months course in entomology at the university. Had three weeks at home and then come back and join the unit as a lieut. And he came into the tent one day, to us, to where he used to sleep – he slept in our tent –

10:30 come in and he said, "Look at me pips, Lawrie. Look. Look at 'em." Was the most unbelievable thing has ever happened to me. They just, he was very unpopular, they didn't like him and they were surplus a sergeant and that's what they did. And of course, he was very capable, he did the job. So that was my chance of being a lieut.

Did you resent the army for that decision?

No, I really didn't want to leave the field ambulance, you know, I'd

11:00 really got in with that, you know, I was enjoying meself with those blokes. And, you know, they're forever me mates and I love 'em too. Oh it was a funny show; it ran itself, you know. The boys were wild and as I say, they'd done a wonderful job. They did Syria, with the 21 Brigade, they came back and they did the Ramu Valley, and then they

11:30 did the Kokoda Trail. And it was after the Kokoda, I don't know which comes first. Anyway, it doesn't matter. They were given leave and then they reassembled in Brisbane – can't remember the name of the camp – and from there they went to the Tablelands. And the last campaign we did was Balikpapan.

So before you actually went away, on the Queen Mary, what…

12:00 **how did that work? How were you trained? How did you work out what you had to do within the field ambulance unit? How were you trained?**

Just what you were going to do, what you were told to do. On the Queen Mary I did a bit of nursing, I got put down in the hospital ward. And, you know, blokes were getting fevers and tonsillitis, all these sort of things. You just

12:30 do what you're told, give them their medicine and that. But they don't have any great, really well

trained nurses would do that, but they had hundreds of blokes like me that just had to do what they were told. It was even like that, you know, by the time I was in the field ambulance. I still had to do what the company commander told me to do. And all sorts of jobs that

13:00 general duties, you know, there's a hell of a lot of work to do. As I say, with the 5th AGH they had 1200 tons of equipment that had to be packed an unpacked and taken from here to there and it'd never... I remember out at the ordnance store at Leichhardt, here's the gold medallist at university, Vernon Barley, with Titch and I, we packed 1200 mattresses, about 15 feet high,

13:30 took them off trucks as they delivered and packed them in... Here's Vernon Barley, the famous surgeon, and he got in and worked with us, doing things like that. He was a wonderful bloke. We, you know, you got to know your officers and.... But on the Queen Mary, I just did what I was told, that's for a while I was nursing and. But yeah. You're a general duties private

14:00 but if you did nursing you got an extra shilling a day. We were on five shillings a day when Titch transf... That's why he wanted me to answer the mass so he wouldn't... If he was nursing he couldn't do that you see, and he only got a shilling a day extra, and that's, you know... I'll tell you a terrible thing about Greece, too.

14:30 It finished up that we were the only group that got away, the sisters got away and our colonel, Colonel... oh gosh... this is terrible this name business, he was a gynaecologist at Bondi Junction. Bill Kaye. Colonel Bill Kaye, he was a decorated officer in the First World War.

15:00 He was, you know, commander of a field ambulance in the First World War so he just walked into command of this 5th AGH. He was killed down on Piraeus. He was getting the sisters away on a boat and there was a terrible raid, and he had terrible head injuries. We found that out when we got to Greece, when we got to Crete, we found out that he'd been

15:30 killed. It was unbelievable.

Did you meet him before you left?

Oh several times, you know, his son also served right through the Second World War. He's our president, in the 5th AGH association. The secretary of it, fella named Vince Egan, he rang me this morning to congratulate me on me birthday. He said, "Sorry I missed ya on Tuesday."

16:00 I was 85. But Vince rang me – every year he rings me before nine o'clock, "Happy Birthday, Lawrie." He does it to everybody in the unit. He's got all our birthdays. Terrific bloke, God, he's held this association together for years. And, you know, he's the sort of bloke you'd want to get to tell you about the prisoner of war bit, about the prisoners. But what... I was just going to say a while ago, we

16:30 were the only group that got away, 1st and 3rd, and all the rest were taken prisoners. And of course, right at the end, they were told, you know, that we can't get out and they all cheered. They said, "We're here, we'll do the job, we'll look after it, see." And the bloody paper in Sydney printed the story, 'The 5th AGH volunteer to stay behind'. And then everybody's asking, "Well what's wrong with the mob that go out? Didn't they volunteer?"

17:00 You know, it was a bloody terrible mistake. And you felt awful because, you know, you had no idea what was going on when you left. If I'd have known that Titch and Murphy and, you know, my good mates, weren't going, I'd have never got in that ambulance. Because, you know, it'd be just the same as everything else you'd done in the unit with them. You just stay there.

So I feel like in a sense we're jumping forward a little bit in time.

17:30 **If we can maybe come back, because you mentioned that you didn't get lectures and before you left there weren't many lectures. But how did you actually get taught what you had to do? What your job was as a stretcher bearer?**

Well now, you did stretcher drill. Now that... You did it by numbers. But it becomes important because to

18:00 load people into an ambulance, you know, it takes a little bit of nous. You can kill a patient if you can't do it properly. You were taught, one of the..., you know, things they went over and over was this Thomas splint because it used to be attached to the stretcher. In part when they got them onto the stretcher. I think at Liverpool we had

18:30 lectures about war wounds, how you would treat a war wound. But I mean, in actual warfare, in the original war wound, every soldier carries your first field dressing. Now if a man was wounded, he'd have his first field dressing and perhaps the first... See the first blokes who handle

19:00 the wounded are stretcher bearers – bearers in the infantry battalion. They are blokes who are usually in the band or in some part of the unit that is not the actual rifleman and they..., you know, they're the infantry. They're the mob that really, you know, they're the fellas that take their life in their hand and do the job and a lot of the others, the engineers and although it's

19:30 not for me to say who does what. But the first field dressing and whatever the field, the unit, the battalion bearers had. They would probably know how to just suture... to prevent haemorrhage, prevent

shock, give a morphia needle, put the quarter on his forehead to say he's

20:00 had a quarter of morphia. Those sort of things, yeah I was taught these. I can't remember them. I'm having trouble remembering when and where.

Just to get the chronology right, did you actually, when you joined field ambulance, what was your actual role when you first enlisted? Did you get told that or were you… how did it work?

When I joined the field… you mean, at the very start of the war?

20:30 That was all that I had, was what they decided because I knew resuscitation, drowning a man, that's something. And probably they didn't have a lot of people and, you know, the people that really joined and made the 5th AGH were St Johns Ambulance blokes, and a lot of those bus drivers. They all do a very thorough first aid course.

21:00 And then the actual blokes who've worked in hospitals as working as trained nurses, male nurses, there weren't many male nurses in those days. The only ones I knew there, were in, you know, in Callan Park mental, most of the nurses were blokes who had trained as mental nurses. There was about 20 of them in the 5th AGH. And those blokes

21:30 who were in the St Johns Ambulance and all those bus driver blokes had all done a very thorough first aid course, and that's made the nucleus of your nursing team.

And where were you in that nucleus?

I was just an offsider to a field ambulance or could be put into a ward, and just look after a patient under instructions from what he's…, you know, was

22:00 to be given. Just make sure he didn't get something he didn't get. And, you know, I gradually just got used to helping with things like that. But you know...

So when you say, 'an offsider', were you an assistant to the nurse or the doctor or were you a stretcher bearer?

Stretcher bearer only. Now, see, now you've seen so many pictures about the Kokoda Trail

22:30 that's all I know about it. Now all the carrying, all the bearers there were the fuzzy wuzzies [Papuans] and our own blokes, you can bet your life on that. Because they'd be the first one, his battalion bearers would be the first people to see a man who's wounded and look after him. You know, there's so many things that people just had

23:00 to do that they didn't know how to do. Even when I joined the field ambulance, I didn't, you know, ever actually attend to a wounded man straight away. Because in the field ambulance you've got three companies. There's the head of the company and there's two bearer companies. Now, those blokes are bearers. But they take their wounded

23:30 from the bearer men most likely, you know, in theory as I know it. From the battalion stretcher bearers. They would be the first would handle a bloke that's wounded. But, you know, at Balikpapan, there was no ambulances – all we had was jeeps, jeeps converted to take three… to

24:00 take two stretchers, because you had the driver in the road. But you'd have two on the left-hand side, the opposite driver's side, and perhaps walking wounded area for other blokes. But, you know, that's all that I can remember doing the work as far as carrying them. The rest of it would be done by the battalion bearers and the first

24:30 bearers the stretcher bearer companies, A and B Company in the field ambulance. And I was in the B company when we did our training in Mosman, Port Douglas. But just after that, Ken Jones come and told me, he said, "You're going to be in headquarter company with me from now on." So, you know, I just got put from

25:00 one place to the other. And all I did when we were in the stunt [action] at Balikpapan, was what I was told to do. Get tents up, organise people to do jobs. Just look after things that your commander told you to do. They had

25:30 a resuscitation tent. They had a big tent we put up, you know, if we got wounded that needed to be with us for a while. But before us, these two companies are bearers and then they get back to what they call the 'advanced dressing station'. And we had quite a lot of patients there. You had to do terrible jobs laying your fellas out that had died, that

26:00 had been killed. You… if a bloke was dying, you never left him.

That must have been the hardest part of the job, was it?

Well, you know, what… It didn't happen to you that often. But

26:30 plenty of people did that. But laying your own fellas out. Dreadful. And, you know, there's so many bloody accidents happen. Our own fellas, accidentally shooting one another. And so many ridiculous

things that happened, you know, like, in the landing, the first night ashore

27:00 you never move. Like, once it's dark. They never move. And then anybody that did move, would have got shot. And the poor little bloke who was RAP [Regimental Aid Post], there was a RAP bloke in the 14th Battalion and he moved and he got shot. Everybody knew him, you know, in the whole brigade.

27:30 And other things, you know.

When you're carrying somebody that's wounded, there'd... would there be... what kind of logistics and things would you have to consider when you're carrying somebody?

Well, you know, if a bloke's on a stretcher, well, you know, I just go like hell to get him to the advance dressing station. And just do what's normal

28:00 you know, what you can. Haemorrhaging, if you can... I never had to arrest haemorrhage for anybody, you know. But thousands of blokes in field ambulances did. And there were silly damn things happening, you know. As I say, there were too many accidents, you know. One thing I can remember, a little bloke, he was

28:30 sitting in his, like they were on the perimeter, quite close to the Japs and they're in a weapons pit that they make for themselves. And that's where they are until you gotta do something else or the Japs raid them or something. ... Both got a rifle and one bloke accidentally shoots the other. And I mean, this was happening, this happened all over the place. Not all over the place, but far too often., you know. I couldn't believe how many

29:00 times it happened. And, you know, if you know the bloke, that's hell.

Were the accidents human error or bad training?

Yeah, human error, human error. Oh, not bad training, you know, the... you could... I mean if you're sitting in a weapons pit. I never had any experience of the Japs, they sent a lot of raids and that. But I imagine if those fellas are there, they're on edge.

29:30 You know, you've got to look after yourself. But it happened too often. And tragic, one of the, you know, one of the worst things that I ever saw, I had to lay this man out. This man was a decorated NCO that had become a lieutenant, now he's the...

30:00 After Balikpapan they made a landing on the 1st of July and by about the end of July all we had was established the perimeter. And the 7th, the brigade, was behind that perimeter. They'd send parties out to find more Japs or something. And this man, I don't... I can't remember, I don't remember whether the war had finished or we were... It was after the 15th of August. But he was

30:30 standing, there was a big log, a tree. And just resting against this tree was a Stanley submachine gun, which were not a favourite gun. And he had a machete in his hand, the gun was just there. And he had a machete in his hand and he's talking to somebody and he's just chipping the log and the bloody gun went off and shot him straight through the forehead.

31:00 I couldn't... You know. And they brought him in. And the war was over. I'll never forget that, you know, that was... As I say, silly accidents.

31:30 It was the most unbelievable thing, and it went straight in there. And, you know, we had him in our mortuary tent and then you've got to lay him out. And there were all graves for people, I can't remember them collecting people for us., you know, there's things I can't remember. But

32:00 **Where did that happen?**

That... at Balikpapan, at a place called, Sepingeng. We were, you know, outside... inside a perimeter that went so far and they said, this is it. Well, they made the landing and then it took, I can't remember, I think it was about a month and we had the perimeter

32:30 covered., you know, they had the battalions... it was 21 Brigade which'd be the 14th, 16th 27th battalions lined out at that perimeter and now and then they'd send out a party of blokes where... You know, you just might be unlucky there. See now, one of those boys, that malarial control unit that I was going to go to, they were in our brigade. Well one of them,

33:00 he went to an area that was inside the perimeter. And he was, you know, they were spraying DDT [insecticide] everywhere so we'd kill all the mosquitos and we wouldn't get malaria. And there was a Jap in this hut with a geisha girl and the... What was his name? I forget. Nice little bloke from Victoria. And he went into the hut

33:30 and the bloody Jap was ready for him and shot him. No, it wasn't him, his offsider went in, that's right, and I remember talking to him and how upset he was, you know. This Jap was, he was a Jap that had been left behind by his mob, you know. And here he was in this sort of a hut, inside the perimeter, evidently, and they went to spray the place and just... I don't know whether he

34:00 got into them first or whether they disturbed him, you know. But that boy in the malarial control unit,

he'd never been, you know, he would not have had been an offensive soldier, like he's a... he's doing, yeah, he didn't have a weapon. Those sort of things were happening too often, you know, that's...

Was this Japanese soldier smuggled into that house,

34:30 **was he taking refuge...?**

Oh, no he's been left there. He's left there. He... they were... they had had it. Like there couldn't have been a very well organised army there, because, you know, the Yanks were way ahead of us, they were up on the north like at some of the big places. And we were coming behind.

35:00 Our divisions did, the 9th Division went and did Tarakan, that's where Diver Derrick [Victoria Cross winner] got killed, at Tarakan. And then the 7th Division, we did Borneo and the one brigade went round the back of thingo, they landed in three different places. But we landed on the place that went up

35:30 towards Sandakan. Remember the terrible story when there were three left out of the battalion? [Japanese enforced march of Allied Prisoners of War killed all but three] But we had no idea then, that that's what was up there. We got far as we wanted to and we... Where our ambulance was at that time was on the beach with the perimeter going from the beach around to whatever area they wanted to cover to a road.

36:00 And just before the war ended we were going to move the ambulance to another spot. And my instructions were to take three or four blokes and go further up the beach and dig a latrine trench, you know, so as it... The first thing we can do when we get into the camp was

36:30 put what they call the thunderbolt on it. It's a great long board thing with toilet pans, you know, and you dig the hole and then you put that over it and that's the toilet, you see. And as far as memory goes to me that's what I was told to do. Take these three or four kids and we went up and we slept the night and we were to get into it first thing in the morning and do the job. You

37:00 know, you were on the perimeter. But the funniest thing happened. We were on this beach, we pitched our tent for the night and we were down in a sort of a gully, and all of a sudden all hell let loose. And they started dropping bombs. "Oh, God! Where am I?" And, you know, I pulled the tent... I thought there might have

37:30 been a landing, you know. But didn't have a clue. And this raid went and, you know, bombs, when they hit the water they go off just the same as they do when they hit the earth, you know. Any rate, it was the Japs' last gasp. They were evidently still over on the Celebes, and they'd had enough planes

38:00 and enough bombs to make this, you know, last raid. And God, I was there. I thought, "Wow!" I didn't have a clue what was happening, whether they were making a landing. And here there's five of us, there all by ourselves, like. Any rate, it was a raid. And it just finished and that was the end of them. You know. We never heard any more from the Japs.

38:30 And it must have been the very last gasp they did in that part of Asia, anyway. You know. Because it only went for about ten minutes, or a quarter of an hour and I don't think they killed anybody. I don't think they did any damage. But they evidently were trying to make some sort of a action to impress us. But of course, we were only there six weeks.

39:00 And the 15th of August came and the war was over. But what happened with me then, was because I didn't go into New Guinea, I missed all that part of overseas service. I didn't have top points to get home. So I stayed. I had to stay and I became

39:30 quarter master sergeant. I became a warrant officer. It was just something that fell in my lap because I was so long in the army. But I would have much preferred to have done those campaigns in New Guinea and be going home as soon as that war ended. As it finished I went home in January. I had to go over to the Celebes

40:00 place. What's the name of the place? Any rate, it was a great pleasure resort before the war. And we were there rounding up Japs. The three battalions still had to go over there too. And they were getting some awful diseases. We had an incident where

40:30 they started to get infantile paralysis. And, you know, first of all this boy got a cramp in his hand and he was brought down to... He was at a place with one of the battalions, I don't know, not far away, and they brought him in and the next thing his chest has gone and they wake up that he's got infantile paralysis, you know.

This was a soldier?

Yeah.

41:00 One of the kids that had been through campaigns and everything. Well the next... We had no way to treat them. Infantile paralysis. What's the other name for it? What Jeeves has got, the bloke that...

41:30 End of tape

Tape 5

00:35 **So this must have been polio.**

Yeah, and it was demoralising, because once it got to their breathing, the only effective way we had to help them was to seesaw them. And we had the blokes

01:00 in the unit were taken at turns to put them… They'd put the stretcher across something, a trellis, you know, something that you'd hold, a trellis, and seesaw them because the action is like the pump in the machines that they put them in. And I think we got five cases and they flew one of the

01:30 machines from Australia, and only one. And we had two and three blokes going at the one time. And it was the most demoralising thing, you know, to think those kids had got through the war, and here they pick up a bloody virus. And then, I think there were a couple died, I think they... See they couldn't get them away.... in moving a stretcher.

02:00 No way to get them home, doing that. But I can't remember how many of them got it. But I think a couple of them died.

How does seesawing help?

Well, it throws your wind, back, see. That's what the pump does, you know, on the machines that the, you know, that great American actor that had the accident on the horse, and he's in one of

02:30 these machines.

Christopher Reeves?[star of "Superman" movies]

That's him, that's him. Now he's in one of those machines. He's been in it all his life, since he did that accident. Now that machine pumps their wind in and out. See. Cos it pumps their lungs so as they breathe.

But it doesn't get rid of the polio in this instance of the soldiers.

Oh well, if it gets to their lungs, that's it, They're in a machine.

03:00 **So does the virus kind of spread through the body gradually?**

I don't know. But all I know is that it was the most demoralising thing that, you know, like, the war had ended in August and we were there until December and these silly sort of things were happening all the time. You know. And other things that, you know, unthinkable.

03:30 **Can you begin by sharing some of your memories from Greta and the training exercises there?**

04:00 Yeah, well, mainly it was marching. We went for a lot of route marches and the unit did very well. And you do about 15 or 20 miles in the day. It was 50 minutes marching, 10 minutes rest. And you expected to cover three miles in this. And

04:30 you know, this was a great part of the training, I suppose. It tends to discipline, get people working together. And when we'd march back into the camp, you know, the other units'd line and cheer and give you a bit of a pat on the back, even though you were just medical blokes you could march, you know, that sort of attitude. We played a bit of football, we played

05:00 medicine ball. We, you know, had a little bit of a hospital going and some of us got a bit of time in that. From Greta we... I was in one part, sent for about three weeks or a month, we went down to the ordnance building in Leichhardt and packed up 1200 of this, that and the other. 1200 beds, 1200

05:30 mattresses, all the x-ray stuff. And the officers were with us from time to time. Different officers'd come and we got to know them that way. And a lot of the time, you know, you'd go to a dance in Greta, in Cessnock, Maitland,

06:00 Singleton, and always you'd be flat out to get that last bus at about midnight. Always one of my old mates, that only died recently, he's telling me he missed the last bus, and he had to walk from Cessnock to Greta and he got to a road sign, and he said he remembers well, striking a match to have a look up

06:30 at the road sign to see where he was. And he lovely old bloke, he was taken prisoner and distinguished himself all the time in hospitals there, and when he came home he eventually got the Australia Medal for good work he did with the POWs [Prisoners of War]. But Greta's just one of the many memories.

07:00 That was the thing, you got a bit of a break. When you went on leave for a weekend, the train'd come from Sydney and if you went on to Greta you had about five miles to get back to the camp. So every time we got outside Greta somebody pulled the emergency cord and the whole train emptied out and run up the paddocks to the unit, to their

07:30 whatever they were in. And, you know, those are the sort of memories. And as I've said before, I was offsider to a little fella named Jimmy Kettle that had a great sense of humour. And we got on well together. On the way back from Maitland, if we didn't have a patient, he taught me how to drive.

08:00 But that was against the rules. But I didn't do very well. I never got a licence. That was Greta. Not much really there, except that. We went from Greta on the train, down through that back line, a goods rail that comes through round about Glebe and takes you on to right down to

08:30 the Quay. We got on the little ferry that took us over to Queen Mary, 52,000 ton wonder of the world at the time. Was moored in Athol Bay, just in front of the zoo. And we got on that night, on the 19th of October. And then on the 20th of October, we went out, 6000

09:00 people on board. And although there were notices everywhere, 'The walls have ears and the enemy's everywhere', there were about a hundred small craft took us out of the [Sydney] Heads. And it was something to remember. And it was good one for me because I'd rowed into the Heads the year before. But I never came back in after the war.

09:30 I came home from the islands to Brisbane, got the train down from Brisbane back home to Sydney. But on the [Queen] Mary there was 13th, 15th, 17th Battalions and Brigadier Murray was the OC [Officer Commanding] ship, all the troops. We got a bit of swell in the...

10:00 Oh, at Melbourne, the Mauritania and the Isle de France, I think, were the two ships that joined us at Melbourne. We crossed the [Great Australian] Bight and we got a bit of a rough and a lot of us were sick. The only way to avoid it was to get onto your back in your cot. And we waited off

10:30 Perth, and the one of the battalions that would have joined us then was the 16th Battalion. And when you talk of the 16th Battalion you think of a wonderful soldier named Sublett. Now when he joined the boat there, that'd be October 1940,

11:00 he was a young bloke who'd done a bit of militia work. He finished up the colonel of the 16th Battalion. He was given great credit for what they did in the Owen Stanleys [Owen Stanley Ranges]. I think it'd be very interesting history to know all about Sublett. He was acting brigadier

11:30 when the war finished and he was still a rosy-faced boy. I made inquiries about him since he's been back in Perth, through the years. I believe he's still there. But that'd be a wonderful story to know of the career of Sublett.

12:00 Often on the Tablelands, the fellows from those different infantry battalions would come to our mess during the week – you didn't have much to do of nights. And they'd come into our mess, we'd have a drink and yarn and that sort of thing and I've always remembered one night, in a place at Kirrai where we were camped

12:30 there were some fellas from the 14th Battalion, and old bloke named Sid Bell from the 16th Battalion, who was a First World War soldier, and Ivan Dougherty [Major General Ivan Dougherty, GOC 2nd Division CMF], came into the mess during the night. And as a bloke who never seen any action with an infantry battalion or

13:00 any other offensive units, I was amazed to listen to Ivan Dougherty, talk to the fellas out of the battalions – privates, NCOs – about what they did. Even I remember a bloke from the 14th Battalion, Jimmy Coy, he

13:30 was a medal winner. And I remember, he argued with his brigadier about what he should have done in the Ramu Valley and what he did. And it was absolutely amazing, to hear Ivan Dougherty argue back and tell what he did, what he thought and so on. It was really amazing. But later on...

Can I just ask about this

14:00 **Brigadier Subbick?**

No. Yeah. Sublett. I think was the spelling.

What was so special about him?

Well he rose from an NCO when he joined that army, step by step to become commander of the 16th Battalion. And I don't know the great history. But a lot of credit was

14:30 given to Sublett for ideas about what they did over the Owen Stanleys – the tactics. And his battalion of course was one of the battalions that did that and the Ramu Valley and the 16th and 27th Battalions, 14th Battalions were in that, and the 2nd 16th Field Ambulance. And I wasn't with

15:00 them then. Then it went on to Balikpapan and he was the man that was commanding the brigadier. He was commander after Ivan Dougherty. He immediately ended the war. Sublett was brigadier and he went home from there to

15:30 Perth. But I think he's one of the people that you can talk about as one of the great Australian soldiers

because he wasn't very old when he did all this, I suppose he wasn't more than 25 or 26 when the war ended and he'd been right through that... all those campaigns that that brigade went through,

and rose from the bottom of the ranks to be the brigadier, acting.

Can I ask about the Queen Mary? You went on to Bombay did you?

Yeah, we went to Bombay on the Queen Mary. We had a bit of a turn one day, the food was served in three sittings of 2000. Now, this particular day they

served lamb's fry to the first group, who weren't very pleased, and they started to perform. Then the second group come down and they performed. In the end there was a carpet four or five inches thick of lamb's fry and porridge all over the Queen Mary and the boys got into a lot of trouble for that bad behaviour. It only happened once. When we got to

Bombay, there was a boat, an Australian boat called the Illawarra and we unloaded from the Mary onto the Illawarra so many at a time and went into the Bombay wharves and for the first time in our life saw how they lived there. But the amazing part was, when we were watching before we got onto the Illawarra

it was a day or two. We watched the British Army blokes, how they were treating the natives on those ships. We couldn't believe it! It was just something different to what we'd ever seen. Then when we got into Bombay, it was absolutely amazing driving from there to a camp called Calava , where they're all the EPIP [English Pattern, Indian Product] tents ready waiting for us.

And the natives were sleeping in the street, it was just unbelievable to us, the betel nut all over the streets and natives everywhere, homeless men by the thousands. We got leave next day and of course everybody flocked into town, having rides in the gharries, going to the pubs, getting into trouble,

getting out of trouble and doing all the silly things. I went down with one of my mates, we went down to an area where the natives lived and traded. Like their standard of living, we were paid a rupee, which was about equivalent to our two shillings, and 16

annas made a rupee, and the native quarter monetary piece, was called 'pice' and they were 164th of a 16th of an anna, which was a 16th of two bob. So that's how their living standard was there to my memory. With four or five of my mates, we got a cab and we went

uptown somewhere. We asked the taxi driver to take us up the more wealthy areas of Bombay and he took us to a place where there was a great long hedge about half a mile long, surrounding a very big estate. So we went through the hedge and we found ourselves in a magnificent lawn area with a big

home, the big ballroom dance going on, it's about five or six o'clock and we just thought we'd introduce ourselves. There were a whole lot of cane chairs out on the lawn, so we went over and had a look, and in no time the manager of the estate was out to plead with us to go home. And he said, "Look, if I give you a drink, and some little food,

will you just sit out here in the open?" So we did. That was it. Some of us went in and had a dance. I remember the woman told me, she said, "I do love you Australians, you are so unconventional." So that was how we finished up, being kicked out really. And that next day, we got back to camp, the Calava camp. I think we were there for another day and then we were loaded onto the

Present and Dumier, and it was a French ship and it took us to Port Taufiq. From Taufiq we went up the canal and she moored in the middle of a place called Ismailiyah. There was an absolute dream in some part of the canal where there was a fair space of water and

it was very beautiful, palm trees and so forth around. From there we got the train up to El Qantara and then onto our first camp, which was in Kilo 89, which is part of Gaza and the areas where our Light Horse were in the First World War.

Did you visit the cemeteries

there?

Yeah, we went to the cemetery in Gaza and very unfortunately, one of the sisters of the 5th AGH died and was buried there with the soldiers of the First World War. It was a tragic, one of those aneurisms, and her name... I can't remember. But it was rather tragic thing.

She'd only just arrived in the Middle East and she was gone. But being the Queen Mary and all those different ships, the one thing that amazed me during the war about shipping was this. When our unit from Alexandria went to Greece, we were on a ship called the Pentland. On the next trip it was sunk. When we had to get out of Greece,

the night we left Argos, we were called together and there were quite a few, I suppose there were three or four thousand troops in various places around Argos, and we were told that the Voyager and the Perth were in the harbour at Argos and they would be helping to take us back to wherever we were

going. But

23:30 when we got to go onto the ships, the first thing we got onto was called an LCVP – a landing craft for vessel personnel. And they took about 40 or 50 and we went straight out and we pulled right in alongside the Perth. Anchored there in the harbour. And believe it or not, I yelled out, I had a mate on the Perth named Michael Hutchison from Harbord, and Noel

24:00 Hutchison was his name, we called him Michael because he was in the navy and that was Oliver's name. Any rate, I called out for him and his mates went and got him and I yelled out, he asked me who it was and I told him. We're talking up about 30 feet up beside the ship and he said, "Come on mate, we'll get you in here, we'll give you a cup of coffee, we'll warm you up, we'll look after you." Just then his boss

24:30 leaned over the edge and he said, "We've got all we can take on the Perth, you'll have to find another ship." So the ship we found was the ship of which the LCVP was part of. It was a ship that was built with six of these landing craft to make a landing of 1250 people. We went to the side of it and we got in the side of the ship and I was amazed. When we got in there were

25:00 thousands already there. We had our wounded, our sick and lots of others. I immediately, with a few of my mates, made my way up to the top and got around on a little railing part that went around the side of the bridge. I got meself with many others alongside the

25:30 the structure of the bridge and I tied my webbing around the ship's railing and I tried to go to sleep. We were about an hour out when all of a sudden the ship stopped and stood stock still. And right underneath where we were were four bodies that were prepared for sea burial, slipped into

26:00 the Mediterranean. It was very startling. Because it was the first of the dead that I'd seen. Of my unit, the group that had left Ekali a bit before us, were detailed to be the medical orderlies on the ship, which was called the Glenurn.

26:30 Now the Glenurn took us to Crete. Besides the Perth and the Voyager, we had an escort of two British ack-ack cruisers. The Dido and the Phoebe. As soon as daylight broke, the Stukas [fighter bombers] came they gave us everything they could give. They

27:00 flew beside the ship and strafed. You were just lucky if nothing happened. I got from where I was and I went round the back of the ship and I stood behind an ack-ack gun. And the Poms were going for their life. Putting up what they could to stop the Stukas. Now, the fellas that got on the man-o'-war told us... One fella told us that on the

27:30 Dido and the Phoebe, the captain, or his detail, laid on their back, watched the oncoming cruisers and zigzagged or stopped or charged... zigzagged, tried to stop the Stukas from hitting the ship. And they did a pretty good job, because we didn't lose a ship in that

28:00 encounter. We got to Crete. In the afternoon we were taken by some other ship, I can't remember, we... I can't remember if we unloaded from the Glenurn. But I remember things were very dicey as

28:30 we got into the wharf in Crete. In Sudan Bay – and there was only one wharf in Sudan Bay which would have been 1000 years old and was a brick stone, sandstone affair. We were just unloading there and the Dido and the Phoebe pulled into Sudan Bay and they were laying in the shadow of a mountain on the side of

29:00 Sudan Bay. Just as we were unloading, the Stukas came. We had no air support whatsoever, we never saw anything of our own planes during that evacuation from the time we left Piraeus until we got to Crete. Then when the Stukas come in they unfortunately dived

29:30 and they didn't know that they were going to get hit by a broadside of the two ack-ack crews laying in the shadow of a mountain. They obviously didn't see it and they got three out of five. We watched them dive into the harbour and dive into the hill on the other side. In about two hours after that some old navy planes appeared, which would have no chance of dealing with

30:00 Stukas or Messerschmitts. That night we moved up into the island and just had to find a spot. Our unit marched until it was quite dark and we had to break for the night, and we found out when we were broken off that we were in a ploughed paddock with lumps of hard earth about the size of a kerosene tin.

30:30 I never forget that night as long as I live. I couldn't get to sleep, you were dead beat, you hadn't had anything to eat much, and blow me down if a sandstorm didn't start and then, after the sandstorm, down come the rain. And it was really unbelievable because the rain formed little rivulets in amongst these blocks of red

31:00 earth and it was like a river running underneath your ear. We were glad to get going in the morning again. We had a bit of rations with us – bully beef and biscuits – as far as I can remember. I remember when we first landed at Crete there was a Salvation Army, or one of the charities there, and we got in a very long queue that gave us

31:30 an orange and a couple of biscuits. I had to split me orange up with about four or five blokes, and the

biscuits, so it didn't make much. But the next day we went fairly far way up into the mountains. At that stage we were a third of the 5th AGH unit, no equipment, nothing that we could do for anybody, and we just had to

32:00 wait up in the mountains there until some other arrangements were made to perhaps get us off Crete. I can't remember how long we were. But we went down to another little place on Sudan Bay called… I can't think of the name. Any rate, we gave them the name, it was a road ran up the side of this area. We called it, '42nd Street'. And the troops called it

32:30 '42nd Street'. And we were in amongst olive groves. That's all we were in, amongst olive groves. We got a little bit of food and the cooks emptied all the bully beef into kerosene tins or something. Any rate, they made a hot meal. I remember that the thing that I wanted most to do was to have a bath.

33:00 There was no hope. When we were up in the mountains a few of us got stripped and there was a little creek running down from the ice off the mountains. We tried to get the water to lather, I tried valiantly to have a bit of a bath. But it was impossible. Then the next effort was while we were there at 42nd Street. Away from the camp was an old place,

33:30 a house, and it had a magnificent fish pond, was about 20 feet square with lilies and everything in it, I though, "My God," you know, "I'm into this." So I stripped off and I got in and when I did I stirred up one thousand years of dirt and dust and rubbish. I was worse off than when I started. I got out of that and I went down to Sudan Bay and had a swim. And I got back and

34:00 I was all dirty with salt and everything else. It was the worst feeling I'd had for many years. And any rate, when we were going off there, there was an Australian freighter came and a boat called the Lossibank, she pulled into the one wharf and

34:30 1500 of us got on the Lossibank. She was a small freighter that used to run up and down the coast, I believe. We got outside Crete on our way to Alexandria, and I can't remember, there was a few other ships with us, and I think one of the ack-ack crews was with us

35:00 and a small destroyer. Any rate, they bombed us half way across on the Lossibank, and it was the nearest thing that ever happened. The bombs, we could watch them coming down from these two planes about a… They must have been about 10,000 feet up. They were Italian planes, they never took many risks. But they dropped these two bombs and the opinion was that they were 1000 pound incendiaries.

35:30 They actually whizzed over the masts of the ship, landed on the other side and the suction lifted the boards that cover the hulls. I was underneath on the first deck down, looking up through those boards, and they actually lifted up and fell back into place. The engine in the boat stopped. So there we were, not moving.

36:00 "What's happened?" "The engines are cut out, there's something wrong, the engines are moved." So we're there about quarter of an hour trying to get the Lossibank engines going, the other boat's circling, then a man-o'-war I think, I can't remember, yes it was a cruiser, and the man who was in that cruiser was in charge of this convoy, it was his place to get them home.

36:30 So after about a quarter of an hour, 20 minutes, he came over to us and he yelled out through a loud hailer, to the captain of the Lossibank, "If you can't get ship going in ten minutes I'm going to take your troops off and that's what you can do with your ship." And all the mob cheered – it was going to be very good to get off the Lossibank and get onto a cruiser. Any rate,

37:00 the engines ticked over and we got on to Alexandria quite safe. But the thing I started to say about the shipping was this, that Glenurn was a marvellous ship, one that took us from Greece to Crete. We came out of Crete about some time late May, June, we re-established again at Kilo 89 and

37:30 started to reform our hospital back to full strength. Then we got a job to go down to Eritrea, where the last of the campaigns were being fought through the Italian areas of Eritrea over Abyssinia, East Africa and those places. We came back as soon as the Japanese came into the war and immediately we were on

38:00 our way home. But when we left the Suez Canal, we loaded onto the Mauritania, in dark, in the morning, we were still there loading. And I looked out at the ships and lo and behold there was the Glenurn on the bottom in Taufiq Harbour. I knew it, because I knew the superstructure of the boat. I asked one of the crew on the Mauritania, "Is that

38:30 the Glenurn?" He says, "It sure is, mate." Now the amazing thing about it is this. That was 1941, January '41, '42, no… yeah, January '42. 1944, after I joined the 2/6th Field Ambulance we went to do our amphibious training at Port Douglas, Trinity Beach.

Tape 6

00:32 **So you were about to tell us about that...**

When I saw the Glenurn in Taufiq Harbour, I thought, "That's the end of that ship." Then three

01:00 years later in October 1944, when I joined the 2/6th Field Ambulance, we went the 7th Division down to the coast, we were on the Atherton Tableland, we went down to the coast, camped along the back of Trinity Beach and round about Port Douglas, I can't exactly say where, north of Cairns, and we slept on the beach

01:30 that night and the beginning of the training started the next morning. When daylight broke there were ships, big ships, out that were going to come in with small craft, pick us up, take us back to their ship and then the following day we would make the landing on the small craft. When I woke up, that morning on Trinity Beach

02:00 and I saw the big three ships sitting out, fair way out. I thought, "That's the Glenurn." I couldn't believe it. I said, "It can't be the Glenurn, it was on the bottom in Taufiq in 1942." So I waited, in came the small craft, the LCVP. And when they come in, when they got to the beach we would load in and there were Royal Marines

02:30 on the LCVP. So I said to one of them, I said, " Is that boat the Glenurn?" He said, "Aye lad, that it is." I said, "But I saw it on Taufiq Harbour." I said, "It must be a sister ship." He said, "No, it's not." He said, "That's the Glenurn." He said, "They raised her, took her down south around South Africa, way out wide into

03:00 the Atlantic and up back up to England and refitted her as a landing craft again." And I said, "Well what do you know." I said, "I came out of Greece on that boat." And I said, "This unit didn't do that," I said, "I wasn't with them then." I said, "I was in another unit." He says, "Well it'll be you and the captain," he said, "because the same old bloke's the boss.

03:30 But he's got a whole new crew." Well that was an experience in itself, that night. We got on ship and that afternoon, that evening, the captain of the ship, a real old sea dog, with a red sea beard and so forth, he came and they got the whole of the troops in on this particular part, midships,

04:00 the deck, and he announced that they'd split the main brace with the army, so we all got a pannikin of rum and a little bit of salty sugar, salty chocolate with sugar. Then he gave us a lecture about the navy. He said, "You must realise that today the 20th of October, is..." Might have been the 19th, I'm not sure...

04:30 He said, "Is truffle guard day." He said, "And that is a great day in the history of the British navy." He went on to tell us that a boy in the navy, at 14, gets seven and six a day and so forth and what a wonderful life in the navy. And he went on and told us all about Trafalgar and then he finished up and he said, "Britain

05:00 has never been defeated on the seas. And never will." And away he went, back up to his bridge. It was the most incredible experience, because, you know, we realised how badly off they were for shipping. They took that ship and took it halfway round the world and mended it and then came back in. In the morning, we all crowded onto the

05:30 LCVP, came into the... And we had to get off, you know, and it's a pretty bad experience to a lot of kids who've never been good swimmers or that. But fortunately we got them off in fairly decent order and marched on and finished the exercise. And then we went back up onto the

06:00 Tablelands. I think that was October, as I said, and we were there on the Tablelands until about March when we moved to Morotai. We unpacked and repacked in Morotai and got into... We took off from there in the ships. Which we were

06:30 going to make the landing. There were all sorts of ships, liberty ships, tank – boats to carry tanks. I was on a ship, not a liberty ship. But it was a landing – it landed vehicles. In the landing, I

07:00 did not go ashore with the assault troops, I think it was the third day that my crowd moved off. Our A and B Company stretcher bearers would have gone off earlier than us. We were headquarter company that had all the equipment to make the advance dressing station once we got ashore. Our CO was killed on the beach. Humphries.

07:30 Ron Humphries, who I had known since... he was one of the young captains in the 14th Field Ambulance, where I'd started of with a lot of my mates in January 1940.

How was he killed?

Well it was an unfortunate thing, it appears that there were some trees that had been partly shot down with fire. And one of them

08:00 fell on him and killed him. It was just a terrible thing. But he had a reputation, he always got on to the... with assaulting troops and he used to laugh and tell us he's going to take... He took his camera – he was mad about getting photos of up close. And he used to say, "I don't click the thing until I see the whites of their eyes." But poor old Humph, it was terrible.

08:30 He had a wife and kids.

Just with that injuries and stuff, you were saying before how several fellas got hit by friendly fire and stuff. Were there more casualties from the enemy or were there more casualties from disease or friendly fire?

Oh no, there were more from the enemy. More from the enemy. But one

09:00 incident that we handled it was from some fellas from one of the battalions, 16th or the 14th. There was a predicted shoot. They knew where there was a nest of Japs. The idea was, they'd go up and the mortar platoon

09:30 would fire the mortars. But they would send up riflemen in front of that and they would be ready. Once the mortar fire had finished and made a mess of the Japs the riflemen'd rush in and take it. But by a mishap they got up too close to their target. And there were about ten or twelve

10:00 wounded with mortar fire. And they come into our place, there's one... I knew one fella in particular because I'd played football against him on the Tableland, he was a young bloke, magnificent looking young bloke. Tommy Nylon. And

10:30 he'd been hit with a lump of mortar – it had taken the centre of his shin out. The surgeon in our theatre did what he could to clean the wound up and he still had, I remember this, he still had good circulation in his foot because he had a big calf in his leg

11:00 and he was a well-built kid. They raced, they took him as soon as they could, and the other fellas, to the 5th AGH, that's my old unit, that was on Morotai. And I never, you know, knew how he got on. But by the strangest happening,

11:30 when I started to work with the repatriation department about couple of years after the war, I was making the payments up one day and I come across Tommy Nylon, works at the limb factory. And I said to one of the blokes with me, I said, "I know this bloke." Sure enough he'd come, they'd had to take his leg off, they never managed to save it. The surgeon who did it at Balikpapan he was a great surgeon,

12:00 he did what he could to save it. And anyway, poor old Tom lost his leg. Then he became a very important person at the limb factory because he was a boy with a lot of nous,[sense] and he started to design legs and arms. They sent him to America and he spent time over there and came back with a good knowledge.

12:30 And he had a family and he had terrible luck. He was killed walking in a pedestrian area, I think, I'm not sure, I think it was between Central Station and round that area, where he come from the limb factory, near Cleveland Street. But, you know, there's bloke that... He was

13:00 only about 20 then, I think.

What about fellas who'd shot themselves, self-inflicted wounds, were there many of those?

No. No. No. There were some terrible accidents, you know, blokes cleaning their guns and shooting one another. I was amazed at, you know, that in two kids together in their weapons

13:30 pit, one of them might have had a smaller gun. But any rate, this boy got shot straight in the bladder. And we had him in our place for a few days and of course, he was a problem. Now in that unit that I was in the 2/6th Field Ambulance they had a fella named Blake, Ted Blake, and he was the most wonderful nurse that you could ever find.

14:00 He was an absolute wonder to the wounded, the jobs that he'd do and it amazed me what he did with this boy who had the trouble with the bladder. There's a thing called soluvac, that drops your drip into saline and these sort of things that they treat

14:30 the wounded with and feed blood to and that. And Ted, said to me, "I can fix this up." So he got a soluvac bottle, he emptied it and he reversed it and he put a tube down into the boy's bladder and it drew... it sucked the urine out of his bladder. And he was the greatest nurse ever, old Ted. And I believe

15:00 he came home from the war and he topped the nurses' exams in Victoria the first year after the war. But I haven't heard of him since. But that was one thing.

Did he get an award or recognition for that?

No, I don't think Ted got an award or a recognition. But he was a marvellous nurse, you know. I was doing the other,

15:30 like looking after getting people moved and putting up tents and that sort of thing. But he was bloody marvellous. But he was mad as a hatter. When we were there in that situation for about a few weeks, he used to love to play with telephones, field telephones. And he'd run a telephone to my tent to his, and he'd... and

16:00 that sort of thing, you know. And one of the funny incidents after the war, it had finished and we were

rounding up Japs by the thousand. And Ted gets a job, he's got to take all these Japs with bad teeth and do what he could for them. So me telephone goes. He's about four or five hundred yards away, and he said, "I want you to come over here and

16:30 just have a look at my dental clinic." So I went over. And he had these Japs queued up for a mile and they'd walk up, "Leesapelan san." "Get down here," he'd say, and he had a syringe and a pair of forceps and he said, "There's nothing in this bloody syringe." But nevertheless, and he was taking teeth out and then they'd get up and thank him. But their mouths were rotten, you know, they really

17:00 needed dental treatment. And that's how they were a bit that way, generally. All those prisoners that they caught. But they were so servile and so obliging that, you know, he just...

A different to what they were like as soldiers.

Oh yeah, they'd been told, "That's it. That's the end of the war." You know, and I was amazed how that... They

17:30 did have a few incidents where some of them had never heard... Well they found a bloke in New Guinea 20 years after the war, who'd never heard about the peace. But, you know, there are occasional stories like that. Any rate, Ted did a lot of marvellous work and anybody who ever knew him that was a nurse'd know how good he was and how wonderful he'd be to the wounded, you know.

Can I take you back, again talking about shipping,

18:00 **when was the first... I understand the first conflict you saw was when the Italians tried to bomb you going up the Suez Canal, is that right?**

Yeah that's right.

Can you tell us about that?

As a matter of fact, my little mate Titch Foster and I, we'd been detailed as bearers on the aft deck in case of a raid. And we were both out there laying on the deck

18:30 waiting for something to happen. And about 100, 200 yards back along the canal, I saw some of the stone work fall into the canal. And I said to Titch, "God, what in the hell would they do that for?" Then all of a sudden the siren went – we were already in a raid and that was the first bomb. And it landed on the edge of the... Of course we went for cover and

19:00 the ship, you know, they take some sort of evasive action. But they couldn't do much in the Canal. But it was also an Italian, I think, because we never saw the planes, we only, you know, saw the bomb drop in to the edge of the canal. And they probably dropped other ways where were couldn't see. But that was the first time I saw

19:30 any action, you know. And that was very little, compared to what was to come. But also, when we were halfway up the Red Sea, we were right opposite Masaur, where the intelligence was still occupying Abyssinia. And by coincidence, our unit went back there after we came from Greece and were in Palestine. We got this job to go down to Eretria. But

20:00 they... there was an air raid when we were right opposite Massawa and of course the Italians, they wouldn't have let a chance go to bomb a ship that wasn't going to knock them out. But later on, I took the advance party again, with Angus Murray, old Angus, the colonel. And there was Angus Murray, Eddie Thompson, who was the

20:30 wonderful doctor from PA [Prince Alfred Hospital] before the war. And there were two brothers, Halliday. One of the brothers, marvellous doctors. That were in that little group and when we only... we had about 20, 30 from the advance party to get to Eritrea first and do what we could to welcome the unit. But

21:00 when our advance party got to Cairo, to arrange for our ship down the Suez Canal and through the Red Sea to Massawa, which is the hottest place in the world. We got there and there was no ship. So the little Pommy bloke on the movement control, come out and he said, "Well, you'll have to go down the Nile."

21:30 He said, "There's a paddle steamer leaving there in a couple of days and so you can go down the paddle steamer." He said, "And when you get down into Sudan you can make arrangements from there." And he said to us, "You're doing a 600 quid trip in peacetime mate, you ought to be pleased." See. That was exactly he said. "Doing a 600 quid [pounds] trip in peacetime, down the Nile." So

22:00 sure enough we got onto the paddle steamer, I've got some photos of it there. There was a bloke trying to get a little goat to go up onto the deck of the boat and it wouldn't go, so he lifted it up and carried it up the deck. I never forgot that. And they were black crew, the boat I think is called the Thebes, after some part of Egypt.

22:30 There's some part of Egypt is Thebes. Then we got the train down to Aswan, where the dam, the great dam is built. And then we went down the Nile, until we got to a place called, Waddi Haifa. And we had

our own rations, we had bully beef, biscuits, pineapple,

23:00 IDL [long life] milk and a couple of some other things and, you know, we did all right in that and we could make tea. All day we made tea because as you'd sit on the deck and you'd have your cup of tea, and it'd run down your legs or off your backside and run down the deck, that's how... It'd come out of you that quick. And I always remember,

23:30 Jazza Elene, the bloke I talked about, he was a wonderful cricketer and footballer, Jazza was sitting there and he said, every now and then with a cup of tea he'd say, "Cost you 600 quid in peacetime this."

I don't understand why you were going down there.

Well we had to get to Massawa. So we went

24:00 down the Nile as far as Waddi Haifa and we had an incident with the Poms [British] there, we pinched some of their... and then we got a train from Port Sudan... from Waddi Haifa right to Port Sudan. And we passed two places, we stopped a couple of times, Djibouti and some other place. The British Army were the only ones there

24:30 and nobody left their buildings between nine and five. It was so hot. You stayed indoors. And for some reason, we pulled in there. We had a sick parade, I remember, we had to have a... We had some fellas crook [sick]. So we had to stop at Djibouti, I think that's the name of the place, there's another one, too, we stopped at. Any rate, there was a British Army were having a sick parade, they had their blokes, so

25:00 I went over with these couple of fellas of ours that were crook. And behind a bit of a curtain, back there was a British officer talking to these chaps about their sickness and that sort of thing, you know. And so our blokes got up and here's this bloke from Oxford, a doctor,

25:30 and he was an Indian. I got a hell of a shock, you know, because I'd expected I was going to walk round and see a lily white Pom. British officer, you know. I always remember that, it was so funny, what I saw surprised me. But he was very gentle with the chaps, you know, and any rate we... At Sudan, we'd got a bit of trouble with the

26:00 Brits [British] on the way. And when we got to the queue movement control there, they refused to give us any pay.

Had they heard about you stealing the beer?

Yeah, I think that's what had happened. But at

26:30 Waddi Haifa where we'd got off, there was a great block of beer, there must have been a million cartons of what was known as RB Lager. And it was built just in a great block, like a matchbox. And on one corner, looking that way and that way, they had an Indian soldier guard, and then on the other corner, at the other way, looked that way. So we sat there and

27:00 we looked at it and we said, "Well if we can get at that bloke here, the close one around that way and talk to him somebody can get a carton or two out of the..." Any rate, we got a few cartons. We brought them back to the steamer, to the little ferry, and we into it. Oh, God it was red hot, you know – you couldn't drink it. Any rate, we drink one or two and

27:30 we went round to Angus and said, "Do you want a drink?" He said, "Oh, I don't think so." Any rate, about an hour after, you know, the Nile travels at about a mile, two hours or some bob, two days. We're just shotting [tossing] the bottles over and all of a sudden appears an entourage, an officer, an orderly sergeant, an orderly corporal

28:00 a runner and six guardsmen or something. Comes up the gang plank, he says, "Where's your commanding officer?" So went round and we told... that we think we're in a bit of trouble here, the Poms have missed the block of beer. And he said, "Oh, well, I'll come round." And one of the things that happened in the Western Desert, we had a couple of old soldiers from the Western Desert who had been drafted into our

28:30 unit. One of them was a bloke named, McKenzie. And he used to talk through his nose – he had come from Melbourne. Any rate we were all sitting on there... One of the things that went on in the Western Desert was you'd steal Italian trucks and then you'd steal an Italian truck that a Brit had stolen, or somebody else had stolen, and then everybody hated one another about who was doing all the stealing, see. Any rate, this British officer said, "Major," he said, "your

29:00 men have done a dastardly thing here. They've stolen this beer." Angus said, "These men are a picked group for a special job," he said. "They wouldn't touch your beer." He said, "No, I don't... look we're through." And this bloke said, "But I insist, look at them!" he said, and he walked over and he had a look at the bottles going down... "Look!" he said. And Angus said, "And I insist. They wouldn't touch your beer, good afternoon!"

29:30 So away he went. And just as he got to the end of the gangplank, he said, "I know you Australians." He said, "We were with you in the desert." And he said, "And we're still a truck up." And old McKenzie leans back and he said, "Couldn't have been much bloody good, we wouldn't have let youse take it." Any

rate, when we got on that train,

30:00 and we got to Port Sudan and, you know, you couldn't have a shower, the water was still boiling of a night in the tanks. So you couldn't get a cold shower. So we went down Port Sudan and there was an American ship in. And there was an American bloke there, drinking, you know, two or three of them. But this big bloke, soon as he knew we were Australian, he was a '14-'18 war soldier and he

30:30 was there as a seaman. An old seaman. And he's buying us beer and he's telling us, "We served with the 14th Massachusetts machine gun battalion, 40 years." And we were nodding and saying, "Yeah." Any rate, he took us back to the ship and of course, you know, they've always got the best food. And we had ham and everything you could want. You know. And we had to get back to camp by midnight. Any rate

31:00 we went back and next morning, there was a little 500 ton tub [boat] that we were to go from Port Sudan to Massawa on. And I think there were 20 of us and a few officers. And we went out of Port Sudan. The water was like ice, you know, it was that clear and smooth,

31:30 it was unbelievable. About half an hour later we were into a storm and I was crook with all the good food and everything else. And the only thing I could do, I got down onto the edge of the ship, with a steel railing, you know, one of the uprights of the railing, and I hung onto it and I went for me life over the edge of the ship, you know. Oh God, it was awful. Then I forget how long we were

32:00 on that. But we pulled and dropped anchor outside Massawa, and the captain said, "We won't go in there tonight, the mosquitoes'll eat you alive." But they came out and ate us alive anyway, you know, on the ship. The next morning, it was so hot. It was the only day in me life I passed out in the heat. I was sitting on a railing and the next thing I knew I was on the broad of me back. And

32:30 you know, it just hit me like that. Any rate, the next thing was an experience too because, to get to Asmara, from Massawa, you go in a little train that climbs 3000 feet, that on the way up, you go up a thousand and down two, then up another two thousand, down three and it is

33:00 the most incredible trip. Tiny little train and all the time you're looking over there about 3000 down, you know. Any rate we got to Asmara and then I forget we... we got on another train that took us to Nefasset I think. A place called Nefasset. Then we got on trucks, we got to the aerodrome

33:30 from which we were bombed, when we were going up the Red Sea and in the Canal. And that's where we were to establish the 5th AGH as a small 600 bed hospital because [German General Irwin] Rommel was giving them a hell of a time in the desert and they were a bit afraid of things. Don't think this was said at the time, but I've read it since, or heard it, knew it. And, you know, they

34:00 they got the Allies back as far as the... I think they got them back as far as Mersa Matruh, you know, it was a very bad situation. They wanted to be sure they had a base hospital where they could fly people. Well we were there for about July until December when the Yanks come in. And we were handling, you know,

34:30 casualties from all the different troops around there. And there was, this aerodrome was a magnificent set up, you know, it was where they trained their pilots. It was their air training scheme and the road ran through it and on the other side of the road was one of the most marvellous things I've ever seen was a Sudanese Defence Corps battalion. And they all wore

35:00 habits, khaki habits. With a bright coloured sash, emerald green, cerise, beautiful orange. And every morning they would go out and march down that road. There was two white men in charge of them, a colonel and a British warrant officer. And they run the control, you know, they controlled those defence corps men. And we had one

35:30 of our officers, Eric Galston, he's 97 now. He's living at home. He was at our reunion a year ago and I sat with him, had a little bit of a talk. His brother was the regimental... the battalion MO [Medical Officer], to the 2nd 1st Pioneers. And he was decorated and he got a military medal while they were in Tobruk for something he did that wasn't

36:00 medical, you know. And any rate, Eric Galston, was a wonderful man. He got interested down there, he got into the last conflict with the Italians at a place called Gonda, that was the end of the show. And he went down there with them as a medical officer with a surgical team, and after the war he went back there for three years and taught the

36:30 Eritrean people and their, you know, what he could for three years. And then again, about five years ago, he went back again and he brought a young bloke back who wanted to learn prostate surgery and also get all the equipment that we use here. And they did that for him.

In the Middle East,

37:00 **during your time with the field hospital. Did you have to deal much with VD [venereal disease], given the boys are going constantly off to brothels?**

Yeah, there was all that. Blokes are silly, you know. I'd be terrified to go anywhere near any of those people. And there was an AGH, a special AGH at Kilo

37:30 89. And I did three weeks there, you know, just looking on, seeing the things whatever happened and they... And see at that time the cure for gonorrhoea was about three months, and if you had syphilis it was unbelievable, you know, you didn't get cured I don't think. But they, you know, looked after 'em.

38:00 And they used to get terrible desert sores in their penis, the head of the penis and that sort of thing. And there was another thing that was particularly of men that weren't circumcised, they'd get a thing called balanitis, inflammation of the head of the penis, you know. And they, you know, they looked after them and some of them went home. As a matter of fact, the worst turnout

38:30 I saw of that, was when we went over to Makassar in the Celebes, after the war, because a lot of blokes hadn't been home for two years or something and of course there were little women over there who were only prepared to, you know, they ran brothels. And we got a lot of gonorrhoea and I used to go up and sit with with old matron

39:00 and tell the bloke whether he had it or not you know. Some of them'd think they had it and didn't. And they were curing it. It was being cured in two days with penicillin. They were coming back in a week with their second load. That's how it was. But it wasn't really funny.

Tape 7

00:35 **You mentioned earlier that you went to El Qantara and that you saw some First World War cemeteries.**

Not at El Qantara.

Where were the cemeteries?

01:00 The cemetery was at Gaza and they were our and British soldiers of the First World War. We did bury a couple of people there – one of the sisters was buried there.

I just wanted to know what impression that had on you, seeing the graves of World War I troops.

Oh, you know, how you felt for them and.... But the thing that was good, you knew they had been looked after

01:30 properly. The graves were beautiful, well looked after and you can't do anything more for the soldier himself than to give him a decent burial and his people can go there and see the grave. In 1977, I went and saw Titch Foster's grave in a place in Holland. Vede, I think it is, the name of it.

02:00 But Titch is buried in a grave, just on the outside of the town and it's a very mixed lot of soldiers because it was right at the end of the war that Titch was killed in April. And he's buried there with American airmen, British soldiers, American soldiers, all sorts. But yeah, they can't do much more than what they do. And there

02:30 was also an Australian cemetery on Crete and I don't know how that was an older, it was a last war cemetery and I can't remember what the war, what association there was with Crete. Must have been from Gallipoli or somewhere, they might have had something there, I don't know.

Just on the subject of Titch, where did you meet Titch

03:00 **and what involvement did you have with him over the course of the war?**

Well, Titch I met in the 14th Field Ambulance when we were called up as UTs, all kids 20, 21 years of age. Titch went to a Patrician Brothers school in Glebe. He knew other blokes in our unit later on, you know. He was from Glebe and

03:30 we just got good pals, because we talked about football and I told him I was going to make it with Newtown and I did, and he was very pleased for me after that, you know. And one bloke in particular, Jack Elene, the good cricketer and footballer, Jazza as we used to call him, he lived where Titch did in Glebe and he was very well known. And, you know,

04:00 you sort of had a connection. But as I told, Titch and I got separated in Greece.

What was Titch's role..?

He was the same as me. But he wanted to be a nursing orderly too. And that's why he asked me to just take over the answering of the mass, and, you know, that's part of his life. That's where he went and

04:30 of course it was terrible to come home to his mum and dad and I was so pleased that, you know, even before I went away, his mother said to me, "You know, Titch is going away because you blokes are." I said, "No he's not, he's going because he wants to go." And, you know, when I came home in 1942, there was a prisoner of war meeting, in somewhere near Hyde Park in one of the big pubs or something, a big hall. Anyway,

05:00 and I thought, you know, this newspaper that had implied that the people who got out of Greece didn't volunteer, and I thought, "I'm going to front up to this." So I went and I knew Titch's mother was there and other people who I'd met, another fella named Alec Fleming. Alec's mother was there, I think. And I went and I had a talk to them at that meeting in POW and then of course

05:30 after that, I left the Fifth and went to the training battalion and also to the 2/6th Field Ambulance.

Was that the first time you'd seen Titch's mother since he died?

Yeah. Well he... No, he hadn't died yet; he was a prisoner then. But I felt that I had to go and tell them exactly what happened, what eventuated. And, you know, some of those blokes

06:00 had a terrible time. It's in the 5th AGH story.

How much did, you know, at that point about what Titch was going through?

Oh, not a thing, really. No, we didn't get any news. But medical personnel under the Geneva Convention can be swapped, Germans, Australians, English, Germans, and

06:30 there was an argument going on between Churchill and Hitler about this. Our fellas, I believed, they'd moved the hospital from Ekali to a place called Kikinya and they'd asked, you know, what was the position of getting these men sent back to their country, because they were under the Geneva Convention, able to be swapped with German prisoners. And

07:00 they did that and I remember when I was in that training battalion in early '34, a lot of them came back to be trained at Bacchus Marsh, at the training battalion. Although they'd been away and served, they were sent back to the training battalion until it was decided which unit they'd go to. And

07:30 I remembered the man who was commander of that a man who was the battalion MO to one of the battalions – I can't think of his name. Any rate he'd come home from the Middle East and he'd been sent back to run the battalion in Victoria and he called me up, he said, "They're all your blokes from the 5th

08:00 at my…" He said, "I'm going to give you them." I said, "No, you're not." I said, " I was the biggest larrikin in the unit." And I said, "Do you think they'll take any notice of me now?" You know what I mean, they knew me as a private, they didn't know me as a sergeant. And any rate it didn't matter, you know, they... It was all right, they just did what the other fellas did and got probably sent back to different units, you know, a lot of them

08:30 were immediately discharged. Probably most of those blokes that were sent back to the training battalion were noted to be discharged because they weren't, you know, fit to be sent away again. But I don't know exactly that's all of what I surmised.

Just on the issue of Titch, how did you find out about what happened to him and what did you do when you found out?

09:00 **Did you go and visit his mum?**

Well, I'll tell you what happened. I was at Morotai and we were repacking our gear for the landing. Another little bloke who lived in Balmain, Glebe, come... I was absolutely buggered, I'd been working all day and I was sitting down on a heap of mud or something and young, forget his name. He came running down to me and he said, "Lawrie, did you hear about Titch Foster?" And I said, "Don't tell me, he's home."

09:30 "He's home and we're all still here." Because a lot of them had, you know, we knew the POWs were home. And he says, "No," he said, "he's been killed." God. Absolutely shocking, you know. I couldn't believe it, because we were, you know, we used to talk about what we were going to do after the war. You know. Just absolutely like a bolt out of the blue.

10:00 Yeah, that was exactly what happened. He come running up to me and he yelled out about 20 yards off, he said, "Lawrie, you heard about Titch Foster?" And I said, "Don't tell me, he's home, and we're all up here. We're still…" You know, the European war had ended and a lot of the POWs were home. And most of my other mates were home. Alec Fleming and the famous artist, Justin O'Brien. Justin was in the 5th. And

10:30 we had lovely little affairs there with members of the unit and Justin and we've got a tape with Justin on. You ever heard of Justin O'Brien? Yeah, Justin and Alex Fleming another fella named Urky Alison, Urky's down in the Narrabeen, you know,

11:00 at that area where the soldiers are.

So how much information could that soldier give you about Titch?

Nothing, he only knew what I... that he was... that the war was over and the POWs were coming home. But the news was bad about Titch.

And did you go to visit Titch's mother after the war?

Yeah, I did. Yeah it was terrible. Poor old Rose and his dad... Knew

11:30 his dad – living image of Titch, you know. And a wonderful little bloke and their only kid, you know. But matter of fact, a lot of Anzac Days a lot of us'd go and see Titch's parents, you know. Have a dinner with them or something. And it was awful. They're a close-knit mob around Glebe and Balmain, those places.

12:00 **You mentioned that you set up on the Gaza Ridge, I just wanted to get... If you could give me an idea about how you set up, what kind of wards you created and things like that?**

The, all the wards at the 1st AGH, was the first hospital into Palestine, and they set up at Gaza

12:30 Ridge. Now the area was also called Kilo 89, I think that was the Australian camp area. Now they'd say, the 1st AGH, set up at Gaza Ridge. Now I said earlier a lot of the nurses and our MOs and that, they were detached from our unit to go and do jobs. A lot of the nurses went and worked in the 1st AGH. The qualified sisters went and worked in the AGH and other places.

13:00 And our camp was right alongside the 1st AGH and it was there that, you know, we go down the canteen of a night, there was a building, a canteen that supplied a lot of surrounding camps and you'd go down there of a night and have a drink and meet fellas from other units and that sort of thing. And as I understand it, that area where we were, you could actually find shrapnel and things

13:30 from the First World War. And you'd still find dugouts, places where, you know, you could go in a dugout that was used during the First World War.

Did you go in them?

Yeah, I've got photos of them. Just a few of us, in the entrance of one of those little, you know, spots that was part of that area and that's where we played our football match.

14:00 I've got a photo of the football match somewhere, if I can find it.

So how did you build the unit, the wards that you were talking about?

Well, this EPIP tent, it's got a six foot ridge pole. But it spreads to 40 by 38 feet, the outside pegs. Now there's an inner side to the tent that's hooked to the ridge pole

14:30 and then there's what they call the fly that fits over that. Now, that attached to that fly were the canvas walls. And you just, they run through with a string. Now if you just pitched a tent for nine blokes, they'd sleep side by side with about a foot there for their

15:00 you know, their gear. You'd go and get a fruit case or whatever you could find and you'd put that there while you were in this spot. But in the hospital, they used to call what they brigade them. Now, they'd run the rope from the ridge pole of one, under the main part of the tent, onto the ridge pole of the next tent. And you'd have a ward

15:30 with the ridge pole side on – it wouldn't be across, it'd be side on. And you'd have a path down each side of it. And you could put, you know, every bed about three feet along. And you called that, brigading them. I think I can show you something like that, before you go.

That's a very good description though.

Yeah.

16:00 So you brigaded those. But then again, there was a tent that the British Army had used and it was the hospital tent and it's called a hospital marquee. And it's much, much bigger than the EPIP tents. I think you had to brigade I'd say three EPIPs to get the same space that you'd get inside a marquee. It was a pretty difficult tent to put up, you know, you had to know

16:30 your business to get it up. And I made it my business to know it and I could put them up without any trouble. But I forget where I put the last one up. I think it was when I was with the 5th AGH. I think we put one up at Armidale. I can't remember now. But I know it was the British Army tent. But this EPI tent was magnificent and I think they're still using it in the

17:00 Indian army and I think they're used in all those camps where all those refugees are in Afghanistan and all these places we see. And they could withstand practically anything, except I remember when we were at Armidale, we got some freezing nights and the ice froze in the loop of the tents and they started to pull the pegs out.

17:30 They were a bit.... But they held.

What kind of climate were you dealing with there in the Gaza Ridge?

Oh it was beautiful. Bit cold of a night. I don't remember it was that cold. But it was beautiful, you could stay there all your life, it was a beautiful climate.

Did you have any trouble with creepy-crawlies or vermin?

No. It's very easy to get crabs,

18:00 you know, I forget, what did we call them? Mites. You could get that in different places . But, you know, hygiene's the number one thing in the units. That's very important about how you run those things and it's amazing how you, you know, you have to run them. As soon as you got to a place you dug a hole. And even if you were going to move on in a couple of hours. You didn't

18:30 put any seat on or anything, you just went there and did what you had to do and then before you left, you shove the dirt back in and covered it up. But the, you know, that's what I was going to do that last night that I thought we... the Japs went in Borneo. When I'd gone up from the rest of the unit with four kids, four blokes and

19:00 you know to dig the toilet up before the mob got there. That was how they used to do it. If you're going somewhere, you send an advance party ahead to do things like that.

So what kinds of casualties did you have there?

Where? At Balik [Balikpapan]?

No, at Gaza Ridge.

Well we never handled any casualties at Gaza Ridge. The 1st AGH was running them and that's where the first casualties came from

19:30 Bardia, Tobruk, El Alamein – that was later, El Alamein.

Did you see any of those casualties, or were you mainly stationed at the other... at Gaza Ridge...?

No, we were camped alongside it. But I didn't do any work with casualties in there, I don't think any of our orderlies did. But our sisters did, the 40 sisters that are attached to

20:00 the AGH.

Did, you know, any of the Sisters?

Oh yeah, yeah. Not many. I did get to know a few of them by the time we got to Armidale, you know, and when we were... like you never had much to do with the sisters when you were overseas, when we were overseas. They, you know, they had their particular friends who…

20:30 A lot of them, officers in the army. But unless you knew one of the sisters before the war, you didn't seek her out in... or bother about contact... you were with your mates. But I, you know, I got to know a few of them by the time Armidale, about five or six.

What kinds of stories did they tell you about the wounded from Bardia and El Alamein?

21:00 No, they never. No, they wouldn't talk about that. They did their job. As I said, we lost one of the sisters, had an aneurism and died there. And also, we lost another sister in Eritrea. She went for a ride in an Italian Alfa

21:30 Romeo that one of the British officers had hooked on and he lost control and hit a mile post – she got killed and he didn't. The night before we were leaving Eritrea. And everybody knew her as, 'Sunshine'. Her brother lived in Manly – Tiddy Morton. He used to call her Sunshine.

Just in terms of things like casualties, where was your

22:00 **first contact with them?**

On the Glenurn. On the Glenurn. That was the first time I saw casualties and that afternoon, in a shocking raid, there were a lot of casualties, I didn't... We'd had a group of the qualified nurses in the AGH to take over

22:30 and relieve the men on the Glenurn because they'd had such a bad time. And the man that was in charge of those was a fella who was originally with the 14th Battalion where we, you know, were in Liverpool in... early. Hewitt. Jeez it's terrible, what's his Christian name? Anyway, he had

23:00 a few other fellas that were very qualified nurses, you know, and they were detailed to handle things on the Glenurn.

So in terms of the Glenurn, I know we touched on the strange coincidence that happened where you saw the ship again. But what actually was your role in that incident on the Glenurn?

Nothing. When we left Crete?

You said that you had contact

23:30 **with casualties at that point.**

No, only getting through them, you know, seeing them. When we loaded into the side of the ship, that was the only time I'd seen. And as I say, an hour later, I saw four of them slide into the Mediterranean. God that hit me. That hit me. I knew I had to do something better.

So when you say you had to do something better.

I just felt that I could do something better, that's all.

24:00 **You felt like your…?**

Well, you realised that, you know, how would you say? The boys just flocked to the AIF to join up when the war broke out. They weren't going to be heroes or they, you know, they were just going into the army and, up till that period, it was an experience. But you knew that it was real

24:30 when you first saw all this happening. It's, you know, it's just that I realised that if I could do something better I would, you know. That's all. But you just do what you're told in the army, you… But I'd… You know, got to and did what I could, that's all.

25:00 I can't proclaim to have done anything wonderful. I'm telling you exactly as it happened.

I am a little bit curious about what kind of casualties you saw there on the Glenurn?

They were

25:30 people who were already treated for their, you know, they might have been hit with shrapnel or something like that. But as I got onto that boat, you know, you could see it all. We went through down about the lower decks and we were there for about a quarter of an hour and there were blokes with all sorts of bandages and

26:00 that, the fellas who'd… They'd got fellas in fact who were up as far as Olympus. And when the Germans were belting them back, you know, they got their casualties down through Piraeus, I think, where poor old Bill Kaye was killed. And then

26:30 got them onto those boats because the Pentland, was one of them. But, you know, I didn't treat any casualties in the Glenurn. I was there and went through and, as I say, there was a group from our unit that were detailed to help the crew in the Glenurn that had a pretty bad time, evidently.

Did you

27:00 **get to chat with any of the men, the wounded?**

Not really. Not really. What do you do? What do you say? You'd feel like, you know, you'd feel a bit silly asking a bloke what had happened to him or something like that. No, you.

27:30 I can't really get you as close as you want to be.

Just moving on to Greece. You mentioned that you stopped at Alexandria, on your way through to Ekali, you stopped at Alexandria?

We didn't stop too long, at Alexander then. Alexandria,

28:00 we were straight off the train onto the ship. They were raring to go, we were the last onto the ship. And…. But I'll tell you this. The night we were… I think we only took one night to get to Greece, I'm not sure. But it was early, it was good Friday, 1940, that we landed, that we got into Piraeus Harbour and the night before the

28:30 Germans had bombed and sunk a ammunition ship. And by coincidence, that ship was also, it was dropping armaments in Greece and then it had a load of printed notes for Turkey. Kaurus. And they were a small note, about that big, about four inches by two. And when

29:00 I got ashore at Piraeus I saw a bundle of these lying in the street, on he wharf area. So I thought, "I'll just put them in me pocket and forgot about it." And found out, you know, we talked about it to somebody that they were off the ship that's blown up. It was all over, you could've found them miles apart. But I got a little bundle that were just

29:30 had a band around it. I thought, you know, "Save these as a souvenir." I wish I did. Any rate, when we come back and we got off the Lossibank in Alexandria, we were, you know, pretty hungry, looking for something a bit different to the bully beef and biscuits and there was a great

30:00 railway area that was protected by a fence, like a tennis fence, you know. And outside this there's about a hundred, not a hundred, any amount of Gyppos [Egyptians], "Eggs a cook, orrangee." Bread, you know, all these sort of things, chocolates everything that they could get in Cairo which was all right. And of course all the fellas had drachmas, what we'd been

30:30 paid in, just the couple of times. But the Gyppos were a wake up to the drachmas – they were gone because Greece was gone, you know. We'd say, "Righto, oranges, a couple of eggs." And you'd pull out the drachmas and they'd say, "Finished drachmas, abyss. Abyss." So I'm… none of us could get anything

to eat

31:00 off them, see. But strangely enough there was a damn train loaded with Australian beer and all the doors were open and of course all the blokes went grabbing and smashing the cases open and get the beer out and oh, that was shocking – it was boiling, you know, they all got sick. But after a while I thought, "My kaurus," so I went away and I pulled

31:30 a couple out and I said to the blokes, "Come over here to the fence, we'll see what happens." So I went over and said, "Oranges? Eggs? Egg a cook?" So they looked at it. "Shufti," you know, "take." And they looked at their mates and about ten minutes confab, I still had hold of me kaurus, you know. They say, "All right, yeah, okay." So

32:00 we shared out the kaurus and we all got a good feed. But they didn't know that those kaurus could have been dead too, like the drachmas, because they were blown up off a ship. The assignment never got to Turkey, although they didn't know the story about that. They knew that Greece was finished. The Greek money was, you know, worth nothing because you couldn't, you know, they

32:30 didn't want it, they couldn't buy anything in Egypt with drachmas. Everybody knew the drachmas were finished. Oh we had a real good go at 'em with our... I still had a few of those kaurus, kaurus is I think how you spell it. I wish to God I'd a held onto 'em because it'd be a nice little souvenir now, from the war 60 years ago.

So in terms of things like currency,

33:00 **you mentioned in Bombay you were paid in rupees and drachmas later on, why was the Australian government paying the soldiers in the currency of where the soldiers were stationed?**

Oh well, that's your, you had the right to buy souvenirs and buy yourself a feed and your Australian money wouldn't be no good. You'd have to find a money changer to change it to get... You were always paid in the currency of wherever you were. Like

33:30 that photo I showed you of Titch and I on the Palestine note, Palestine pound note, that was the currency we used in Tel Aviv and Haifa if you got there. And all the other places.

So how difficult was it then for you to get rid of your currency if you had surplus once you left a place?

Oh well, the army'd change them back for you. You could put that... But I don't think that happened very often. You'd all get

34:00 rid of your money, you know.

Did you let them know that the drachma was obsolete, had been scrubbed? Did they repay you with the proper money you were owed, when the notes you had weren't useable?

Oh we got refunded anything... you know. You had no worries with that. The worry was, if you've got to get the money, that's all. The currency and

34:30 of course... and, you know, the same thing was when you went down through Egypt, piastres, piastres, what do they call them those things? I forget now.

And in terms of... what kinds of exchange rates were happening during the war if you can remember?

Oh, it was fair. Like you knew what the exchange rate was. I remember so well, our pound,

35:00 was, the English... for the English pound we could get one pound, five. One pound and five shillings, for the English money – theirs was more valuable and it still is. The English pound is still more valuable than the Australian

35:30 dollar. But there was no trouble with your, you know, you never had any trouble with finance and the thing was, if you weren't, like if you were in a campaign for a couple of months, or, you know, in some place camp, where you couldn't get to spend your money, then you didn't bother about payday. But then again, that was offset because the two-up was on,

36:00 you know. You'd gamble of a night. Some blokes'd play cards down the canteen, others'd play two-up [coin gambling game]. But that was the only other outlet you had for your money. But when we were back in Australia, like in any part, I remember on the Atherton Tableland, we got an issue of two bottles of beer a week, and you could always buy good

36:30 food in the canteen. Your own canteen wouldn't have a great range. But if you got to... if you went to Atherton or Kirrai or somewhere around there, Yungaburra, you could spend your money, you'd have your camp money. But a lot of gambling went on.

Were you into the two-up yourself?

No, I never liked two-up. But I loved having a bet on horses and I still do. And one of me mates, he

37:00 was a two-up man and he... poor old fella, he died about a year ago and he finished up RSM of the unit, one of me great mates in my tent. And we used to do a bit of reading and this fella was, you know, he became a particular mate of mine, Jack Mangan was his name, he come from Newcastle. And one day in the tent, I was talking and I used the word, acquiesce, and

37:30 Mangan said, “By God Laney, that’s a big word for you, acquiesce?” I said, “I’m not a bloody fool, Mangan. You read more than me, perhaps.” And then every now and then a spelling bee’ [contest] come up, see. “How many Ls in such and such?” And it went on and on forever, see. But we were there from about July, August until we left in about March. We were there for along time. And it was a great

38:00 camp and was healthy. We did a lot of, you know, a hell of a lot of stunts, marching, must have marched thousands of miles and you camp out and, you know, places we have never been. I woke up one morning out on the Tableland somewhere, I don’t know where it was, one of the pla..., you know, bush camp. And I slept beside a log that night, so as I’d be protected from the wind. And as I sat up, this is gospel,

38:30 I sat up and all the unit blokes are standing there all laughing at me, see. And I look around, there’s a bloody black snake on the other side of the log. And there was a fella named Ralph Cross, he was a real good man with snakes. And he just yelled out, “Don’t move, Lawrie, don’t move.” But I don’t know, I’d only just woke up. But the cooks and all the blokes that should have been out before me, they were there and some of them must have seen it.

39:00 Might even have put the damn thing there. But. Any rate Ralph Cross just went over and grabbed a stick and belted it over the head, you know. But God I got a shock. And lots of other places on the Tableland, there were diamond snakes everywhere, you know, the lovely... carpet snakes, carpet snakes, not diamond snakes. But diamond patterns on them and that. Every place we stopped of a night Ralph Cross’d go out and he’d come back with two or three snakes over his arm, you know. But that’s

39:30 how it was, you know. There was no real danger. You’d be stiff [unfortunate] to, you know, to have something like... be bitten by something like that.

Tape 8

01:05 **You were going to elaborate a bit more on the two-up.**

Well, with Jack. He really liked playing two-up and he said to me, “I’ve gotta win Lawrie.” He said, “I’ll tell you what I’m going to do.” See what’d happen, every night when we finished, you know, the day at about five or whatever, the big two-up ring’d start

01:30 up where it always started and Jack was doing his money. So he said, “Now what I’m going to do, I’m going to go up there every night and I’m going to risk five turns on the two-up to win one dollar.” He said, “I’ll risk 15 to win one.” He said, “And I’m going to work that for a while and see how it goes.” Well it went all right, he’d come back

02:00 just as we were sitting, you know, going to have mess and he walked into the mess saying, “I got it Laney, I’ve got her, I’ve got me dollar.” So this went on for months and months. And he had a good bank, he’d won, his system was working. He was risking 15 or more than that to win one, and it meant stacking up like the header the first time and he’d back tails and he’d lose his money. So next time he’d put two on. If he lost again, he’d put three on so.... But any rate, if

02:30 he had to have five heads or five tails in a row to be beaten, to lose his money without winning his dollar. Any rate he had about 300 saved up, you know, and this night, drink night, he gets as full as a jug, goes down to the canteen and gets into the cards and he turned the card for the full amount of his savings, and he

03:00 did his two-up money on the turn of one card. And he came back into the tent and fell into bed and drunk, you know.

And he lost it?

Oh yeah, he was on the turn of a card in the canteen. And of course the whole unit knew what was going on. They were all gathered round and this bloke, that, you know, running the card business, he was a sharpie, he knew and he finished, he got Jack in and he got Jack’s money. But God I’ll never forget that.

03:30 Was funny. But he was a great mate and we were with one another a lot after the war. And he developed the most dreadful cancers on his face. He used to... I used to tell him, he had that red skin, you know, and I’d say, “Jack, keep out of the sun, you bloody fool.” But he’d get out and with his book and he’d read. He’d... Any rate, it was terrible what happened. His nose went and his... Oh, it was dreadful

04:00 at the finish, you know. And then of course he got dementia and the last time I saw him, Bern and I went through Newcastle and we called in to see him and his wife, and Jack was really long gone. He didn’t

know me. And I started to talk about blokes in the unit and it jogged his memory. “I remember that Richards,” you know, the bloke that got my job with the malarial control – we all hated him because

04:30 he’d got my job and he was in our tent, too. But it was shocking to see Jack at the finish. Oh God, that was dreadful. And especially with dementia. And he was in a nursing home and he couldn’t manage anything, you know, it’s dreadful.

Just on the issue of Ekali,

05:00 **where was the rest of the unit when you set up there? Were they with you at that point?**

Oh yeah, the whole unit was there and the sisters were there too – they were in a hotel, not far away. Everything was, you know, arranged. But for the first fortnight or so that I can remember, I was in this tent with Titch and all me mates, you know,

05:30 and then they said, “You better go up and stay in that cottage,” see. So I went up there and was away from them. But I’d be called back to do things that I wanted to do and there was unpacking. As I say, the packing and the packing of that unit was unbelievable. And they only got half of it unpacked I think, by the time they had to leave. They knew... they were only in Greece a fortnight, when

06:00 it was obvious, they were going to have to go, they’d have to leave, and they started to organise things from that point. But, you know, I’m getting vague. I can’t remember particularly times of where I was, how long I was there and that.

You said the sisters stayed at a hotel, was that pretty common for them to stay at a hotel?

No, that was just that that arrangement was the best for them at that time.

Where would they stay?

06:30 Well they’d, you know, when they got to Gaza in the first instance they were in the tents. Their tents were pitched and they lived in the tents and like when I saw... remember a girl, oh God, she’s a character, and she had a big notice outside her tent on a bit of board, ‘Hag’s Nest’. And things like this, you know. Hag...

07:00 Hag’s Nest or something like that, she had. But they were girls that, you know, they volunteered for the job and they looked after themselves proper.

So they didn’t get paid?

Oh yeah, they got officer’s money. Oh yeah, oh goodness me!

And how many would be in the tents? How many girls would be in the tents?

I don’t think there’d be more than four of them in the tent. When we were in an EPIP,

07:30 five of us slept down one side, the entrance to the tent was one way. I think in one time they had the entrance to the tent the other way and we slept four each way. But we could get nine into a tent. And that’s the EPIP, you know.

And did the women have much privacy?

Of course, oh yeah, of course they were looked after. But I can’t,

08:00 I could look up that 5th AGH book and I’ll see the name of the place where they were. But they were, you know, they were no sooner in than they were told to go. That they would be, you know, that there was no hope that they were going to hold Greece. That was the situation. Though of course, I didn’t have a clue at that time. But reading the 5th AGH history, I found out more than anything I knew at that time.

08:30 Because we didn’t think we were going to get kicked out of there. I remember we lost Dunkirk, then we lost somewhere else. And then we... I remember one of our blokes abusing a Pom, he said, “You got kicked out of bloody Dunkirk, you got us kicked out of so and so and now you’re getting us kicked out of bloody Crete.” Blaming the Poms.

09:00 **You mentioned earlier, that there were air raids, in Ekali. What kind of patients were coming in?**

Oh, they were war wounds and sick blokes, you know. I never nursed, I wasn’t there, in the tents where they come in. But I’d help to

09:30 unload ambulances or something like that. But...

You didn’t get a view of what kinds of casualties there were?

Yes, no, no, no. I tell you what, I got views of casualty while we were still in Liverpool. Had a boy down there one morning dragged by one of the cavalry horses that they had a cavalry field

10:00 what do they call it? A horse, field ambulance, the horse galloped down through the grounds and he had his foot caught in the stirrup and he was kicked to bits. And we all rushed into the first aid tent to see what, you know, when he was there, what they were doing with him. That's the sort of thing you want to talk about, you know, that's… I can't tell you any more than I have.

10:30 **Would you similarly go into the tents when there were casualties, patients, or did you not have time to…?**

No, I didn't go looking. I'd be given something to do and I'd do it. I wasn't particularly anxious to become a nurse, you know. I was satisfied to do the job that I was given and of course by the time I was through a few years of it,

11:00 I knew what I wanted to do.

When you say, 'war wounds', can you describe, expand on that a little bit more? What kinds of war wounds were there?

Now the boy I was just talking about, Tommy Nylon, he'd been hit in the shin with a great lump of steel. There was a great hole in his shin and there was all proud flesh around the thing. Now

11:30 the surgeon had to get to and take all the rubbish away and then what he did, he made the top part of this, he cut it and then he brought it to a sort of a T and then the bottom part he did the same thing. And they hoped that when he got to Morotai in the 5th AGH, they'd be able to perhaps graft a bone into the middle.

12:00 As I told you, that never happened for Tom, he had his leg taken off. But the surgeon that did that said, "He's got enough circulation in that foot to perhaps stand a graft. So we're going to send him that way." Now...

Was Tom at Ekali?

Oh no, he was in the

12:30 14th Battalion. I don't think he was old enough to get into the battalion, into the war for that. All right I'll talk about another casualty. There was a… When we were at the advance dressing station at – can't remember the name of the place – there was a

13:00 a water point about half a mile up towards the perimeter. There was a water point there because there was a creek, flowed down from up way past the perimeter and we were able to get water there. Now they had put a couple of guards on that water point, because probably they thought

13:30 Japs'd be after the water, the same as we are. There was a young bloke, I can't remember what unit he was in. He was at the water point and a Jap came down, floated down, threw a hand grenade in and blew him up. He came into our unit with shocking wounds and he lost his left eye, and the

14:00 surgeon thought he could save his other eye. Now, they did what they could and my company commander said to me, "Lawrie, if we could get him to Morotai quick, they might be able to save his other eye." He said, "Now what do you reckon, what do we do?" Now I'll tell you what I did. I got a jeep and a driver,

14:30 and we would have been about 50 miles from where we landed, the landing where the beach was. I thought there might... A boat was in me mind. I thought, "Now this poor fella, I just hope his people don't hear this." He had diarrhoea; we had to carry a pan for him. He had not, you know, was dressed as best he could be with

15:00 the dressings. He had other wounds, can't remember. I got down to Red Beach, wherever it was we landed and lo and behold there's a Catalina [flying boat] sitting out in the middle of the bay. And there's two blokes diving off and on the Catalina, having a swim. So I said to somebody with a small boat, I said,

15:30 "I want you to get out to that Catalina and bring one of those blokes in." And he did that. And I said, "I want you to get this man, to Morotai." And that's what he did. Now, I can't get you any closer to anything, I don't know what you want me to say. His name was Williams and I've often… He was from Victoria.

16:00 And he said to me, he said, "When I joined up," he'd only been in the army about a year, he said, "When I joined up, somebody said to me," and I'll… this is cruel to repeat even, somebody said to him at a place where he was joined up, "Do you want to be a Provo [Provosts. Military Police] or do you want to be a soldier?" He said, "You can be in the infantry or we can be make you a Provo."

16:30 Now that was the most dreadful thing to hear from him. And to hear from anybody, that somebody would say that because the… it's absurd, it's a shocking bloody thing to say. And there was that boy, that was in his mind. He had to be a soldier, he couldn't be a Provo, you know, they were saying to him, do you want to... you get what I mean now?

17:00 **If at any point the questions are too invasive, just tell me to back off.**

Well I'm telling you

17:30 what I've told you time and again. I was not a nurse. I was in a field ambulance. I was in the hospital. But I was not a nurse. I did do some nursing in the Queen Mary going over, in other places. I filled in for a week somewhere looking after the sick, even at Greta before I went away I was looking after blokes with measles and doing all the sorts of things that you do when the measles

18:00 are gone. You get the mattresses and the things and you put them in a room with formalin and Condies crystals and you kill the germ, the measles germ. All those sort of things. But I don't know.

I'm just trying to get a perspective on… as a stretcher bearer that you would have had contact with people that had been wounded when you were taking people from the…

18:30 Yeah, well while Syria was on, we were back from Greece and Crete we were at Kilo 89. I was doing a theatre school with a crowd of blokes. We went in and watched the operations at the 1st AGH operating theatre. When the Syria wounded come in, I helped unload the ambulances, took them into the theatre if needs be, line them up,

19:00 do what we could. But that's it. You can't get any closer than that, unless you're the surgeon doing the operation. You follow what I mean?

Yes I do understand what you mean. I'm also trying to work out, for instance in the air raids, in Ekali, what kinds of wounds…?

We didn't get… I think there was one person badly wounded there

19:30 or killed. But I never had anything to do with him. I'm not. But in the like, I was one morning there, quite close between the aerodrome and the hospital actually, in this place where we were saying the mass. I can't exactly remember exactly where it was. But the next couple of days I'm up in this house. And when the raids come of a morning,

20:00 it was a fair way up this hill. And I tell you, a couple of mornings there when they come in, I was standing level with the pilots that went past. Honest to God, they were about half a mile across that way, I suppose. But they were coming in and they just wiped out every plane that was there. We had no planes in Greece. That was it. But

20:30 there's the, you know, one part of it's a joke. Standing watching the enemy wipe out your aerodrome. You couldn't… Like you can see it on the pictures now. But there I was and you could actually see the bloody German pilots, their heads, having the time of their life, wiping out every plane was on. How they ever put the hospital beside it, I don't know.

21:00 **How did the procedure work? When someone was wounded, where would you step in, in the process?**

You do what you're told. They… help a bloke onto the stretcher, as I've told you before, you have your battalion bearers and you have your A and B Company ambulance bearers and that's one scene. Now I was not on the Kokoda Trail. But we

21:30 can all see what the situation was there. It was only the blokes that were right forward, the infantry blokes that were right forward there and their mates got hurt, they had to get them back to somewhere where they were a bit safer and get them onto a stretcher. Their own bearers and the field ambulance would be in its place, whatever was sensible to have them there.

Wouldn't loading someone onto a stretcher be as close as a surgeon

22:00 **to the wounded?**

Well yes, it would. And he'd probably be in shock. And you'd get in shock yourself, you know, I've just told you all I can.

Did you

22:30 **want to talk about that any more? Did you want to give that a wide berth?**

Yeah, I can't seem to get what you want.

No, I just wanted to get a perspective on maybe some of the things that you may have seen and maybe some of the things that the men might have called out for, or…? It's hard to access this stuff.

Well gee whiz, I, you know, I'm just frightened that

23:00 some day, somebody might see this and say, "That was my son." Follow what I mean? This is something that I'm not happy about.

I understand. You mentioned that you had contact with the artist Justin O'Brien.

Yeah, Justin was a great friend, great mate of mine.

23:30 First time I really got close to Justin was when we moved to Rehovet and he was in a tent, eight of us in a tent. Justin wanted to nurse and I think he was doing ward duty while we were at Rehovet. Now

24:00 this is what he was like. He was the most generous, lovely bloke you'd ever meet in your life. He'd get lots of presents from home because he was very well known, people loved him. Everything that he got from home, he'd dump in the middle of the floor and say, "Everybody take that." If he got money, he'd break it up amongst the lot of us, you know. And

24:30 he would never... people used to say, you know, "Draw something." "No, I don't want to draw something." One day, we had both been out in the open somewhere and I was in this corner of the tent and Justin was in the other corner. And he came in, sat on his bed, and I sat on me bed and I was reading something and I looked up and

25:00 Justin's like this. And I said, "What're you doing?" He said, "Just don't worry, just stay as you are." So he goes on and on, about half an hour later, he said, "There you are." And he threw me the drawing. Was a foolscap drawing of myself. And God I've never forgiven meself for losing it. I got it home from the Middle East. But where in the name of God it went then, I don't know.

25:30 It wasn't me, it was the living image of my brother. And I... It was the living image of my brother, just as if he'd drawn me brother. But we were nothing alike then. But we are now. And I said to him, "That's not me, that's me brother." He said, "That's as I see you." Now we became good pals,

26:00 after the war, you know, he was down here in Woollahra with a whole lot of other artists and he was, you know, a battler then. And gradually he was improving and having exhibitions and we'd see one another now and then at a reunion. And then in 1977,

26:30 he'd gone and lived in Greece, about 1970, I think and then he'd come back and then he went and lived in Rome. In 1977, Bern and I went round the world. And we were a week in Rome just around the corner from Justin and, you know, I went and we had dinner with him a couple of times and was at his

27:00 home with him. And some of the paintings that he was halfway through were in his place, gallery or whatever, you know, the room where he painted. And he made friends with a little Italian family, and he became family with them. And he taught this bloke to paint. He now comes here now and then with

27:30 an exhibition and he decided that he was going to finish his life in Rome. And a couple of times when he come back, we got to all our mates come here and, you know, just had a day together. And the last time Justin was here, we made

28:00 a CD [compact disk], a film of it. We've got it there. But he, you know, he got the prostate trouble and he came home and I thought he'd stay here. But he went back. He died in Rome. But we've got a lot of...you know, all his stuff, I've got a book there of his and he was wonderful

28:30 bloke so, such a bloody character too.

Was he a young bloke as well?

Yeah, he's about... I think he was my age, Justin.

How close did he get to the action?

Well he was taken prisoner. And he was in the nursing wards at Ekali, and from then on, he was in the

29:00 various camp. If you get the 5th AGH book you can read where all those prisoners spent their time and what they did. But, you know, they don't get that explicit in what they were doing, they tell you they were nursing wounded or something like that. But Justin was

29:30 absolutely mesmerised by what he saw in Greece. They tell me that they were going up in dog carriages, you know, cattle trucks and in the middle of the night through the snow and everything. One of the blokes, Fleming, told me, he said, "Justin's standing up in the middle of the bloody carriage with a... looking through a slat, looking at the mountains in the snow and saying

30:00 how marvellous it was." He said, "And all the rest of us were trying to get warm." You know, and things like that. But he's a very lovely, generous bloke, Justin. Somebody sent me two jars of cashew nuts, and I left them on me little table – this was at Rehovet. And I was out somewhere

30:30 and I come back later in the afternoon, there's Justin, sitting on my bed, reading and he's eaten all my bloody cashew nuts. God, I was wild. I was going to kill him. But that was Justin, you know. You couldn't get angry with Justin because he'd give you his heart, you know, everything he got he just split it up amongst us. But he was

31:00 not trained to be a soldier, you know. Somebody said to me, "Justin'd never got a bloody feed in the camps if I hadn't have looked after him." You know, that was just one remark, one fella says.

Why, because he didn't want to eat or...?

No, because he was not the sort of bloke that'd rush down and get in a mess queue, you know. He might even let it go, wouldn't have anything to eat rather than to... But what that bloke said, he was one of his good mates and that's just how

31:30 he, you know, how he found Justin.

What kind of impact was the war having on Justin as an artist?

Don't think the war ever came into it with him. All his paintings are just bloody beautiful things about, you know, still life, or a village in Greece or in some of the islands or something in Rome. I had a cousin

32:00 who was a millionaire, and he bought five of Justin's paintings. And he's died since, and his miserable wife never gave me one of his paintings. But the most marvellous thing, if ever you can see it, it's 'The Kiss of Judas'. And his colours are magnificent, you know, all the different

32:30 colours that he'd paint in their robes and that sort of thing. It's the most beautiful thing of his anyway than he ever painted I think. And of course, I haven't seen thousands of them I suppose, or hundreds of them. But Barry, my cousin, had it over his bed and every time I went there and had dinner I had to go and stand and look at it for a while, you know.

33:00 Such a magnificent painting, I think it's probably in the book there. But...

So he wasn't responding in an open way to the things that were happening around?

No the war didn't guide Justin's idea of art. He just, you know, painted the things that were beautiful in his view, I suppose.

Can you remember how he

33:30 **used to work? How would he execute his paintings or drawings?**

I don't really know. I've been into his room where a painting half done was on the easel. But I don't know how long he took to paint it and what I gathered about that, you know, about Justin, was that, you know, if he did a painting,

34:00 he might let it go for a while and come back a month later and start fooling round with it again. That's... I don't know an artist might do that. All his, you know, all his friends would be able to tell you that. I don't know much about that. But he drew me in about 30 seconds, in about, he took about half an hour to draw me. But oh God, I'm wild that I lost that.

Would he wander round with his sketch book to

34:30 **right where everything was happening, or...?**

No, he never did a painting while the war was on.

Like sketch, I mean drawings...?

No he didn't do that. That's the only thing I ever knew was when he sat opposite me in that tent and drew me and that's the only... Because anybody who want him to draw anything, say, "Oh no, no I don't want to draw that."

So was he actually there as a soldier or as an artist?

He was there as a soldier. He just

35:00 went along the same as everybody else. Same as I did, same as Titch did, same as all those wonderful surgeons did, you know, what it did to their lives, a lot of them. Took five years out of it. But when they came back, they made their mark, you know, all those... the 5th AGH had six men knighted when

35:30 they came, after the war. Sir William Morrow, Sir Angus Murray, Sir Kenneth Star, at one time in the Middle East when were in Eritrea the British Army were concerned about the fact that the air force were getting a lot of trouble with facial injuries and the plastic surgery was a mess, you know, they were worried how they were going to do this.

36:00 Any rate, we were in Eritrea at the time and this Kenneth Star was with us, now Kenneth Star's a very well known man, brilliant. He taught the year previous at the university to the one that he was doing, to get through medicine. Now that's what sort of a brilliant mind he was. So the AIF sent him to England at the request of

36:30 the British Army just to be at this school and learn more about facial injuries and surgery, plastic surgery. When Kenneth Star came home, the British Army sent a letter to the AIF to thank them very much for sending Kenneth Star over to teach them so much.

37:00 And he was knighted.

Did you receive any awards?

No. No.

You mentioned earlier that you got really sick in 1941. And came home.

Oh yeah, when I was at home.

What happened between 1941 and 1944? When you went back to Balikpapan?

Between 1941 and ’44, I was at

37:30 the training battalion in Victoria and there was a host of sergeants, useless like me, because I’d lost me unit. Once you leave your own unit, you’re just nothing. But I could… I knew how... The first thing you teach stretcher bearers is the stretcher drill. You do it by numbers and you teach them how to lift a stretcher and how to

38:00 stop themselves getting hernias and how they lift it up and it’s a pretty important way. But the only way you can teach it is by a drill. And then they finally know when they go to handle somebody what they can do. Well I used to, you know, there were young kids being drafted in at that age, at 18. I did stretcher drill for a while, and then

38:30 I could lecture just out of the bit of first aid that I’d learned before the war about, “There’s 103 bones in the body. The long bones are the tibia, the fibia, the forearm and the numerous,” and all this and, you know, get a mob of kids that know nothing and I talked to them just about that with, you know, then you teach them the pressure points. “There’re so many

39:00 pressure points in the body to…” “For an artery to be stopped from haemorrhaging.” How to put on a tourniquet and not to have it on too long, for more than 20 minutes and all those sort of things, I did that. In the training battalion, between 1942, ’41 and ’44 when I very luckily got drafted to the 2/6th Field Ambulance,

39:30 there were blokes down there that didn’t want to go – they wanted to be there in Victoria and never leave. And, you know, that wasn’t my idea. But it took me a long time. I couldn’t get back to me unit because they’d already formed and one of my mates had taken my job as sergeant, and, you know, they weren’t worried about getting me back. And

40:00 any rate, I got meself back into a unit. But that was the worst part of my war. I would have been so proud if I’d have been in the 2/6th Field Ambulance that went through the Ramu Valley and in the Kokoda Trail. But what happened to me was I got mumps and I didn’t know – I ignored it. And your testes

40:30 shrink, and you can die with it.

Tape 9

00:42 **So you were telling us about when you had the mumps?**

01:00 Mumps, yeah. I didn’t realise how serious it was and I got out of bed and went up town, up to Armidale and I got into a fight and I came back, it was none of my doing, the fight, I came back and got into bed in hospital and in the morning I was unconscious. I thought I’d had a rigor, I think they call it.

01:30 And nearly died and I lost a hell of a lot of weight and that was a lot to do with why my unit left me, because I’d got way down in weight. And there was going to be a reorganisation. And at first I was to go and then when then reorganisation happened and I was crook, I didn’t go and that was it. And I went to this

02:00 training battalion after me unit left for... I waved them goodbye on the Armidale Station and then I went down to this training battalion and God, I was lonely, you know, I was very angry that I hadn’t gone with my unit. It was just things that happen, you know.

Were you angry at the unit or was it just things that happen?

Yeah, well I was angry at meself a lot for what

02:30 I’d done and… But it was just bad luck, you know, it was just one of those things that happen. And, of course, you know, I was rather proud of the work that I used to do in the AGH because I was the general duties sergeant and, you know, I had responsibilities, mainly the tentage and things like that. But if I was wanted to do something, and go and do a bit of stretcher bearing, you’d do it. You’d

03:00 be told to do, as I say. We were, you know, in Gaza at the time Syria was on, the wounded from Syria, were down in no time to the First AGH and they said, “We want blokes to do some stretcher bearing.” Well you did it, you went over and you did it. But you didn’t concern yourself for the bloke on the stretcher – that was the concern of somebody else. You’re a stretcher bearer.

Just on that topic of stretcher bearing, you’ve mentioned before

03:30 **what makes some good qualities about nurses, what was some qualities that made a good stretcher bearer?**

Oh, just be strong enough. And perhaps, you know, you might have been required to give a little bit of help to a bloke on a stretcher. But you'd want to know a little bit about things, you know, if you had a bloke who was on a stretcher and he had a tourniquet on his

04:00 leg, you'd be wondering to yourself, "Has this been on for 20 minutes? Has this been on too long?" You know. But those weren't the sort of things that ever happened with me. What I was talking about with... we had to go from Balikpapan over to Macassar to round up Japs and the field ambulance just established a,

04:30 well we were going to establish a 12 bed hospital, because we didn't expect any casualties. And on the way over we were on a landing craft tank, they were numbered, 6- 66 was the one we were on. Anyway at halfway across we came upon a situation in the middle of the Malacca Straits where the water was like ice, you know, after a storm. Or before a storm,

05:00 but it was after a storm. And suddenly, you were all at sea. There's nothing happening and then suddenly, there's a speck on the horizon. And everybody's rushing over to see what it is, and when we get close to it, it's a native, sitting on the roots of an upturned coconut tree, in the middle of the Malacca Straits. Well, it was the funniest thing. We brought him on board. And he'd been in a terrible storm

05:30 and the coconut tree had got near him wherever he'd come from and there he was sitting on his haunches on the remainder of the coconut tree. Like the tree was like the rudder, it was down there, and the knot, the gnarl of the all the roots and that was where he was sitting. And the funniest thing happened. 20 years later, I'm going through Yass, and I go into my mate... He has

06:00 a place at Yass. His son was here last week. He's dead. Jack's gone. I was going through Yass and I said to Bern, "Jack'll be in here." We got there about seven or eight. And I said, "Jack'll be in here at The Commercial [hotel], we'll go in." And I hadn't seen him for about ten years, you know. And that's what used to happen. You wouldn't go to a meeting for ten years and then you'd start going back. Any rate, I went in and here's this Mal Barber, he's got the...

06:30 telling this graphic story. And he's telling the story about the boong on the coconut tree. And I said to Jack, they were all laughing at him, saying, "Ohh, no more war stories, what... you're joking." And they were all chiacking him and going on. And, "It's true! It's true!" And I said to Jack, "It's true, he's on the same LSD [amphetamines] that I was on." I said, "That bloke was sitting on that coconut

07:00 tree." And Jack said to the mob, "Mal's telling the truth." And Mal never forgot me when I, you know, confirmed his story. Oh, God it was funny. Because they'd been giving him a hell of a time and I just walked in that night at the very minute he was telling the same story about this man on the coconut tree in the middle of the Malacca Straits. He's a direct descendant of

07:30 Hume [early Australian explorer]. He was the direct descendant of Hume that owned thousands of acres outside Yass. Hume was made a grant for his explorings and that and Mal was a direct descendant of him.

So he wasn't there in the Malacca Straits, he'd just heard this story?

No, he was on the boat, the same as I was. That's why I could confirm it. And see, I didn't

08:00 know Mal at that time, he was in another unit. But there, you know, there about six or seven hundred of us on that boat. And, you know, we'd seen the same thing and I just happened to come into that hotel that night, because I knew Jack Lyne, and there is Jack's... one of his mates and they're all giving Mal a bad time about the story he's telling. Because he was a big story teller, you know. That was very funny.

08:30 **In summary, if you were to sum up the war, for you, how would you sum it up in a sentence? What was the war to you?**

I was such a lucky man. That's it. To see all that.

09:00 But not lucky to lose wonderful mates. Because you really made mates in places like that, living close together in a tent, seeing what one another put up, you know, what your mates put up with. How they, you know, you're all together and that sort of thing.

09:30 But that's all I could say – I'm so lucky. And here we are, we're living these long years, you know. It's unbelievable.

Did the war change you in any way?

Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Yeah, I was immature. When I went to the war I was immature.

10:00 It did so much for me. In six years you meet so many different men and see what terrible things some of them can do, just, you know, although they're in the army, what the damage they can do to places where

you go through, you know, give us a bad name something like that. But give us a good name, most of the places. Well, look at France. God, they

10:30 owe us for the rest of time, you know, when you come to think of 60,000 Australians buried in France, you know, how could they say anything wrong about our people? And they appreciate it too. But we can, you know, just imagine, 60,000 Australian fathers, what would our population have been in this country if we'd

11:00 have had all our 60,000 young men that never went to the war. It made a difference in our life. It's this, you know, I try never to talk... I can never stop telling funny stories, about the war. But you don't get too keen on talking those... the sort of things that are macabre.

11:30 You know, I could tell a lot of stories. But you wouldn't do it. You couldn't do it.

Without telling us the stories, why do you think it's important to only tell the good things about war?

Well, I wouldn't say it's only the good thing. But I mean, you know, you're always ready to tell a good story, aren't you? And laugh about things. But

12:00 the young people, they're seeing enough of this world. It's just absolutely terrible to watch the carnage that's going on. They'll learn more than we can tell them about the war and its bad parts. God, look at it every night on TV. These suicide people

12:30 and nations trying to wipe one another out. God knows when the Arabs and Jews are going to settle that bit in Palestine, or Israel, whatever it is. And it's just bloody awful to think that they've had that hatchet buried for 2000 odd years and now they want to do it all again. I just read a book

13:00 about the Middle East and, you know, how Turkey with the empire there and how many times it's changed hands. In the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, you go into... It's a very old building. You go in down a staircase and you come into the church and it is said that the church is built over the Mount Calvary

13:30 where Christ was crucified. Now, up you go up on this rising and there's a Catholic altar where I went with the priest and answered the mass for him. Next to it is an altar that's Coptic people that are in

14:00 Eastern Africa and then some other church somewhere else. Down underneath and it's hollowed out and you can look up, you're under Mount Calvary and they claim that the three holes there are where the three crosses, where Christ died, and the two thieves beside him. Now that's what you go and see when you go into Jerusalem. Now on the Catholic altar there's

14:30 a case about as big as that photo there, and in it is a statue of the Virgin Mary, the Madonna. And in that big case, it's about a foot deep, a couple of feet wide, a couple of feet high, it's got a glass front, and in that is jewellery,

15:00 and all sorts of things that were planted there by the monarchs who conquered Jerusalem. The first one is AD 60, I think, might get mixed up, the first is some great piece of jewellery. Queen Helena of Turkey.

15:30 And some by the crusaders, they've got a gift in there, there's all these things and the last one that was there when we were there was something that had been put there by Allenby. When the Australian Army went through Jerusalem in 1918. Or 1917. And, you know, you look into that case and you see

16:00 what's gone on in the Holy City. In the holy, what they're all fighting about. All those monarchs that have came, all of them, you know, the Turks, you name it, they've been there.

So in terms of those kinds of historical changes, what would you say to future generations about war?

Well we don't want it. That's all I'd say to them.

16:30 It's cruel, it's terrible, why do we have it? Why can't we, you know? What on earth are we going to stop about these people now that are in Iraq. There's the most holy city in the world, and in the middle of it there's this case with bits of jewellery planted there by all crusaders, all the different

17:00 nations that had been there and we're the last one. Australia. But of course he was representing the British. That was Allenby, Lord Allenby. And, you know, there they are, it's 60 years since we had a look at that, now the Palestinians and the Israelites are fighting one another about what? It's not religion. It's just greed.

17:30 It's stupid. Well it is religion and they're fanatical about it. And this is the trouble. This is what the young people have got to think about. Stop this business of war of people of different religions hating one another. That's a joke, isn't it? This, the thing that's supposed to make us all good, is the thing that's making us all... making people kill one another. I can't, you know, I can't say anything to

18:00 the young people. But for God's sakes, stop it if you can and the first way is to respect other people's

religion. I don't know how they're ever going to get control of this Iraq business now.

Is there anything else that you would like to add to your interview, Lawrie?

I just hope that the things that I've told you might help somebody some day, might, you know, young

18:30 people, you know. They're like I was. They're too immature to accept what war is. The thing is this, when the war broke out, how could I stay at home when I see all my mates going to the air force and to the navy and that – you wouldn't even think about it.

19:00 But you didn't want to go. You didn't want to... Nobody really wanted to be, well we'd seen what happened to our 60,000 blokes in France and the Gallipoli bit. I remember the morning we were getting out of Greece and I got on the Glenurn. Gallipoli's only about a thousand miles away up the coast. How ridiculous it was, you know. I said,

19:30 to somebody, "God, isn't this ridiculous, it's Anzac Day, and here we are getting off the bit that our poor old fathers and uncles got onto." And this is it. If we can... That's all I can say to the young people. You're immature and watch that you're not misled. We don't know whether Mr Bush is right or wrong yet. But we've got a pretty good idea.

20:00 **Thank you very much.**