Australians at War Film Archive

John Murphy (Ray) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 4th February 2004

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1457

Tape 1

00:33 Where was I born? I was born in London on March 30th, I think, 1919, and my foster father was a First [World] War soldier, my mother was a British war nurse. Come out to Australia on the troop ship [SS] Dunvegan Castle

01:00 in 1919, I think, shortly after I was born, came out to Australia and my parents settled on a wheat farm at Strathallan [220km north of Melbourne], which is near Echuca and Rochester, and from there I spent my boyhood and went to school at a place called Strathallan, three, no, it was the wrong number on that one, and grew up there as a teenager.

01:30 My mother died when I was 12 and I had a sister and a brother, half brothers. I was a free spirit and ran wild as a kid. Grew up as a teenager in a place called Nanneella [15km south of Strathallan]. I had a stepmother, a wonderful lady who brought us through our teenage difficult years and was a wonderful lady. I went to school there

02:00 and we only had a merit class and achieved all that, no problem. Then the school was 3708, was the number of it, and my sister and brother and I went to school there. We used to ride a horse and they used to chase rabbits and catch rabbits and

02:30 snakes and all those sort of things. In my early formative years I wanted to be a soldier and I joined the Australian light horse, which is near 100 years this year, in the early days and I did my training on Vickers machine guns at Bendigo, Echuca, Rochester and places like that, and I always

03:00 just wanted to be a soldier and, as I said, I did my training in those places and then I worked on a farm for a major in the armed forces so, naturally, I learnt a lot more than most people would have. Then I went to war as soon as war broke out I went off to war. I wasn't supposed to come back according to my parents and

03:30 all my things were sold and gone when I did get back. And, as I said, I wanted to be a good soldier so I trained as a machine gunner and then from then on, when I enlisted in the 2nd AIF [Australian Imperial Force], trained on Bren gun carriers and trucks and Vickers machine guns. Went off to war and spent five years away

04:00 and came home, took up a Soldier's Settlement [Scheme] farm and reared my family there. Two boys and two girls, lost a couple. I wanted to be free but I didn't realise how hard the work was, but my family and I we're quite happy there, and they belong to umpteen organisations around the district.

04:30 Colin's [interviewer] got a list of all those so you'll know what I belonged to and all the rest of it, and then when I got old enough to retire, I did. I retired at 55, which is quite a while back now. Belonged to all the local things down in Shepparton [Victoria] before we moved down here. Lost my family

05:00 earlier on. Daughter first, my wife next, and another daughter, and that's all I had and then the two boys, they're still with me. I've retired to, not a quiet life but a damn busy one and that's about it.

Excellent, thank you. Now we're going to ask you some questions, going to go back,

05:30 **turn back the clock back to your childhood days. Tell us about your mother and father with more details about their background.**

Well Mum was a lady born in England and she trained as a war nurse. Now how those two met is an interesting story on its own which I think you'd want to hear. I called him Dad, even though he wasn't my Dad, I called him Dad.

06:00 He was wounded at Gallipoli [World War I campaign in Turkey] and was, I think, wounded again in France, was repatriated to England to convalescence and at this hospital he met my mother and he married and lived happily ever after, that's how the story always goes. My father was a wheat farmer at Strathallan near Echuca, as I mentioned earlier. I

06:30 understand in his youth he was, like me, a free spirit and he grew up and trained himself to be an engineer. He got a certificate from Technology and Engineering in London and he was well trained as an engineer during the wartime days, and I have his diary. Like me, we both kept

07:00 diaries and he did wonderful things to get trucks and engines and things going in the war days. He didn't win any medals that I know of but he was a very, he was a good parent and they were both very good parents and it wasn't until 40 years after I was born that I found out

07:30 who I was in actual fact and do you wish to…?

Well, you said about your foster father and he met your mother at a convalescent hospital in the UK [United Kingdom] was it?

In the UK, yes, and we came out, the bit I missed, we came out to Australia on a ship named the Dunvegan Castle and I have photos of all the babies, new babies, and I was one of them onboard ship and

08:00 we came out to Australia on that. I think they called them, later on they called them 'bride ships' or something. My foster father was the sort of bloke that you had to work out what he was thinking and all the years that I worked with him, we built houses and sorted out machinery, and he always used to think that I would know what he was thinking about

08:30 and if he wanted something like a hammer or chisel or something, I had to figure it out beforehand that's what he wanted. He never used to say much. I rarely heard him talk about his war days, but when I did I think that's what fired off my imagination of what I wanted to be later on. The little bits I heard what he said and the horrifying

09:00 things I heard him say and when I enlisted he said to me, "Well, don't go into the infantry". He said, "Get a job as a tank driver or a truck driver and things like that".

Your real father, your biological father that is?

Yeah, my biological…thanks for reminding me, I forgot I had one. My biological father was a Welshman, his name was Gorony,

09:30 Gorony Davies, which is part of my name now. He was serving in the [Royal] Welsh Fusiliers, I've got to watch my pronunciation, the Welsh Fusiliers, and was killed on the 25th November, 1917, and that's a bit of a sticking point there, and he was killed at the battle of the tanks in Cambrai in France [Battle of Cambrai, 20 November–3 December, 1917, was the first battle in which tanks were used en masse]

10:00 on that date and he is buried in a cemetery known as the Ontario War Cemetery, it's mostly Canadians in Cambrai, and I have been to see it. It took me years to locate it. He was 25 years old. I think he was, I know he was a musician. I think

10:30 he was a pastry cook by trade and, luckily, when I went to find out all about my parent through the French war graves commission [Les Ministère des Pensions (Ministry for War Veterans)] and things like that, I had a lot of stuff to track down, I missed the point there. Yeah,

11:00 there was the [Welsh] Fusiliers buried in Ontario [War Cemetery] and Marg [John's wife] and I finally found his grave.

This is after the war?

After the war yeah, many, many years. For a long time, my mother, not my mother, my wife, used to say "If I didn't know better I'd think you belonged to someone else". But I didn't know that then, I only found that out later on. Marg and I saved up to go to England.

11:30 We sold our best stock of cattle and we went without things around the home and everything and we saved up and away we went on the Elaneese off to England. Ten days before we got there, the only surviving uncle died. That was the end of the line and he died but I found lots and lots and lots of cousins who knew I'd come to Australia as a

12:00 babe but, of course, naturally hadn't met me. So around England and Wales we went, catching up on all these cousins. It was really wonderful. We'd put an advert in the paper, in the English papers, "Anybody knowing the whereabouts of something, something, something, please contact my solicitor in America." and we left out certain details so that

12:30 people who'd read the article would have to supply the information to complete the details, that was done. As the solicitor bloke said, "We struck oil" when we got all the information, but it was really wonderful. When it was all sorted out and we got everything correct, all the details in their right position, I called the family in and

13:00 they wanted to know what they'd done wrong, what was Dad going to tick them off about. I told them the whole story which I have it all typed out, told them the story and they said, "Oh, we've lost a grandfather", which was this J. J. Murphy bloke, and I said "No, you've gained a lot more others". And that's how the story

13:30 evolved and eventually it all came to fruition when we sailed away. On that tour we went all around England and Wales, as I said, looking for cousins and left the family in charge, a ‘nanny’ I suppose you’d call her, and away we went. That was only one trip. We went on a

14:00 trip later on, and that was probably the interesting part of my life or one of the interesting parts, to find out that I had other family that I wasn’t aware of. During my school boy days, I corresponded with a boy in Ceylon [modern-day Sri Lanka]. A

14:30 boy called Dayaram Saede [?]. I never met him, only wrote to him as a boy, and when I went across to the Middle East later on as a soldier I looked for him and found out that he’d been killed in an earthquake some years before and I used to often wonder why he didn’t write back and that’s what happened. So that was the end of that.

So you had a pen pal?

15:00 He was a pen pal, yes.

From Ceylon, out of all places.

I think all kids should have pen pals and in actual fact that’s just transgressing, I suppose it doesn’t matter, transgressing in my service club, at one stage I was linking up American kids with Australian kids in Shepparton to write to each other. I know some did, there were some answers. That’s the beauty [of]

15:30 communications.

So, it sounds like you had a bit of an unsettling and tough upbringing in the sense of this…?

Yes, I think a lot of the times all these upbringings were moulding people for something later on. We used to go fishing in the creek and catch

16:00 cod fish and all sorts of things like that and on the little place where we lived there was what was known as ‘black fellow ovens’ and we kids used to go fossicking around through those to try and find anything at all.

This was at Strathallan, was it?

This was at Strathallan, yes.

Now how old were you when you came from England?

Now that’s a good point.

16:30 The story goes that I fell in a bucket of lime and was blinded, now that meant I had to be walking and the pictures on the table there show that. Even though the Red Cross nurses were looking after all us kiddies, babies, I was old enough to walk and fall in that lime wherever it was.

17:00 The trouble was Mum died when I was 12 so I didn’t get to hear enough of my earlier days. I guess it was a good life. I had a step grandmother or a foster grandmother who I absolutely adored and I used to go and stay with her

17:30 every weekend, if I could. She taught me how to eat breakfast properly and have porridge and things like that and she also taught me to be a gardener. She said, “Always plant your seeds in a straight row because they won’t grow like that”. I never woke up to that one till years later I thought, “It wouldn’t matter a hang where I put the seeds, they’ll still grow”. “No, Ray you’ve got to plant them in a straight row”. If grandma said that,

18:00 grandma was right. Then there was going to Sunday school. I’m not sure if I should tell you this. We would throw stones on the church roof or at other times we’d have a penny to put in the collection plate and just before they took up the collection we kids at the back would slither out of the church. They didn’t get the pennies but

18:30 we kept them. Reminding me about pennies, I remember this one. Mum would say to us “You weed the pathway of a Saturday and you will get one penny for weeding that”, and she paid. Once as we, as all siblings do they fight, and my brother and sister they were younger,

19:00 we were scrapping and I thought “I’ll get even with you kids” and I took off after them and away we went around the garden, but they jumped over a box and I didn’t see the box so I had a…I still have a damaged big toe where I hit the box. We used to have lots of fights, we kids. We fought like anything outside the garage wall where my foster father was working with an engine

19:30 and he couldn’t put up with us any longer and he came out with a 10-inch file in his hand and he belted my sister first, she got copped, then my younger brother, he got copped, but I was fast on my feet, I was never beaten at running, remember that one, I never got beaten, and I took off and my foster father took off after me and I dived into various places. When I thought I’d be safe, I dived into the blackberry bush and I thought, “He won’t follow me”.

20:00 He did and I got a bigger hiding than the other two kids, too, but it was alright. The flood waters used to come past our place and that's all in my boyhood memories too. I've written that up. We'd walk along the top of the fences in the floods and all that sort of thing and shoot rabbits when they popped their heads up. Shoot

20:30 them.

Tell us what Strathallan was like? We were talking about…

Catching crayfish out of the creek, I think.

No, we were talking about what Strathallan was like.

Strathallan was just dry farming, wheat or sheep. On actual fact, I saw one of the original Cobb and Co [famous Australian coach company] bullock wagons go through Strathallan when I was a nipper [young child].

21:00 Floods and Indian, not an Indian, Iranian hawker [door-to-door salesman], one of those people who had the covered-in lorries that sell trinkets, buttons and needles and that. They stayed at our place for many years and he rescued me when the flood waters came up and as boys do, we leaned over to pick up something out of the flood waters

21:30 and I fell in and he rescued me with a walking stick with a crook on one end. He pulled me out and rescued me. Another time when he stayed at our place, a different place, he used to have a, you probably know this, a tradition of praying before he killed the chicken for his tea and he used to do that and we kids loved that and he'd

22:00 make dampers [bush bread made from water and flour] and we thought they were wonderful, these dampers. Mum would say, "Huh, you'll eat his burnt old things and not touch what I cook for your tea!" but he was a wonderful old man. We used to listen to the stories he would tell and that's the sought of life we lived, I guess. Our home

22:30 was originally a brick, mud-brick home, and in the real hot days we'd lie down beside the wall on lino [linoleum] to keep cool but also, one of the problems about a home on the ground is snakes. Snakes would come in through the holes in the wall or the floor and they'd get in and they'd try to climb up the wall to get away but they couldn't because they'd slip. They kept slipping on the lino

23:00 and my foster father, JJ, would get out with his shotgun later on and catch them outside see, so that was another one. My grandmother she was, as I said, she's the one who said to plant the seeds in a straight row or they won't grow and I would stay with her of a weekend and we'd have porridge and we didn't have milk, we had butter. We stirred the butter into the porridge and, oh,

23:30 absolutely out of this world, and open ceilings. There'd be all sorts of things hanging down. Vegetables and things like that. I loved that lady. She was the one that told me my English relatives had died.

Did you say you had some interaction with Aborigines in the area?

With their

24:00 fire places, there were no actual Aborigines there but the fire places or their ovens as they called them, 'black fellow ovens' as we called them, they were there, and all the burnt ashes and all that were still there but we never ever found anything, but it is an Aborigine site. My nephew now, he

24:30 lives next door, he said "Don't tell anybody of the black fellow ovens, you'll have the world on your doorstep".

So you actually never met any?

No, no. Not at home but I met some on the ship. Actually, there was a big brawl across the road on Saturday night.

25:00 New people moved in. I'm quite happy with them because in my Scouting [youth movement] career I've had little Aborigine boys as Cubs [younger boys in Scout movement]. They're good kids. At school I think there was two or three little half-cast but I don't differentiate. They're all my kids, as I call them. That's a

25:30 bit more modern times.

So tell us what you did, where did you go to school firstly?

Right, it was a school at Strathallan and the school was 100 yards away, virtually. The teachers boarded at my home and I think that's the worst thing that can ever happen to a kid. Have his teacher board.

I've never heard of that actually.

26:00 Terrible things. Yeah, the school was there and we had Italian children going to school there that their fathers were building the road from Rochester to Echuca and I had to be, ha, I had to be bodily caught

and carried into school because I didn't want to go to school. I thought, "Well, just be wild

26:30 and free", and I think it took three or four big boys to catch me first of all then drag me to school where I, I don't think the pens are still on the ceiling. They were all relieving teachers, lady teachers. That was at that school and then when I went to the next school, at Nanneella 3708, the teacher gave me a hit with the strap and I went through two classes in the one year.

27:00 Apparently, it was some latent talent there, but going back to Strathallan, we used to have sports days once a year and I used to win all the foot races. I mentioned earlier on about this one. No matter how long a race was or how short it was, they'd put me at the back

27:30 of the mob running and I'd always run up and around the side and up the front, later on I put down all that experience down to trying to get away from my stepfather, but I won all the races. I think it was because I was just a wild, fit little horror and away I'd go. I remember Mum

28:00 taking me to school the first day and she had a stick to me, about to me, and it looked about a mile long and she belted me all the way to school. I might add that the ink I poured over that kid, she deserved it. That's in my memories, my boyhood memories. I've got all that written out but I need to get it typed out. I keep saying, "I'll

28:30 finish it off", but I keep living too long, that's the trouble.

How old were you when you finished school?

Twelve. See, why I finished school so early, well, in those days I suppose it was normal procedure but there was no tech [technical school] or high school anywhere nearby so I finished up at 12 and then worked around the area at Nanneella. Worked around

29:00 the area for the farmers and then my foster Dad and I we built houses. We moved houses, we put houses on big wheels and moved them in my youth, still a free spirit, I'd get on an old bike and ride to Swan Hill or Bendigo or somewhere. There's a lot in there, somewhere.

29:30 One of the things that, there'll be probably more as we go along but one of the things was that I mixed all the concrete for dairy yards and footings and pathways, I mixed it all by hand, sorry, with a shovel by hand. And when I went to the war my foster father brought a mechanical one, which I was a bit crude on him. Why couldn't he have bought it a bit earlier when I was younger,

30:00 but I was fit. I'd go out at night time and ride my bicycle, it was the only transport I had, ride my bike to Kyabram or Bendigo or Echuca and the old man would say to me, "Well, I don't care where you go at night time as long as you're home next morning at 7 o'clock ready to start work". Work was, as a teenager, it was about, I'd get about two shillings a day, I think.

30:30 The rule was that I had to work for Dad for two days a week for nothing, but I think many times it was five days a week. That was for my board, meals and food and stuff, but he was very good. One night I'd come back from Kyabram pretty late and

31:00 stepped over the wall instead of opening it through the door, stepped over the wall and stood on the dog and, of course, what did the dog do? Yelp, yelp like crazy, and next morning the old man says to me, "Mmm, got home a bit late last night, son". But that's another thing, I never slept inside a house until I was married, I was always out on verandas.

31:30 Yes, always on verandas. That was healthy and, reverting again to verandas, at Strathallan we only had wire netting, fly wire, around the house and my Mum used to come out and say, "Let's have a look at the trees and see what they're doing", and watching them and listening to the thunder and all that sort of thing. She was good that one. And on Christmas Day, I don't know what age I was then,

32:00 but we'd all had measles and Mum carried a tray around the house with sulphur, hot sulphur, to kill off any bugs that we might have had. I can recall sitting in the chair, high chair, and the other brother and sister they were still in bed with measles. Another time, my sister put her finger in the mincer and, of course, what does big brother Raymond [do], he turns the handle.

32:30 She lost the top of her finger. I didn't win any prizes for being nice.

Your mother died when you were 12?

Yes, Mum died at childbirth with my young brother, Ron. He is the only survivor of our family now. There was no penicillin or anything so she died six weeks after my young brother was

33:00 born in Echuca hospital and that, of course, was quite a big blow to me.

Is that why you left school as well?

No, I don't think so. I think it was something that just happened, but I became the head of the family then and what we had to do

33:30 was or what I had to do was get two kids and myself ready for school, cut lunch for us and go off to

school, and on Monday mornings we'd drop our washing off at a lady's home and on Friday's we'd pick it up on the way home from school. So I became 'Mum', virtually.

34:00 I guess that gave me a sense of responsibility to cope with these kids. I think it was good for us in some respects, to stand on our feet much quicker than what, most times.

34:30 **Ray, how did the Depression years affect your family and yourself?**

Pardon?

The Depression?

Depression?

How did it affect you down over there?

I think it was all Depression, what was it? 1936. That's the year Mum died. I look at it this way, we had nothing, we had nothing to lose, we had everything to gain.

35:00 **What do you mean 'everything to gain'?**

Well, we had no money, put it that way. Quite bluntly, we were a poor family but a happy family. We were poor in monetary ways but terribly rich in worldly ways, but that didn't worry us. One little thing does remind me and it should have worried

35:30 me was there was a little box of straw on the veranda, on the wooden veranda and, of course, smart-alec John Raymond found a box of matches and set fire to the straw on the veranda. Luckily, my foster father caught me pretty quick on that one but we thought it was fun, oh dear.

Can you tell me about

36:00 **the First World War, what did you know about it?**

Ah, World War I. What did we know about World War I?

At the time, of course.

At that time I was only a baby.

No, no, no. In the '30s before the Second World War started when you developed into a young teenager, what did you know about the First World War?

Oh right, yes. I thought I

36:30 must have been pretty good in some ways when I heard my stepfather talking about it and his experiences, which gave me an insight into war. I'm not actually sure whether I thought it was a good idea or a bad idea. I don't think I was capable of making a learned decision on that one, but I knew that

37:00 my stepfather's sister and brother-in-law were all ex-First World War and he was in the tunnelling. Oh, thanks for reminding me, an uncle was in the tunnelling unit which, as you'd realise, was holes underneath the German lines. My father was in an infantry battalion, the 5th Infantry Battalion of the 5th Australian Division,

37:30 and he was involved in the battle of Fluor Bay [Suvla Bay?] where we lost 5000 casualties overnight, virtually, and he told me that he used to hide behind a log and they were getting killed all around him. He was in the trenches one day and the shell burst behind him and the shrapnel came through the bloke, like you and I here, came through his

38:00 back and blew him to pieces. He told me about the time when a shell dropped in the bomb crater and killed 31 of them and left only about two survivors. Then he reckoned the war was getting a bit tough so he decided to join the cycle battalion, so that's where he finished up. There's a picture on the wall up there of him in the cycle battalion. I presumed he was a,

38:30 a messenger or something.

This was your uncle, was it?

No, this was my foster father.

Oh right.

See it's hard to keep saying foster father when I thought he was my father.

Right.

No, my uncle was in the, he was the one in the tunnel trying to dig holes underground.

Your foster father's pretty frank about…that's

39:00 **pretty unusual for a First World War…?**

I used to listen to him, he'd be telling some of these war-time stories to other people and my ears would go like that [prick up to listen], I'd try to get every word I could because I thought, "Now there's something in this for me, eventually I'm going to be a soldier". I don't know, I always wanted to be a soldier, full stop, and I wanted to be the best soldier, and I was. So I used to listen to these stories and they impressed me very much, but I only wished he'd told us more.

39:30 It might have put me off being a soldier but it didn't.

Was he AIF or English?

AIF.

AIF?

Yes, he was AIF.

Your foster father?

Yeah, he landed at Gallipoli. He was shot through the shins at Lone Pine [the name of a ridge on the Gallipoli battlefield], that you all know about, and then he was wounded in France, through the stomach in France.

Did he actually tell you directly?

No.

Never?

No, I used to be a good listener.

Who would he tell?

People,

40:00 mostly, I can remember we were building a house for a chappie and at meal times these stories would come out because they were probing my stepfather for more information.

Okay, we'll have to pause now because we've run out of tape.

Tape 2

00:33 **Okay, so we're back on again and you were telling us about some of the stories that your stepfather told you?**

Yes, yes.

Can you tell us a few more of the stories it's so rare that...?

Yeah, I can tell you one about a piano. It was during mid-winter over there and they were freezing cold and they said, there was a piano

01:00 there, and they tossed up whether they'd have music or warmth. They lost out on the music, they burnt the piano, so that kept them warm. I don't think I've done too badly on JJ's war experiences. He didn't tell me anything much about Gallipoli, except that he was wounded. He was evacuated from

01:30 Gallipoli with enteric fever, evacuated to Alexandria [Egypt], I think that's, said where he went to, but he came home to Australia and he went as a wounded veteran and then he went back to France again. I don't know whether he was sent back there or whether he wanted to go back, I don't know, but I guess his parents would not want him to go, but

02:00 knowing him he'd want to go, he'd want to finish the job. You see, I think along the lines somewhere I felt as if I absorbed all his soldiering days. I've got a picture on the table there of him buying something off a native at Durban [South Africa]. This is related to him, too, part of him, I found some negatives of him some weeks ago

02:30 that have never been, I've never seen them to develop them. Had them developed at a 'leg and an arm' cost and he's in a couple of those, and Mum's in one, and natives of Durban, a French destroyer, a cruiser, that's all part of World War I. When he came back to Australia on to this farm at Strathallan he said, "Well, I'll make either £10,000 or nothing".

03:00 Needless to say, he made nothing because the droughts and all that sort of thing, like we still have. And there was one time when he was driving a team of horses and a wagon and the horses bolted and I can see him trying to steer the horses but he steered them into a dam and that slowed them down. All he got out of that was a cracked ankle, I think.

03:30 They're the memories…and another time was a cat shoot, this is still related to JJ, a cat shoot, there were too many cats in the big storage shed and they had cat shoots and all the neighbours used to come down with their shotguns. I don't think I better go into that one in depth. Then at our place we used to have conversations and JJ Murphy would invite all the local people into his place and

04:00 we'd have these conversations and we'd have sing-songs and after church on Sundays we'd have sing-songs around the piano with hymns. That was all part of his life. Going back to the war days there's not a great deal more, I don't think that I can add to that.

Tell us in what way he told these stories, were they something very serious that he would talk about with just a few people or did

04:30 **he tell them as kind of adventure stories with a lot of people around?**

No, they were mostly told on a basis of one to one. Most of the stories I heard were at this house we built and he would tell the owner these stories at lunch time and I would listen, but this chappie whose house we built, Vern Andrews, must have had some interest somewhere to be asking and

05:00 probing what JJ's army life was like. So I don't have very much on that one being a bit too young, I suppose.

Well, why were you listening? What made you listen?

I was helping, I was one of the 'hold the hammer', 'hand up the nails', as I mentioned earlier. I had to watch what he wanted. I

05:30 was, well, I was just working for Dad for nothing for two days' a week and I would have worked for him for nothing forever but that didn't matter.

But you were obviously interested in his stories?

I was a teenager then, I was out of my early days. I was a teenager and I was probably thinking, "What am I going to do when I get a bit older?" so I used to listen very tentatively to that.

06:00 Oh, another thing we both did, we both joined the RSL [Returned and Services League]. Oh sorry, he was in the RSL but I joined the RSL at Rochester in 1943 after I come back from the Middle East. I've lived the life of being a growing up soldier or something like that.

Why do you think you were interested in the

06:30 **stories?**

Mm?

Why do you think you were interested in the stories?

Just pure kid's curiosity.

And did it sound exciting?

Well, I probably thought, "Ah, I can tell me mates that my father was a soldier and that he did this and that". That's probably what it was. It's all part of my, fitted into my growing up days. I can remember him after the war going off on a horse so he,

07:00 he must have had some, in uniform, he must have had some connection with the light horse which makes it interesting when I finished up in the light horse. They were good days. I think I was never sought of penned down or pinned down to do things. If I wanted to wander off on my bike and go to Swan Hill he'd say, "Well, we'll just finish this job and you can go",

07:30 and then I'd wander around Swan Hill and come back to Nanneella. This Strathallan place where we all grew up together, I guess it was just to me to be desert but there were crops growing. We had the local hall nearby, a couple of hundred yards away,

08:00 and we'd have dances there. I learnt to dance there. JJ was president of the hall committee so we got involved in that. He had some involvement in the Country Party, which was known as the…I can't think of the name that it used to be, some farmers' union or something. So our family were involved in all the activities around the

08:30 district, the same as I was later on. It's all sought of, I guess I grew into it.

Did JJ march in Anzac Day parades?

Yes, yes. I can remember we marched through the streets of Rochester, well, he did, through the streets of Rochester and Major General George Rankin had some involvement with it all. He was my

09:00 GOC [general officer commanding] later on. They'd march up the street, then they'd have a talkfest and on the way out they'd throw money into a flag for the ex-diggers. I marched up that street once too, with two other blokes on Anzac Day.

Before the war or after?

No, before the war, that's right, about that

09:30 same time.

Why did you march before the war?

I was in the light horse, I was a soldier and also because I worked on the major's, Major [Horace Wilfred] Hicks' farm, so it all tied in together. I worked for him and then I worked for the government, I suppose. I was a soldier

10:00 but I was so proud that this Major Hicks who I worked for and helped build his house, a mud-brick house, and help run his farm and cook for him and every other darn thing, but he inspired me. I polished his saddle and I polished his leggings and bandoliers and rifle butts and all that, I polished all those and just loved to do that.

10:30 And I was only 17 then, wasn't in uniform, I didn't go into uniform till I was 18 and that wasn't quick enough. I would have liked to have been in earlier. I went on this Major Hicks' motorbike to Echuca when the Duke of Gloucester was governor general and he came into Echuca, and I went up there on the back of this motorbike and that was before I was in uniform.

11:00 **Tell me about the Depression years? What did you notice about how other people were coping, did you see swagmen come up from the city?**

We had swagmen, lots and lots of those. There was one particular swagman who came to our house at Strathallan and stole, amongst other things, he stole a big peach, we caught him, Dad caught him later on down the highway near Echuca very, very

11:30 sick, that peach was a bit green. There was that side of it. I don't think the Depression side of it overly worried us because we had rabbits to eat. I don't know about the possums, they were there but I can't recall eating those. We had two or three cows and my

12:00 stepmother or I milked those. At Rochester there was not much to do except wait for the wheat to grow and shoot the cats and fall into the floodwaters. Am I allowed to tell you about who put the stones in the railway points? I was a rotten kid. Well, the train at the station, well, there's two stories about this one. Remind me

12:30 about the second of turkeys. Anyway, we kids would put stones in the points when the goods trains were coming along hoping that we'd derail the trains. Of course, they never did but when the engine got to the platform, where we kids were watching with most innocent, most innocent looks on our faces, "What did you kids do?" "No, not us, sir. No."

13:00 The other story was the turkeys. We had turkeys, hundreds of turkeys, and they used to go across the railway station where all the wheat was bagged waiting to be moved and they'd poke holes in the bags of wheat and spill wheat all over the railway lines and we had to sweep that up before the trains came through. And something else about those…we drove, I think we had 1000 turkeys that JJ Murphy had

13:30 bought and he had a big wire netting enclosure, but how do you shift 1000 turkeys from A to B? You walk them. And we had to walk these damn turkeys, 1000 of them and most of them died with frost bite, see. That wasn't a very successful mission.

You mentioned rabbits before, did you shoot the rabbits?

14:00 Yes, I had a poo rifle and when the floods came up the rabbits got flooded out, of course, and they'd be hopping along with their heads above water and I had a .22 rifle and I used to knock off these rabbits. Another time, my dog Toby and I, we went rabbiting. That was one of my main occupations was rabbiting. We got 10,

14:30 10 pence a skin, I think, and Toby and I went rabbiting and we found a rabbit burrow and, of course, you can smell the damn rabbits so I put my head into the burrow to get a closer look at this rabbit and my dog Toby thought he should put his head in the burrow. Do you know what he did? The rotten cow bit me right over the eye. It's a wonder I didn't lose an eye over that.

The dog or the rabbit?

15:00 We got the rabbit in the finish.

The dog bit you in the eye?

He bit me in the eye. Toby was my favourite dog, too. He had three white legs and a black leg but he reckoned he should have had his head in the burrow, not me, so he grabbed me by the eye, he should have pulled me back. A lovely dog. But for the rabbits we used to get, I think it was about 10 pence each and

15:30 by the time the dealers got their commission there was damn little left.

Now were you brought up religious at all?

No, I'm trying to think how I can put this. I can't recall any church going or Sunday school going at Strathallan. At Nanneella I was,

16:00 I went to Sunday school and the only way I behaved myself, they said, "We'll give you a book for Sunday school presentation if you behave yourself one day". It only lasted one day and then there were stones on the roof and all sorts of things. We weren't a religious family at all. I suppose we were Methodists or Presbyterians and, later in life,

16:30 it didn't matter as long as there was a church somewhere near. I'd take my kids until young Jerry climbed under all the pews, crawled under the pews up to the minister and tugged at the bottom of his pants, so that was the end of that one. I didn't know him. We weren't a religious family at all.

Your mother was a nurse in the First [World] War, did she tell you anything about her

17:00 **experience or how she met your stepfather?**

I've got photos of them in the gardens over there somewhere. No, I don't think she…she had a sister, she probably talked about her sister. Her mother was there,

17:30 Aunty Mabs, Grandma…I don't know if it's aunty or grandma. No, there's not a great deal I can recall of anything along that line. I only had her for about 12 years so I

18:00 didn't get too much in that time. No, I've got nothing more I can top up on that one. I know that when I fell into the flood waters and that Iranian bloke brought me in, I can remember they stood me on a chair and dried me down or dried me up, whichever way you go, but

18:30 I don't know much…she jammed her fingers in the car door, I can recall that, and she played tennis a lot. I don't think I've got much on her because I didn't have her for very long. When she died, I became the boss, as the saying goes.

Now at what point did you

19:00 **join the Scouts?**

Oh, Scouts yes. There's a story there too. Of course, there's stories behind all of them. Empire Day…is it alright to sit up?

You can sit up a little bit. Yeah, that's fine.

Empire Day in Cobram, which is up near Numurkah, the kids are all marching

19:30 and I'm on the curb. Mavis was [Girl] Guide [female equivalent of the Scouts] commission and she was marching and the boys were marching as Cubs and Scouts and the girls as Brownies [female equivalent of the Cubs] and Guides and I thought, "This is no good", and a place called Yarra Weir, which is just out of Cobram, they needed a group leader and Scouts and

20:00 I thought, "I'd better link up here somewhere between all this and not stand on the side out of uniform", so I joined Scouting in 19…I can't remember, it's a long time ago.

Approximately?

The snippets are on the wall in there, anyway. I joined Scouting at Yarra Weir because they didn't have a scout hall. They had a,

20:30 they had a school, we used to meet at the school, and the school was full of white ants and rats and mice and they said, "If you join scouts, Ray, you won't have much to do". You'll meet a couple of times a year and I fell for that one. I was a Scout leader for years and years and years on that one. They got a Scout hall, bought a Scout hall, and got it moved to

21:00 Yarra Weir and it all sort of started off from there. Went to the jamborees [Scout gathering, usually national or international]…

When approximately did you join, early [19]30s, late 30s, 20s, 40s?

That's the question that's worrying me a bit. I can't get the date.

Do you remember around about how old you were?

21:30 I had grown up. I was an adult.

So was it after the Second World War?

Oh yes, yes. We went on to the farm, this is getting close to it, we went on to the farm in 1947, so it would have been not long after that, three years after that I became group leader for my group and later on I became acting district commissioner for that

22:00 area and then moved down to Shepparton and became district commissioner. I stayed as district commissioner till right through till I retired, but then we wondered for years, good years, jamborees, training kids, training leaders and Margaret, she used to go to her Guides and Brownies, then come home and talk to me about it and then I'd tell her about all the goings

22:30 on in the Scouts and the Cubs and, in general, we had a good rapport with Scouting and I won a medal they call the medal of merit. I don't know who dobbed me in on that one but it got presented by the chief Scout of Victoria, one of the governors.

Okay, I don't want to get too far ahead of ourselves, let's get back to the pre-war years,

23:00 **tell us a bit more about the school that you went to. What sort of kids were there? How many kids were there?**

Right, the first school was Strathallan. There'd be about 63 kids and one teacher, a lady teacher. She boarded with us, it was like living with the enemy. And then Nanneella, we had a man teacher. We had about

23:30 40, 48, 49 there. That's where I did my good schooling. I didn't go on any further because there was nowhere to go on the teacher job.

What sort of kids were at your school?

The kids? At the first school, Strathallan, they were a lot of Italian kids because their parents were building the road.

24:00 Just generally wild kids like me, I guess. At Nanneella, where I got my merit certificate, they were a different sort of kids, they were dairy farming kids, where Strathallan was wheat farming, Nanneella was dairy farming, and after, yeah, I must have left school because I drove the mail bus. You can ask me about that one later, mail bus

24:30 and all that, but I think they were just normal kids, we used to get into trouble of course.

Were there any different races?

Strathallan had Italian kids and Nanneella had Aussie kids. We didn't have any other kids there.

The white Anglo Saxon Protestants?

Yeah.

25:00 Yes, that's what they were. There were no Italian kiddies there that I can recall.

Did you learn anything about the First World War at school?

No, not that I can recall. I guess we had Anzac Days and Armistice Days and Empire Days and those sought of celebration days, but I don't think we were taught, I have no recollection of being

25:30 taught anything about World War I. What was that story I was going to tell you? It's gone out of my mind. Something to do with the school. It will come back later.

What were you taught about the British Empire and how did you feel about that?

Now that's one of the questions on a questionnaire I filled in many years later here on the

26:00 book of mine. What did I know about communism? Nothing. What did I know about the British Empire? Oh, not a great deal, except that King George [V] had a beard. My [hero] was Prince George [later King George VI], I had his photo up on the, or picture of him, up on the veranda wall. I guess I had a built-in, and I still have, a built-in loyalty to the British Empire. Somewhere it must have rubbed off

26:30 onto me or into me. I guess I was one of those kids that…and I still do, raise the flag. I'm a monarchist, I suppose, you could put it bluntly for better or worse, but I don't think we were told much about the Empire.

27:00 As fas as I was concerned, Grandma in England was the Empire.

Okay, you left school when you were 12, which would have been right in the middle of the Depression…

That's right.

Tell us about getting work and was it easy to get work or was there not much around?

There was work there but you didn't get paid for it.

27:30 That would be in my teenage, early teenage years. Now as I've already told you, my stepfather was an engineer-builder so there was plenty of work for me helping him but also I helped around the farms, all around the farms. Anybody that wanted a spare slave, JJ would say "Ray can

28:00 go down. He'll look after your farm while you're away". Oh, I know what I was going to tell you and this fits in with your question…the mail man. I was the mail man driver when I turned 18 for Rochester, Nanneella, Timmering. Now it was my job to collect the mail and deliver anything, like five days' a week I'd go to one area and drop

28:30 the mail there and the rest of the week, the other way around. Anyway, I'll get it right in a minute…I drove the mail bus with bread, ice, flour, groceries and the mail, which I used to pick that up in Rochester, and take it all around the various areas and throw the papers over the top of the car,

29:00 then drop them into a mud puddle, but that was the job I had, you refer to jobs. That was almost my main job late teens and into 18 years old, but I could do that, I could handle that, no trouble. What we used to do, JJ Murphy would fix up the vehicles in return for groceries.

29:30 So that fits in with your job spectrum, yeah. That was good, I enjoyed that because that gave me, at 18, a responsibility which not many would have had but it was a job. Later on when I was working for one of the farms, I got seven shillings and sixpence a week milking cows by hand and he was a tyrant of a boss

30:00 and I gave him a week's notice and stayed three months, but the same bloke he wouldn't let me read anything. Nothing on the tables or like that, but that's another story.

Earlier on when you first left school you said you worked as a slave, I mean did you actually get paid for that work?

Yes, I got paid, but only if there was a spare shilling or two available.

30:30 If there was no money, it didn't matter, I didn't need it. It took me 12 months to save up money for a pushbike [bicycle]. I'd just get onto my bike and ride away into the dark. No, the money side of it, although I kept a record of all my money dealings as a boy and a youth, money didn't become an overriding concern. If there was none there,

31:00 there was none there, full stop, but I was very canny with what I had though, I spent it wisely.

Okay, Ray, could I ask you to just unfold your arms, the microphone is very sensitive.

I forgot about that.

Yeah, so if you're rubbing your clothes or the microphone itself then it's going to record all that sound. Now do you remember any sustenance

31:30 **workers around the area?**

Sustenance?

Mm.

Yes, two quid [pounds] a week, I think my uncle, or cousin whatever he was, got…no, see, I don't think I was old enough to know much about the dole. Did they call it the dole? Yes. We were never on the dole.

32:00 An uncle of mine was, he got a pound a week or something, but I don't know anything beyond that. It never affected us kids. We didn't know, we were happy the way we were.

So from your memory, most people in your area were not affected by the Depression?

No, not a great…no, they wouldn't because…the one thing that would

32:30 be affected most would be the wheat growers. If the crop failed or the drought took over, they were out but the dairy farmers always had some income available to them. No, I never felt as if I was deprived.

Now, I'm not

33:00 **sure if there's a gap here between a point where you were working around the farms, helping out a little bit here, a little bit there, until you became the mail driver at 18. There's about six years, was there anything else that you did in that time?**

Well, most of the time at home we would pump sand in my early youth, there were big sand deposits and

33:30 we used to pump the sand from underneath then and where the water was and I used to help on that. If anybody came to take a truckload of sand away, I'd help load it and I might get a shilling for helping or nothing if they decided I didn't do it well enough. I worked for the farmer who had an irrigation farm next door to us. I worked for

34:00 them for two bob [shillings] a day, irrigating, stacking hay. In actual fact, I found my first tin of tobacco up there working for that man. It sought of just merges in, from my boyhood to youth.

34:30 **Now at home, did you have a wireless [radio]?**

Oh, thank you for that. That's a good prompt. On my, I don't know if it was my 21st birthday or not, but my stepfather made wirelesses, he built them, he wanted a battery for his wireless and he said to me, "Ray", he said "I'll give you an option,

35:00 I [can] give you a Gladstone bag [piece of hand luggage with two equal-sized, hinged compartments] or a battery for the wireless". And I thought, "Hang on, I can be smart here". He wanted to listen to this old wireless, so I [said], "I'll have the Gladstone bag, Dad". He still had to buy the battery for his wireless. I had that Gladstone bag for years too after that, somewhere around the place.

35:30 **Now in the late [19]30s, there was a lot going on in Europe that would eventually lead to a world war, with your wireless and other methods of communication, were you aware of what was going on?**

Yes I was, and the night the war broke out I am sitting in front of this radio set, wireless set, that

36:00 Dad built listening to the news. War was declared and I thought, "Goodie", and about half an hour later the phone rang, "Ray, you're on 12 hours notice to go off to the war". And [it] didn't happen so that's what triggered the start of all that off.

Well, prior to the actual declaration of war, were you aware of what [German dictator Adolf] Hitler was doing?

36:30 Well, I must have been otherwise why was I so dead keen to be a soldier. I must have had some inkling, although at that time we were building a house, for this Vern Andrews bloke, so I must have been listening to the news there and hearing what was going on and listening to JJ and his stories, so there must have been a build up

37:00 in there, yeah. I know I was pleased as punch and I've got it written in my pre-war albums.

Do you remember seeing any news reels [documentaries shown at movie cinemas] or anything like that?

No, nothing.

Do you remember hearing about the invasion of Czechoslovakia?

We only had the radio, that' all we had out there.

Do you remember hearing about the invasion of Czechoslovakia?

I was listening to that,

37:30 I was listening to that.

You joined up quite early in 1937?

'Transferred' is the word, I was the militia man and I transferred in, no, I enlisted in the militia in 1937 and then transferred to the AIF in the early part of 1940.

Well, tell us about the militia first off?

'Chocos'. I'm very proud to be a choco, which is

38:00 you're training as a chocolate soldier to be a real soldier later on. Yes, that was great. Where do we start on the chocos?

Well, tell us about your enlistment first off ?

Well, I didn't tell my old man, that's the very important part, I didn't tell him. Though he must have been suspect all the time. I went to Melbourne and had my X-rays and

38:30 came home. I told him I was coming down for some clothes or something and when the letter came to ask me to report to Royal Park [inner Melbourne suburb] training at the enlistment depot I showed him the letter and he went white, absolutely white, because for all the years beforehand he'd keep saying, "Well son, you'll be next. It will be your turn to go next".

39:00 I thought, "No Dad, no". Anyway, I had my X-rays, got everything organised and showed him the letter and, as I said, he went as white as a ghost. He realised then that I was fair dinkum [serious].

Sorry, what was the letter?

That was from the army.

Was that in '39, once war had been declared?

No, that was early 1940 for that one, but we'll revert back to

39:30 our militia days. I went to the camp in, Dad was good about that, he let me go to all these things. He never ever said, "Huh, can't go to that son". He said, "Oh, I'll manage somehow without you". So I think one of the first camps I went to was at Broadmeadows [outer northern Melbourne suburb], Bendigo,

Torquay, where the stampede was, I think there were about five camps.

40:00 About two years and nearly three years as a militia man. We used to get training in Rochester once a fortnight, I suppose, go training in there. And I finished up, we were using the Vickers machine gun detachment and I finished up the number one gunner because I could assemble the bridge plot mechanism, firing mechanism, blindfolded.

40:30 That was what they taught us so I became number one on that one. Camp Bannockburn [30km west of Geelong] was another place, Torquay, as I said. Another one overlooking Tasmania, I can't remember that. That's where I fired the gun and frightened hell out of the sergeant.

Okay, I'll get you to pause there cause we're at the... (TAPE ENDS)

Tape 3

00:30 **Okay, Ray, tell us about the day you enlisted?**

Yeah, no problems.

Or actually tell us what you were doing when the war started, when the Second World War was declared?

I was helping build a house when the war started and JJ Murphy said, "Well, we'll see what happens when we finish building the house", but I don't think I stayed to the finish. The day I enlisted I caught the train with

01:00 JJ Murphy from Rochester to Melbourne and, I heard all this later on, he was supposed to tell me that day who I was. He didn't own up, but that's a different story. Down to Royal Park in Melbourne and he went one way and I went another and that was virtually it. There was an old tin shed, I suppose they called [it] a tin shed where I signed at, the

01:30 attestation (got to be careful how you say that word) papers and the first day I was getting a job of finding places for the new troops coming in. Finding places for them for the billeting around the camp. And all you could hear was "You'll be sorry, you'll be sorry", they had to clamp down on them because it was hurting the feelings of the younger

02:00 blokes. But I was only there, because I'd had military training I knew what to do and so I was made a lance corporal almost the same day, about a week later actually. The first day, as we went through, we were stripped, searched, medically checked, given our regimental number

02:30 (VX33922). It took me a long time to try and not forget it. Then I was made a corporal in charge of route marches. We'd march down Royal Parade, I think they called it. I'd start off with a thousand soldiers and finish with about a dozen. They kept falling off at the back, falling off, I mean by disappearing from the back, because I was up near the front

03:00 and many years later in the Middle East I met a bloke over there, he said "I remember you", he said, "you're the bloke that tried to keep us in step. You'd get the front boys in step and by that time, the ones at the back would be out of step and by the time you got the back ones right, the front ones would be out". I remember that.

Tell us, you said your parents, your father, stepfather, did he react

03:30 **negatively towards you enlisting?**

Originally, he kept saying to me "You'll be next, son. You can go off to the war next." But when it actually happened and I got the papers, I think deep down he was, not hurt, I don't know quite what the word is there, perhaps deep down very proud that I'd enlisted.

04:00 I guess there's a tradition in there somewhere, yeah. I sought of did everything I possibly could to not leave him in the lurch. I made sure that anything he wanted done or needed help, I helped him.

04:30 **What unit did you join, your first in the militia, what did you join?**

Why?

No, what unit?

In the militia, the unit was the B Squadron, No 2 Troop, 17th Australian Light Horse Regiment, B Squadron Machine Gun Detachment. That sounds like a mouthful,

05:00 but that's what it was. They were, the Vickers, I loved them, I really loved them. I must have been a horror somewhere along the line.

When did you join the militia?

1937, as soon as I turned 18 I joined the militia. I guess I was part of a soldier before because I worked for this Major Hicks on his farm. No,

05:30 no, I couldn't get into it quick enough. Also, it meant, I think there must have been some pay involved in it somewhere. How much, I don't remember but I guess that was an incentive, plus the fact that I just wanted to be [a] soldier.

The light horse was local around this area, was it?

No, the light horse was right throughout Victoria in various areas. The 20th, 8th, 4th.

No, I meant the 17th, the one you were with?

06:00 Yeah, the 17th was Bendigo, Echuca, Lockington, Rochester, Nanneella. That was then that area.

How often would you go for training, what was the system?

It would be once a fortnight, I imagine. It wouldn't be any more, it wouldn't be any less. Once a fortnight I'd ride my bicycle, I was in full uniform, not the bike, ride my bicycle into Rochester,

06:30 do our training or on one occasion, four of us, three or four of us, rode our bicycles to Bendigo to do specialist training down there and, yeah, it was good. Nobody got hurt, not that I can remember. There was a sergeant leaned over the barrel of the gun when I fired it but I was trying to keep

07:00 off the enemy that were coming across from Tasmania. How the imagination went ripe, so I just...and also the machine gun, we had it on the beach and the tide came in so we had to hurriedly move our guns. I don't know what sought of soldiers we would have been.

So, when you were called up in 1940?

'40, yeah.

Into the AIF...

The 2nd AIF.

The 2nd

07:30 **AIF, were you instantly promoted?**

Very soon afterwards, roundabout a week, I guess, before I, I went in as a trooper. We were troopers in the light horse, and then when I went over to the 2nd AIF, I should have had all the pay books here, they're all in there, it wasn't very long

08:00 and then I went to the Middle East and lost that rank. I became a sergeant at Geelong, Geelong training. I became a sergeant down there almost the same as I started, on the basis of my previous military service, became a sergeant down there and did a lot of machine gun training and also I did a lot of

08:30 drill, ceremonial drill. I was good on ceremonies and I also had another job down at Geelong, weeding out the misfits. If you've got two left legs or something like that, you were useless in the army so that was another job I had. Also, I was involved in a…we had a bit of a riot there one night and I had to put a lot in the guard house, but that's because I'm a soldier, not

09:00 a muck-arounder, playing up, and they knew that, the boys knew that. They knew that I wouldn't stand any nonsense from them and I slept in the pig pens at the Geelong showground. That was my camp or tent but I loved ceremonies. I'd always be first on the parade ground, I liked to train the troops to do the proper drill and do everything

09:30 correctly. As I told them, "You're not here to play. You're here to learn". See, that's what the rotten cow Murphy was, they didn't like me at one stage. I believe later on somebody was going to throw me overboard on the way to the Middle East, but they didn't, so there you go.

We actually heard that from someone else yesterday?

Did you, oh good.

That they were threatening to throw someone overboard?

10:00 On the troop ship, I did a lot of things probably incorrectly by the authorities, but I was in a cabin up on the top half of the ship and my boys were down below and I used to bring them up at night time to have a wash and a bath and a clean up because they were in amongst the slops and everything down below whereas I was in a cabin. Being a sergeant, you get certain privileges and

10:30 that was…another time on that same ship I fell down the stairs, on a wet day just tripped down the stairs and fell into the arms of a Victoria Cross winner from New Zealand, Brigadier Blackburn, who was taken prisoner a bit later on. He said, "Are you alright, son?" "Yes, sir". That was another thing there, but I wanted to make sure my boys were as

11:00 well cared for as I could without any troubles.

How old were you in 1940?

21. A very young 21.

Did you find that there were chaps a lot older than you who you were in charge of?

Oh heck yeah. Some were up nearly 40.

Did you find that a problem, your authority?

No. We were all in our right positions. Age sought of didn't come into it.

11:30 **So you were training blokes to drive trucks at Puckapunyal [130km north of Melbourne]?**

Mm.

What was that like?

It was fine. You taught them by signals. Turn left or turn right, speed up or something. I stood in the centre of the parade ground area and I hoped no one didn't crash anybody. That was good. We used to go for long drives and I was also in charge of the convoys

12:00 bringing the boys home from leave, from Dysart [5km south of Seymour] to Puckapunyal [a distance of 15km]. Of course, coming home from leave it was full of….and my truck stalled, I was in the front vehicle and I stalled it coming up a bit of a hill and they gave me hell for that one. Yeah, next question, before I run off the road.

Was it there you were also

12:30 **training people with Bren gun carriers?**

Yes, no, just going back for a second on that one on Puckapunyal, on my final leave, the driver who was taking me into Seymour station, I realised he was drunk and that was a very close shave. I dragged him virtually out of the driver's seat and I took over. Bren gun carriers…there's one up there on

13:00 the ledge there. One of my favourite Bren guns, Bren gun carriers. I trained all around the hills of Seymour. Fancy giving a young buck a Bren gun carrier to drive. I could drive it up onto a log and balance it. Do wheelies with it. 21, boy oh boy "This is good!", so I became a Bren gun carrier driver

13:30 as well as, I had all other knowledge of the machine guns as well and I'm very proud I was able to, proud I was given the opportunity to do all these things.

So by this stage, what took place after the Seymour and the Puckapunyal training?

I went back to my training unit at Puckapunyal

14:00 and I can't remember much about after I went back there. I was 19 at Seymour where I did the training around the hills, but I never did any more training on there but I did training on…I went to a school at Seymour for truck driver training, yeah, truck drivers. Somewhere there there's a certificate that says I passed and,

14:30 yeah, what happened, I trained on those sort of vehicles, went to the Middle East and we had different vehicles.

So the light horse were basically mechanised infantry?

Ah, there's two things in the light horse. One where the fellows are on horses, which we had at Torquay where the stampede took place, but my sub-unit had a truck and on the back of each truck were portors [? portals?] or

15:00 something which our machine guns slipped into them so we didn't have to catch horses, we only had to turn the key on and go to war with those.

So there were no horses used at all apart from ceremonial purposes?

In the light horse days there would be hundreds of horses.

But when you were in the Second World War? No?

15:30 In peace time, I didn't have a horse, I had a truck. A lot of the other units had horses, not my unit.

This was in the Second World War at the start, 1940?

Yeah, 1939, '37, '38, '39.

Up to the war?

Up to the war.

But once the war had started that changed?

That finished.

No more horses?

No more horses, no. By that time I was an artillery man instead.

So

16:00 **tell us what happened once you completed your training in Seymour and Puckapunyal, what was the next phase after that?**

The next phase after that was home for three months and then off to the war.

You were sent home?

I came home after the militia training, came home and, I think, we either built or moved another house and then I went off to,

16:30 off to Royal Park and off to war.

So what happened, you had leave basically, is that what you're saying?

The camps were of various times. Some of the early camps were a week, that's in the militia. The last one I was at after the war broke out was three months so I was more or less…

17:00 no, I didn't come home, no. I didn't come home I don't think, I don't know.

Do you remember the day you were leaving Australia to the Middle East?

Yeah.

Tell us about that?

Good Friday, 1941, we trained at Dysart railway site in Seymour,

17:30 rattled our way up to Sydney. On the way up to Sydney, to go onboard the Ile de France, I had a letter written, I had prearranged with JJ Murphy to let him know when I'd left Australia, totally illegal, you shouldn't do that for security reasons, so I worked out a system that I dropped a letter over the side to

18:00 the fettlers [person employed to maintain railway tracks] who were on the lines and in the letter I said to Dad, "I'm going to see Uncle Sid", half of Sydney is Sid of course, and I don't know whether it was really bad and that's what I did and I had a special signature in my letters to him so that nobody else could counterfeit my letters. I believe in World War I,

18:30 they'd write home and say "Send me another hundred pounds" or whatever and sign it, but they were forgeries. In my case I had a snake bite in my signature so they couldn't forge it, but we got to Sydney and got on the ferry and went out to the Ile de France on Good Friday, 1941, and we sailed away and the next day found our cabins and bunks and all the rest of it.

19:00 I don't know whether it was a happy occasion, I don't know.

There must have been a lot of people being 'good-byed' at the wharf?

No.

No?

No, it was practically, the wharf was practically empty. See, the ship was anchored out the other side of the coat hanger [Sydney Harbour Bridge] and so the people who did know we were going couldn't get out there in any case.

19:30 No, it was a very, very quiet, and also very quiet on the way back home years later.

You went out on the Ile de France?

Mm?

You knew you were going on the Ile de France?

The Ile de France, yeah. We boarded that one and that's about all I can tell you about her. She was a big ship, [43,000] tons.

20:00 We were immediately all given jobs to do. My job was check the blackouts on the port holes. We sailed on a convoy of about five ships, Aquitania, Mauritania, Queen Mary, Ile de France. I think that's all there was. Round to Fremantle [20km south of Perth], we couldn't go ashore there,

20:30 of course, because some of the earlier troops had played up there so we didn't get ashore. Up to Colombo [Ceylon]. We were up there for nine days while we put the decossing [?] gear on, then up the

Red Sea into Suez [Egypt] and then Taufiq, Port Taufiq, and then…

Okay, I'll stop you there for a moment, tell us about Colombo, where you stopped at

21:00 **Ceylon? That would have been your first stop overseas?**

First stop overseas, yeah, that's where I went looking for that pen friend. The thing that sticks out in my mind there was the drunken troops who didn't want to march properly back to the ship and we also had, what's that fever they get? They put them in quarantine.

What,

21:30 **enteric [typhoid] fever?**

No, there's one chap who got some sort of fever and we were quarantined there in any case, but it was hot and humid, you know, sticky, but somewhere along the line we met two ladies from a church, Methodist or Church of England, Church of England, I think, who they took us under their wing for the few days we were there and drove us around

22:00 Colombo and generally took us away from the murky places and looked after us and washed and ironed our clothes, and that was the good part and they were good, nice people. And that's where I also bought a filigree bracelet], which is now in the Townsville museum. I bought a black ebony elephant which I've never seen since. I don't know where it finished,

22:30 I know it came home but I don't know who got it or what happened to it. That's about all I know about Colombo. Oh, the bus trip up to Candi [central Ceylon, 90km north-east of Colombo].

You went up to Candi as well?

We went up to Candi in one of your broken down old buses, put an engine in it next time. I think it took three buses to get us up there and we stayed there a couple of days, but I don't know much about Candi.

23:00 The brain doesn't reveal anything on Candi. So that was experience number one.

Did you interact with the local population?

No problems.

Tell us about that?

Well, as you know, they wanted to sell things so we had to haggle with them, "Oh, too much!", "Yes, yes", but I don't recall any problems

23:30 getting to know the local people. I think being a country kid it was just second nature and we went, of course, straight from there to the Middle East. Some of my regiment went to Bombay [India] on earlier ships, they went to Bombay and places like that.

24:00 No submarines going over, only coming back.

So a pretty relaxing stopover as well?

I forget I had one in my cabin, one of the early occupants, peace time occupants, was a Dorothy Lamour [American film actress] or someone or one of those artists, television, not television, those sought of people.

24:30 **It was coming back on that journey that all the excitement was.**

You came back to Ceylon on the way back?

I came back to Ceylon on the way back, so I was an old hand virtually of Colombo and Ceylon.

Did, after Ceylon you said you stopped at Suez, that was the next stop to the Red Sea?

25:00 Yeah, Red Sea was the next one before I saw all the flying fish, there's that song and, yeah, we disembarked at Suez, came down the canal, across the canal in an air raid, my first air raid at Al-Isma Iliyah [Egypt]. I was still a sergeant then so I went into the sergeants mess and had a drink of

25:30 Advocaat [Dutch liqueur], what are you like Colin on Advocaat? Drank Advocaat and washed all the dust down my throat, that was my excuse. From Al-Isma Iliyah we went over to Gaza [Palestine]. I was in charge there for a little while, training troops that were like myself, a bit soft from

26:00 the boat cruise. Trained the troops there. I remember one night I was marching up the wadi [dry watercourse] and run into a patrol of camels and I think the camels got the biggest fright than what I did. We were absolutely exhausted, we marched till we dropped and we did drop. I was badly knocked about with chaffing.

26:30 It was one of the worst times I've ever had.

Where was this again?

That's at Gaza.

That's Palestine?

Palestine, yeah, and I waited there for about, I don't know, not very long, I had to wait and my unit came through down to Syria and I caught up with them there. This Gaza place where we marched,

27:00 I guess it was pretty damn hard on the boys, too. It was hard on me but I can't remember much else about it. I think everything was sought of happening and then on into Syria, of course. That's another battle.

27:30 **What were you told about Vichy French [collaborationist government forces] before you went into Syria?**

I don't think we were told anything. I think the first we heard about the Vichy French was when we arrived at Fuela [?], on the Syrian border, that would have been the first.

28:00 A lot of the Vichy French, of course, were big Senegalese, big tall blokes.

Were you wondering why you were fighting the Vichy French or the French?

No. No, not till afterwards. What's your next question?

Tell us about the operation in Syria,

28:30 **how did you prepare for it?**

Now you're getting into the nitty gritty. My war…

That's what you want to talk about though, the operations.

When I grew up from a young wild country kid into a terrified frightened boy, I suppose, a man. Fuela, we were camped at the Fuela waiting to go over the border and we were told that we wouldn't get much opposition,

29:00 which as it turned out it was all the other way around. One little thing that happened while we were waiting to go into action, one night sleeping on the ground and a big crash next door and there was a motorcyclist, Sergeant Don Lilburn, hit a truck and I found some first-aid

29:30 equipment and we fixed him up. We couldn't give him any morphine because I didn't have any. I wouldn't have had any, sent him back to Australia and then that's where I joined my unit at Fuela and the Syrian border, and I didn't know what I was going to do. I had plenty of training but I didn't know what was available so off come the stripes straight away because there was no position for me as a sergeant there.

30:00 It didn't worry me but a couple of the other sergeants it did worry them because, apparently, they hadn't been too good to the boys and they were going to get their own back on them, but anyway, that's another war. We set up our camp site there under camouflage and prepared to go to battle and I was given the opportunity of listening in on some of the earlier orders.

30:30 We were divided into three groups, I was on the coast road and then there was the inland road. There were two groups, inland or centre, centre and inland, and I was given the job the first few days of driving the captain up to the front, which wasn't very far up I might add, and he used to say to me "Drive

31:00 faster" and I said, "This damn old utility won't go any faster", there was that much camouflage stuff on it. We were bombed six times, air bombs. I was in a truck taking the coast road and they blew the road out in front of us so we were trapped until the engineers could cut into the hill and get us a road

31:30 through. The Vichy French could have had us, we were bottled up, they could have had us, golly, but I didn't know that. Luckily, they don't tell you everything. And then, the day I got shell shocked, I went up to take some parts up to the guns, big guns,

32:00 and the shells from a navy gun, a French navy gun, a fixed navy gun shelled at both sides and my warrant officer said to me, "Look, we're too close together, let's split up a bit." So I tried to dive under a culvert in the road and that was full of infantry blokes and they said "Get the hell out of here! There's no room for you!", so I laid down beside the terrace.

32:30 You only had about five seconds from the time they fired their big guns to the time they exploded so that was alright, I got out of that alright, and another time one of our guns blew up about from here to Colin in front of me and the big barrel on the gun just blew up like that and the explosive sound hit me at the back,

33:00 I was only about 10 yards away, at the back. That wasn't very nice. I think that's the day my captain was killed. The bloke I used to drive the ute [utility vehicle] for. I guarded him all that night and we buried him the next day. I dug the trench and we just made a rough grave for him. His photo's in amongst

those on the table.

33:30 We got a change of officer then, but he was the bloke that said “Go faster”. And then the day they signed the surrender I was standing on the side of the road when the French general’s went along and I had no feeling at all, none whatsoever that day. I guess it was part of the

34:00 shock and part of the nerve damage that was done. I had a trench, a slit trench beside our vehicle and every morning or every night I used to dig it a big deeper but every morning a French plane would go over and try and find us and I dug my trench about that much deeper. If he had dropped a bomb, it would have closed in on me.

34:30 Also those two ships, where is that picture? That would be in there, those two ships, the French ships that fired on us, this captain did a bit of a panic and made a shift very quickly because we were open target so we went up the hill and cheered every time our guns got close because we could see it all from the top of the hill. We had a good view, like

35:00 a football match, and we could see it all happening, but round about that time we had a shot at a British plane, we got it mixed up. He had no sense of humour that bloke as they fired a few shots around him and smartened his footwork up a bit.

35:30 It was a funny sort of a war, I guess. We had the natives walking around our tents and everything like that later on. I finished up going into Turkey to have a look up there, over the River Jordan into Turkey, over the Allenby Bridge,

36:00 have a bit of a look around there and we were setting up gun positions right along the Turkish border at Homs, never been so cold in my life as I was at Homs.

Did you lose many friends in the Syrian campaign?

Yes, we had the highest casualties of any battle up to that time. I think we had 1400 killed and wounded, including

36:30 my captain. A lot of casualties because those damn French [Foreign] Legionnaire blokes they were good fighters, and that’s where [Lieutenant (Arthur) Roden] Cutler got his VC [Victoria Cross] in there. He was only about 10 mile away or less, it wouldn’t be that far when he got that, but he earned that there’s no doubt about that.

37:00 Another time during the battle I went swimming in the Mediterranean to have a bit of a wash and a clean up and a French plane came over dropping what they call ‘daisy cutters’, as they come down they’re spinning out and I was in the water. I tell you I got out of the water fairly quickly and got dry. That will teach me to go

37:30 swimming in wartime.

Did you get into close combat with the French?

No, no. None of us did, I guess there, except the infantry blokes, but we weren’t far away. At one stage I had my vehicle parked in with the infantry and they’re supposed to be up the front line.

38:00 **How did you find yourself coping with the heat of battle?**

Not a problem because I was a trained soldier. There was only, there was once we had to move quickly we thought we were being…coming in from the sea there was a couple of little boats and we thought they were the enemy. We had to move fast there. Even,

38:30 even with the ‘mad mile’, as we called it, we had, when I was driving the truck or ute up to the farm we could hear the shells start and we knew we only had five seconds to get…because of the trajectory of the shells that were coming out we could get through, the mad mile. Something else I wanted to say about that, yeah, when the British

39:00 commandoes landed at the Litani River they landed on the wrong side of it and the shells from our side burst all around them and later on that day I went up to have a look at them and there was all these beautiful young men with smiling teeth, all dead, all dead. I don’t think I could ever forget that. What impressed me, they had

39:30 such beautiful teeth but they were dead. They were Scotty [Scottish] blokes, they’d landed on the wrong side. I think they might have copped it from both sides.

So, your own artillery was landing there as well?

Yeah, they were landing all around. The French artillery and ours all around there.

Were there many of them dead?

I wrote in my diary about 100-odd I thought, but that seems to be wrong.

40:00 I tell you that really impressed me that, I guess. That’s when I grew up very, very rapidly.

We'll have to pause now because we've run out of....

Tape 4

00:30 Open heart surgery, five bypasses, a $27,000 operation, you paid for it, thank you.

So that's a little thank you to the DVA [Department of Veterans' Affairs], is that what you're saying?

Yes, thank you very much DVA with all my bits and pieces and my crutches and walking stick and that chair, thank you DVA.

01:00 **Alright, let's get back on the track.**

I'll take these off, that's right. Now I can't think with them off.

Now I wanted to ask you, take you back a little bit to the Ile de France, now when you were on that you mentioned that you...

On the table was a menu, from the Ile de France.

Okay, I wanted to ask you, you said when you crossed the Suez Canal you came under

01:30 **enemy fire?**

We came under aerial bombardment.

Can you tell me about that experience, what was it like?

I don't think there was anything to tell about it. They were dropping shells or bombs and we crossing the Suez Canal on barges. There was no organised panic or no slit trenches or anything like that. Oh, the search lights were on, you could see the search lights. We probably thought it was great,

02:00 "Gee, we've arrived at the war". As I said earlier, I had Advocaat to wash the dust out of my throat. That was about all I can remember of it.

So did you all just get up on deck and watch it happen?

No, we were on land then. We'd been disembarked, disembarked at Al-Isma Iliyah, I think. We crossed at Al-Isma Iliyah, we disembarked at Suez, I think it was. Hazy memory on that one.

02:30 No, the Ile de France, we sent her packing.

Alright, can you tell me a little bit, a bit more about the training camp at Gaza, what sort of training were you doing?

Quastina, a place called Quastina, Q U A S T I N A, I think we were camped there…the only training we had there was route

03:00 marches. There was nothing else, I don't think. I can't recall doing any gun training or anything. Just mostly night marches because we weren't there for very long, only a very short time. The length of time I can't recall, I know it wasn't long.

Did you go out on leave there?

On?

Leave.

Leave? Oh, bucket off. We were there to fight not go on leave or chase the sheilas [women] around.

03:30 No, no leave there. I didn't get any leave till after Syria was, after we cleaned up there.

Really? Not even a night?

No. Where was there to go except for paddocks of sand?

Most of the diggers we've spoken to got at least some leave to go into the local town and do a bit of shopping.

No, not then I didn't. Later on after it was over I did.

04:00 They must have found somewhere that I didn't find where it was.

Can you tell me what were your first impressions of Palestine?

Probably going back to Sunday school days and that's all written up somewhere, I think to be quite candid, it all

04:30 seemed unreal. I guess that's what a lot of it was and, not being a city-bred boy, I only had vague ideas of what kids got up to in their towns. I think I was probably wondering, these blokes getting around with their long white jackets on, are they on our side or whose side are they on? You've got to be very watchful of that because we caught one bloke and thought he was a spy.

05:00 I remember seeing him. I don't think we've got many vivid memories of what the population was or anything because we had no idea before we got there. I presumed I just accepted people as we came to them.

What about the countryside?

Well, from a boy who came from, originally from a very flat area, it was a lot hillier over there than I'd expected,

05:30 yes. Orange groves and all that that we didn't have, but I think we were too, I know I was, I think I was too busy preparing for the battle ahead than to be thinking too much about the people over there. I know after it was all over we had tea with a very nice family and we drank arrak [spirit distilled from toddy palms, molasses or other materials] and there's a right and wrong way of drinking arrak.

06:00 You've got to have greens with it, cucumbers and lettuce, otherwise…and, also, it's a very potent drink, as I didn't personally find out but I saw it happen that you've got full on arrak and two or three days later you had a glass of water and you were just as drunk again. That was the reaction. Whether it's colourless or not, the people whose taxi that finished up near my tent, you

06:30 don't want to hear about that.

Yeah.

Well, it sought of wandered that taxi, two of our blokes borrowed it, brought it in, into our tent line, that was from Beirut [capital of Lebanon] that was afterwards, from Beirut and there was a hell of a furore over that. The taxi bloke wanted to know where his wireless was, well, I could have told him that. They lined us up as a, what do you call it? Mug shot to see if they could identify

07:00 anybody and they couldn't cos the blokes that took the taxi were away on duty. He got his taxi back but he never got his steel box that was the radio. I had that right for Borneo days, I was looking after it, but this commanding officer wasn't very pleased with their behaviour, not mine. It's just one little incident where you met the people from Beirut,

07:30 the taxi driver people and, I'm trying to recall, Damascus [capital of Syria], I know I was in Damascus but I can't recall it. I've got a photo of having my shoes cleaned.

Alright, well let's talk about Syria, it sounds like when you were there it was a very hectic piece of fighting.

Well, that's right. We weren't there very long before we went into action. I think we got there and on June

08:00 7th we went into action and we were there and about a week beforehand, it was a mad scramble to get stores and spare parts and get orders and meals and all that sort of thing really.

What exactly were you doing?

At that time, I was driving the commanding officer's or captain's utility

08:30 because previous to that, that was straight after I arrived, that was the next day, I think. I got the job of driving him up to the front, which wasn't very far, and then a little bit later on, I'm not sure at this stage how much later, I was given the job of being put in charge of spare parts for trucks and guns and rifles and Brens and all those sort of things. Well, that was my job then

09:00 right through. Actually, I didn't know much about it in any case when I got there. I soon learnt. I got to know the numbers of all the, regimental numbers of our men. My unit was only, was made up of 13 men, I was the 14th, much larger later on.

09:30 We had to cook for ourselves and all that sort of business. During the battle itself we had some rations but we mainly had to cook for ourselves and do what we could.

What sort of food did you have?

Mm?

What sort of food did you have?

At one stage we had camel and that black beet with strings right through it. The food was,

10:00 well, virtually there was no delivery of food much at all, it's what we carried with us. I can tell you a story later on about the food in New Guinea. It's a funny thing that, the toilets were non-existent, of course. Every bush when you went to go to the toilet, which was frequently, every bush you thought was

10:30 an enemy with a big knife about to stab you in vital spots but that was the feeling we had.

How did you come to be eating camel?

Short of rations.

Where did you get it from?

Well, that was the normal issue of food through the regiment.

The army issued camel?

Army issue. Oh yeah, you wouldn't have voluntarily eaten the damn stuff.

11:00 We had some eggs that we bought off farmers and the people that lived there, we got some eggs off there. I remember cooking those in my dixie [cooking pan], but until the fight was over, rations were catch as catch can. You bought some eggs if you saw any around the vendors that used to wander through our lines. You'd get a couple of eggs

11:30 but mostly it was hard rations. I sent a tin of my hard rations to Townsville [museum] a few months ago. If I'd have known you folk were coming, I would have kept them all for you to see. Meals were, if you ate you ate and that was that. There were no, nothing special about it.

And where were you sleeping?

12:00 On the ground. And my new adoptee grandson when he was down last weekend he wanted to know about sleeping and I said, "I slept on the ground for roughly four to five years." And he couldn't work out, "But how did you sleep?" I said, "You dig a little hip hole, down beside the wheel of a truck". One night in Syria I was sleeping under the truck, my big truck, and was right up with the infantry cos of

12:30 nowhere else to park and I was sleeping under there and the navy boats opened up from the Mediterranean, over the top of us, and I forgot where I was sleeping and I jumped up and I whacked my skull on the tail shift of the truck, oh boy, the Scouts would love to hear that story. Laughed their heads off, "Oh, you whacked your head, did you?" I probably, after that slept outside on the ground by

13:00 the truck, usually by the wheels.

Now the captain you were driving was killed, can you tell us a bit more about how he was killed?

Yes, I can tell you that because I'm one of the few that probably knows about that. I'm surprised that…I thought others did know, I still think they knew. What happened was, I was up at the front with the warrant officer checking these guns and taking parts up and when I came back I'd

13:30 found that Captain [Thomas William] Thrupp had been killed [on 26 June 1941] and what had happened, the armourer was testing rifles and as he tested one there was a bullet in it and it went like that and Captain Thrupp was coming across like that and they met, the bullet and Captain Thrupp met. Killed him practically instantly. And there was a court martial and

14:00 the man was cleared. It was definitely one of those things that happened, but it was my job then to sort of look after him at night time and make sure the body was decently covered and all the rest of it, and then the next day I had to dig a trench or a grave for him and we had our volley of shots. And

14:30 I understand his remains were moved to Sayda, or Sidon as we called it, for a proper burial. I didn't know him very well because I'd only been there a little while and then the only time I knew him was when we were driving up to the guns at the front. It was very sad that, as I said, because his daughter has been back, has been over to Syria and gone to

15:00 the cemetery where he is now buried so it closes the episode. The authorities were very good. They all decided to stop fighting each other post-war and, yes, so that was my experience.

Did you actually see him get hit?

No. No, I don't think anybody did. He was on a motorbike, on this motorbike whizzing across.

15:30 That's about all I know about him. We had a new officer shortly afterwards, Captain Brown, Admiral Frederick Brown , and he was a good man, too. Actually, I think all my officers, to me officers, senior to me of course, I think they were all pretty good because they were tradesmen, they were all engineers and mechanics and all that sort of

16:00 thing and that's what we were, we were a specialist group of repairers or whatever you liked to call us, armourers because without us, the guns couldn't fire. [Major] General [George] Vasey said years later in Syria, oh, in New Guinea, "If you haven't got your spare parts blokes to keep the guns going, it's kaput", and you realise that later on. You don't think about

16:30 it at the time, you just do your job.

Now you had quite a lot of air raids at this time?

Air raids? One, two, three, but in my notes I've got written down, six air raids in Syria. I can remember the, I think it must have been that prince plane flying over every morning. There was that one and the one that dropped the 'daisy cutters' on me in the Mediterranean.

17:00 I don't think I thought much of them, I don't think, because I have no vivid imagination on any of it except the one that dropped the 'daisy cutters'.

Were you also involved in helping wounded men?

Yes, in a different way to what you might think. I got a call one morning,

17:30 would I go up towards Damascus way and pick up a boy out of the [2/]27th Battalion who had been hurt when a Bren gun carrier had overturned. As you realise by the picture on the wall in there, it's pretty rough sort of country and a Bren gun carrier had overturned and I was sent up there to bring him back to hospital.

18:00 Freezing cold, no windscreens in the vehicles because they reflect, bring him back to hospital in Beirut or somewhere along there.

That was night time?

No, it was day time but, unfortunately, he died so I never got to know any more about him. That was, you might say that was my good Boy Scout turn, starting off on that one.

18:30 **Did he die with you in the truck?**

He died after I got him into hospital, but I just shoved him in the back of the truck, no stretchers or blankets or anything or pillows or mattresses, shoved him in the back because we had nothing else. The main thing was for me to get up the hills and pick him up and take him to hospital.

Was he badly knocked up?

Mm?

Was he badly knocked up?

I don't know.

19:00 It was fatal but I don't know what his injuries were?

Was he bleeding?

You never get to find out these things. I know he was out of the 2/27th Battalion that I wanted to join later and also that was the same battalion that picked me up when I had fever. Took me into a café.

19:30 So that was that story.

I understand there were a lot of land mines around Syria, did you ever deal with them?

Not quite. Where I had to lead the unit trucks into a place, I think it was 'Death Valley', as they called it, they told me

20:00 and showed me, they said, "There are unexploded bombs in Syria". But I never ever saw them so I don't know any more than that, but I'm not aware of many land mines, not like they have today. I never walked on one anyway, so I was lucky that way.

Did you get up

20:30 **into the forward trenches?**

I would say I was up with the infantry and they're usually in the front line. That's where the warrant officer said to spread out and disperse. He said, "You are all too close", when they were shelling.

21:00 So, it's a bit hard to say where the front line was because we weren't in trenches like they were in World War I. We were sought of hiding behind, well, the infantry were hiding behind rocks and stuff.

You were being shelled?

Yes.

There were shells falling around you?

Yes, they were the ones, they were fixed navy guns, the French had some damn good guns. They had

21:30 the two destroyers out at sea that we fired on and they had these fixed navy guns and they would fire over our heads and it was in amongst those where the warrant officer said we were too close together, don't let us bunch up. If they wiped us out, they wiped out their repair units and I had five seconds from the time they, about five seconds from the time I heard the shell

22:00 fire and if I was taking the captain up I could whiz through under the trajectories. Yeah, a bit scary but who cares, I'm a young bloke, I'm in a truck, I'm at war, I'm where I'm trained for.

So you didn't think it would happen to you?

No, of course you don't. They never told us that. When we went and did our training they never told us once that the enemy would fire back. We were the ones firing all the time according to the training

22:30 team. Not a word about them shooting back. I think it was very unfair but that's where I grew up very smartly. As I said, I hid behind the, I couldn't get into the pipe under the road so I laid down beside the terraces until they stopped firing.

Given your boyhood dreams and the training that you'd had, was it a bit of a surprise to find yourself

23:00 **running and hiding?**

Well, that's right. I'm sure it would have been a surprise because none of that came into my training. They used to talk about the enemy but they never talked about shooting back, especially the ones that come from Tasmania and we were at Portarlington [50km south of Melbourne] training.

Were you scared?

No, oh, I don't know. Now that's something I can't recall. I was probably very concerned.

23:30 Was I scared? I reckon I must have been at that time. I think if you weren't scared there was something wrong with you. I think you'd have to be a little bit concerned, but then you had all your mates around. They didn't appear to be scared and they were probably frightening hell out of them, they weren't showing it. I know my foster father said I aged

24:00 five years in that two years I was away over there, so it must have shown.

Did it affect you after a while, all these bombs going off around you?

Yes, you become very touchy, very 'bomb happy' as my wife used to say. I said, "No, it's not bomb happy". "Yes it is. You're touchy, your nerves have gone…" Well, you might have seen them shaking this morning,

24:30 that's how it affects you. If I hear any sharp noises outside I'm just as likely to dive under the table or something, but I get very upset with sudden loud noises. That's how it affects you. Watch TV and I cry my head off, watching TV, but I've got to watch those sort of things to try and get through that system. I watched Stalingrad [World at War documentary series episode on 'Stalingrad: June 1942–February 1943' that aired on 4 April 2004 on the ABC?] last week and the tears

25:00 rolled down and then watching Berlin being bombed and all that. They're the things that upset me now. Not so much at that time, at wartime.

Why does that upset you? I mean Berlin was enemy territory?

I think I'm trying to relate to it and I think I feel as though I'm there.

25:30 **Do you think the reality has sunk in more now?**

Well, that's right. At the original time, it's play time. Now it's sort of more fair dinkum. The reality is coming through all the time, as much as you think "God how did I survive?" I know when the atom bomb dropped I was in hospital and I said, "I'm free.

26:00 I can go home tomorrow to my family. I'm still alive." That's the words I used, "I'm still alive", because you only live one day at a time. You don't know what next week brings. My pension says 'nervous disposition' or something. That was one of the early ones, but I do, I get very

26:30 upset and touchy, I suppose are the right words. In there, there are umpteen volumes of wartime books. I feel as though I've got to read all those to get through this system of worry about it and…

Do you have dreams about it?

Nightmares, screams. When Margaret was alive

27:00 she wouldn't let me watch much tele [television] when there was wartime stuff on. She was only five foot nothing [tall], she knew what would happen, I would go to bed and I'd start dreaming of Germans and Japanese or Italians or somebody coming at me with bayonets and I can't move, my bed won't move, and I start screaming, and I still do that but it was worse a few years ago. I must have been going

27:30 through a rough period and I'd just yell and scream and everything like that, so I don't know whether our boys do or not. I presume they would. Especially the POW [prisoners of war] boys. Oh yes, at the service club they always talk about Ray and his war because they like to have a go at me.

28:00 **Why do you think they have a go at you in particular?**

I'm the only returned bloke there, I'm the only…that's why I go out, well, not why I go out, I go out to Scouts talking about World War II because they want to hear about it and what it is, I'm a real live returned soldier to them and my own grandson many years ago, he said to the Cub pack, "This is my grandpa. He's a general". I thought you rotten little cow.

28:30 I could have kicked his shins, but I let them think I was because I had that uniform on. I think there's a picture of it somewhere…no, it must be in there. There's a lot of variants.

Did it make life difficult for your wife, Margaret?

I think it would have because I was very, for quite a number of years I was very

29:00 edgy with my family, because it's probably, it's still in my system and the kids probably didn't help it at times. Margaret was ex-service. I don't know why the wives, I believe, were told not to talk to us and ask us about the war days. I think it would have been good. It would have got a lot of it out of our systems.

29:30 It's mainly nightmare is the worst, yeah it would be nightmare. There's many a time I've sat here watching the box and something will come on and I'll cry my head off. Absolute volumes. I've thought, "What the hell? There's nobody to see? I can scream my own head off at my own

30:00 family in my own house, there's nobody to see and I think that's good. Don't bottle it up, get it out of your system. Hopefully, you'll feel better but at least you've got it out of your system.

Is it just war shows or [do] other things upset you?

Yes. Not only war, with the loss of my family I've only got to see something on tele, there was something there on tele one day and they

30:30 said two or three things and I thought, "Oh, that's what my daughter said to me just minutes before she died", and of course what happened, I collapsed in a heap on the floor. That's the sort of thing probably caused originally by the wartime experiences, just enough to trigger it off. I only lost my eldest daughter, my wartime daughter about six years ago, six years ago, that's right.

31:00 **You mentioned that your unit had very high casualties and just in your experiences in Syria alone, you must have lost a lot of men in Syria?**

Fourteen hundred were killed and wounded. One bloke was killed on the last day sitting on a

31:30 Bren gun carrier, I think, he got killed, and Captain Thrupp but, of course, you don't know who those people are because if they're not in your own unit…

Well just within your unit, did deaths have an affect on you?

No, only the one. That was Captain Thrupp, he was the only bloke. It did after the war because his family came from where I came from and they were all wondering what had happened to him, I thought they were told.

32:00 According to an article I read recently, they didn't know. I could have told them years ago all about it. I guess underneath because you keep remembering these things, it must have some affect on your outlook and that. Next

32:30 question.

Well, I'm wondering, I mean, you've talked about how the war has affected you later in years so at the time, as you say, I mean, there was really Captain Thrupp and that chap you took to hospital, but after a while you must have seen more and more men get killed or hit, did this affect you?

I saw all those Scottish blokes killed. A shell had

33:00 hit the, they were sheltering under sort of a bush and a shell hit the bush and the concussion spun them all out and killed them that way. I can't remember how I felt at that time, I can't recall that. Whether I thought it's wartime, this is what happens. It probably, unknown to me, it would have had some affect.

33:30 **Do you think that maybe at the time you just went into automatic?**

Well, that's what it was, yeah. War's war and that's that.

You mentioned before, we'll move onto another topic now because…you mentioned before that when you were driving in the truck, there was no windscreen and it was freezing.

That's right, it was freezing. Absolutely bitterly cold. There was snow on the mountains,

34:00 up high, and there was no windscreen in the truck and I froze because you are driving into the cold air. I felt honoured to be given the job of bringing him back to hospital, I thought "Ah, this is not what I

usually do", but they were looking for someone to drive a vehicle that could drive. Yeah, that stuck in my memory that.

34:30 Never found out his name either.

Did it affect you when he didn't make it?

I don't think so, I was probably sad.

I was going to ask you a bit more about the weather, what sort of weather you had and what affect this had as

35:00 **I didn't realise that it was so cold?**

Yeah, up in the hills it was bad, it wasn't too bad, well, it was cool but there was that cold night air cutting through where the windscreen was. I don't think I was worried about that. I was sought of probably used to, accustomed to driving around such a lot that I don't think the weather worried

35:30 me.

Did you ever see any dust storms?

At El Castina on the way home we were camped there, that was after Syria, we were camped there ready to embark and we copped a sand storm, or dust storm, whatever you call them, we copped a dust storm there. I should have drank some more arrak, not arrak, Advocaat to

36:00 wash it all down. That's where we were camped, we were only staging there and there were concerts and that sort of stuff and packing up equipment. Being the NCO [non-commissioned officer] in charge, a lot of these things I had to do, packing cases and all that sort of stuff, yeah. Concerts, grog [alcohol], American grog, no, Canadian grog I think it was. Stuff called Canadian White Label. It was tough, boy it was tough

36:30 at that stage, wasn't it? Had to drink all this stuff. It saved taking it back to Canada. So it wasn't all serious, there were a lot of funny sides which I can tell later on. He's still deep in his book.

Sorry about

37:00 **that.**

Are we still on tape?

Yes, we're still going.

Oh good, I had the job of helping load guns and trucks and equipment onboard Madras City, was the name of the tub [boat/ship], and we came across the Syrian desert, driving across there, no brake cylinders, no master brake cylinder, got to where we had to go at Tawfiq, loaded our guns and trucks, emptied all

37:30 the petrol out of the tanks, checked the tyres and all that sort of stuff. I was in charge of a working party of Arabs and this Arab dropped a big beam on his foot and I said, "Ooh, you'd better…", because I spoke a little bit of Arabic and I was trying to tell him to get the hell out of here and get some treatment, "No, no, no", he said "I loosa da money, I loosa da money if I

38:00 go to hospital", so it made an awful mess. We camped out in the open paddocks while we were loading because while we were there, I'm not sure how it started, but there was a fight started amongst our blokes. Gee they were good actors too, and while the military police were trying to quieten them down some other fellows went around to the navy canteen and 'borrowed' a few cases of grog. That was the Canadian White

38:30 Label. Good grog too. And I didn't drink that much either. I enjoyed it. I felt, again, I felt I was doing something being in charge of unloading, stacking and storing guns and ammunition. And I believe there was a ton of TNT [explosive] onboard underneath where my utility was. I slept in the back of the ute in front of the bridge [of the boat/ship]

39:00 and if that had have gone up there would have been no need to worry about lifeboat stations [emergency procedure to ensure everybody is allocated a lifeboat position], we'd have been gone. I think we had a lot of the machine guns on our ship that should have been on another ship further ahead of us. It always seemed to be windy and dusty

39:30 over there.

Now is this in Lebanon or Syria?

Syria. It's all changed around now. I think what we called Syria then is Lebanon now or something. That's where I learnt to speak Arabic a little bit over there. I tried to speak Arabic to a chappie on Australia Day when I raised the flag in Shepparton and I thought he said he was from,

40:00 from Lebanon, but it turned out he was from Albania. They all look the same so chatted to him for a while in Arabic, but it's fun. That's another thing too, I talked to the kids at school because there are ethnic kids over there and I speak to them in Arabic, one or two words and their faces light up, "Somebody knows what we can say". Mind you I can only count and [a] few other

40:30 words, but I've learnt all those words from all those years ago and every now and again the basic words will crash and in that case you say "tittabargoose", it means 'no good', or "ishimin balard", "ishimin balard" is 'what's the name of the next village?' "Kwayes kadir" means 'it's good'. I'm lucky,

41:00 I know that they don't know what I'm saying so I have a lot of fun on that one.

Okay, we'll pause there. That's the end of the tape.

We'll pause for a…

Tape 5

00:35 **When you left Syria, what took place after that once the campaign had finished?**

Right back to Australia.

No, immediately after the campaign finished, where did you go from there?

Oh, we went up to the Turkish border and we set up gun pits and what across there.

That's right.

That's what we did there. That was as cold as Homs hobs [?], it was a cold, bitterly cold place.

01:00 I don't think I've ever been so cold. I drove the officer in charge up to there and I sat in the car and still froze because, no windscreens, don't forget. Then we sort of set up the separate division, which was part of mine. We set up right across the top of Syria against the Turkish so the Germans and Italians, or Germans mainly, when they came down through, that's what started it all. We cleaned all that up and had a

01:30 fair bit of leave. I had leave. The only way you could get leave to Palestine was if you had money in your pay book and I always had money in my pay book, even though I didn't have much. I got leave and went down to Jerusalem and had four days there over Christmas. On Christmas morning I heard the bells of Bethlehem ringing and there was a shower of hail stones which made it a white Christmas. That's all

02:00 in on the table in a six page letter for you. That was that, so we sort of wound up Syria and came home on the boat to Colombo, where we tried to get into Java [Dutch East Indies; modern-day Indonesia] and couldn't because the Nips [Japanese] were there ahead of us.

So we went to Colombo, how long were you in Colombo for?

We actually went in, we

02:30 went into Colombo first…

Or was it Madras [India] first?

Went in first and then down the coast and every time we tried to land the Japs [Japanese] were there ahead of us. Then we came back, turned back to Colombo and stayed there for, oh, I'd say a week or 10 days. Every time we tried to get out there were Japanese submarines.

Outside Colombo?

Outside Colombo.

03:00 And then when we finally got out and came down to Fremantle, the Japs could have got us because we had no real protection, there were a couple of destroyers and a battleship but they couldn't have saved us and it would have been a damn long way to swim.

So let me just get this straight, we don't want to go too far ahead…

No.

You went to Colombo and then your convoy was going to go through Java?

That's right. That was the intention. The 7th Division

03:30 was coming down to Colombo and to be sent into Java only, whoever the [Australian] prime minister was, Curtin I think at that time, he put on such a stink that we were unprotected home, at home.

But you didn't know that at the time?

No, no. You don't know anything.

So this excuse for U-boats [unterseeboot; German submarine] really probably didn't exist?

I read about it later.

So it was true?

I believe it was true and I read about it later. They could have got us because we were

04:00 virtually…I believe there was a gap in the escorts so far down. You'd go on your own and then you'd meet up with another escort down to Fremantle or Rottnest Island [small island 20km north-west of Perth], I believe so, because you don't get told you've got to surmise, but I think I've read it.

How long did you stay in Colombo for?

Going or coming?

On the way back?

On the way back.

04:30 I don't think very long.

Were you with the 6th or 7th Division?

There was only one division and that was the 7th Australian Division. The others were all make believe. Not true, not true. No, we were the 'silent division', they called us.

Why is that?

I don't know. Nobody told the world about us. So that's why this doctor in Melbourne is writing a book on the 7th

05:00 Division, he said "There's little or nothing known about you fellows", especially my little unit, very little known. I've marked it in the book. No, we couldn't have stayed there very long. I don't know but I know that the boat that was at the front of our convoy dropped off

05:30 boys from my district [in Java] and they all got taken prisoner about a week later. That's how close we were. My ship, the Madras City was the tail end, sought of a rescue ship. We had things that drop in the ocean, the bombs [depth charges]. We had those onboard. We had the guns, the machine guns, that belonged to the crowd that got taken prisoner. Their guns, their machine guns, were on our boat. Oh, it

06:00 was a muck up! A real big muck up. So we turned tail and came back to Colombo and waited there for a while, I don't know how long.

Was it a fair amount of time?

Till it was safe enough to venture out, but we didn't know that much.

What did you do in Colombo in the meantime while you were stationed there?

We were stationed on the boat, we weren't stationed ashore.

06:30 I think we just took day trips around because I can remember the Christian ladies who had a car and took us around, but there was nothing much except route marches and eat, get drunk and all those sort of things. Not me, no. I didn't get really drunk, I'd just get full, that's not a big difference.

There must have been a lot of foreign troops there at the time?

07:00 The 6th Division had been there ahead of us. Our division went through and coming back the 9th Division followed us. It couldn't have had too many there because Colombo harbour is very small, it's very small, so you couldn't have too many troops. All that I can remember about was hot and

07:30 steamy, that's what I remember. A bloke on one of the other boats had cholera, that's right. That's why we couldn't do too much around, we were quarantined. He lived, he went right through. One of my jobs was to march the troops back to the

08:00 jetty and then on to the boat. You can imagine a whole stack of soldiers, half drunk, mad as hatters.

So you went through the convoy route back to Fremantle eventually?

Yes, from Colombo to Fremantle. We didn't go ashore, I don't know whether anybody did. Back there and then down.

08:30 Oh, incidentally, coming home there were two cargo boats with holes in them that had been torpedoed. One behind us, one in front of us, and we had no escort from Tawfiq to Colombo. Just had to go like 'bats out of hell' [fast]. Then down to Fremantle, round to Adelaide, where we disembarked and there was a wharfie strike on at the time which

didn't please us, went overland from Adelaide to Helleden [outer north-western Brisbane suburb] in Queensland. In Adelaide, I had a few jobs to do driving around the officer in charge to headquarters and stuff like that, but I have no recollections other than that.

Then on to Queensland…

You drove up to Queensland?

I drove.

From Adelaide?

Yeah, from Adelaide. Some troops went by train. See, what happened, some of our trucks that had high tops on them and couldn't get under the bridges, they were on the trains and couldn't get under the bridges, that's right. We came through Seymour and some of our boys disappeared and came back home later. I didn't get any leave, although I was only

from Seymour to Rochester [120km] away from my foster family. Right up to Helleden in Queensland and then we did a lot of jungle training. I trained senior blokes in my unit and that didn't please them either, but I was told I had to train these blokes. See, a lot of them just come out of garages at home straight into the unit.

These were replacements?

They weren't militia or anything like

that. I'd had all that training and that was at Canungra [120km south-west of Brisbane] and then, I think, we took off to, I think my daughter was born, no, she couldn't have been born that was too early. I know she was born while we were stationed in Queensland. Then we did a lot of jungle training there and then up to New Guinea,

where my job there again was to help dismantle guns so they could put in the aeroplane and chuck them overboard and put them together later on. Little 'baby' 25s.

'Baby' 25 pounders?

25 pounders, yeah, they were cut down. Each piece had to be no more than 600 pound or something. Drop them with a parachute.

That was one of my little jobs and then after they'd gone over and dropped their guns and found most of it, it was my job then to spend every night setting up spare parts and oil, buffer and recuperators, oil seals and all that. Then as well as putting up with fever and aches and that's where we had one air raid there. That was one of the air raids. A good

number of my unit landed in the middle of New Guinea and a lot of our fellows died of scrub typhus [disease passed onto humans by mites], a terrible damn thing that is. They tell me that they'd just wake up screaming or they'd sit up screaming their heads off, with scrub typhus.

Now before we go on, tell us about your training at the Atherton Tablelands, is that where you trained for jungle training?

Yes, jungle training there and then mostly, oh,

something I haven't remembered for years, my jeep that I had then had to be set up so they could go underwater so we used to be crossing rivers and that, but everything had to be so that we put stuff over the carburettors and everything with long tubes that were stuck up in the air. That was one of the things I had to help set up. That was a fun thing, getting

ready. I taught myself to drive backwards up hills and that's where I went down with fever again, but I was very upset when I got left behind there. I tried to transfer to another unit, an infantry unit,

and I found out later why I was left behind was if my unit had been wiped out I was to start a new one because I had all the records. Then I felt a bit better after that. I was very, very…I've still got the letter that I wrote to the CO [commanding officer] telling him what I wanted to do and felt that I hadn't done enough. I must have really been crackers.

We were camped at the end of the wards in Jackson's aerodrome and every now and again a plane would drop in a bit low. That's also where the [2/]33rd Battalion blokes got wiped out when a bomber whizzed through their ranks. I heard that but I didn't see it.

So you were sent from Queensland to Port Moresby and from there you were deployed?

From Queensland to Port Moresby,

and then the unit went over into Nadzab [380km north of Port Moresby] and other places, Markham Valley in other words.

Nadzab? So were you a part of that unit in Nadzab?

I was a part of the unit but I didn't drop by parachute. There were 35 regiment boys dropped by parachute, they were the ones that had to find all these bits and pieces that I'd dismantled and made into small packets.

15:00 **That was the only time Australians were used as paratroopers, wasn't it?**

That's right, 503 American Parachute Regiment I think they were [the US Army 503d Parachute Infantry Regiment assaulted the Japanese-held Nadzab airstrip on 5 September 1943]. I like the Americans. I know they said a lot to skite to us but when my beer issue was issued, I used to take my grog to the Americans and let them have it. Also the cigarettes because it was

15:30 roundabout that time that I lost my vocal cords and I haven't stopped coughing since, I could have smoked couldn't I, but I got rid of all the cigarettes. I bought 35 tins of tobacco home for my stepfather so he could cough his head off. Also at Moresby, Port Moresby, one evening, this is the food section, one evening

16:00 sitting around the log fire and my meal dish is on the ground and I turned away and when I looked back and it was crawling with black maggoty flies and I stood up and I kicked it and I haven't had a decent appetite since, it really affected me that much. Yucky stuff, it would have been worse than that camel stuff we had in Syria.

16:30 The Japanese were on the hills behind me and I didn't know. Thank goodness I didn't know.

Where were you at this stage?

Moresby.

Moresby? So there were still Japanese there?

Oh yes, the Japanese were coming in from Milne Bay [eastern-most bay on New Guinea] way but they didn't get through, and then the Japanese were coming over the Kokoda Trail but they were on the ridge but they could see down. I didn't know that till just recently, otherwise I wouldn't have slept too well. I thought it was nice and quiet and peaceful. I was doing my job at night time

17:00 sending up the gun parts as they requested and I also had advanced warning of coming back to Australia. I had to go around the army depots, spare parts and all those sort of people, looking for boxes to stack our stuff in. I knew all that before the rest of the troops did. I was privy to it and very proud to be privy to that. That happened also in Syria

17:30 when we were about to move there.

Did you say that the Americans paratrooped with the Australians at Nadzab?

The American parachuters?

The paratroopers, did they go down with the Australians at Nadzab for the para drop there?

That's a good question.

Or was it just Aussies?

I don't know. I don't know. There are pictures in that 2/4th Field Regiment book of parachutes dropping. No, I think…

18:00 I can't imagine that they'd let our boys drop without some support. I believe they found only one bit was missing out of those guns and I was told a bloke put his foot on it so it was buried in mud so he didn't have to push the guns around, that was a good story.

Was there a lot of training with the Americans?

Training? No, we didn't have time. I reckon about a week, a fortnight. It all happened

18:30 so quick, yeah. I wished I'd been one of them. It would have been a great experience but then there's more ways of committing suicide than jumping out of an aeroplane.

Did you see the paratroopers take off from Port Moresby?

Yes.

How was the operation conducted from there from what you could see in Port Moresby? Was there a smoke screen put up and things like that?

19:00 Yes, it was in one of my books, some planes came in and dropped a smoke screen so the Japanese couldn't see our boys dropping and then they'd drop through the smoke screen and then later on, after the jump or the drop whichever way you'd like to put it, my unit or our unit went up there. They were flown up but they were able to fly them up

19:30 and land them at the Nadzab nature strip, whatever you call it, air strip. I know one of the boys when he

came back he said, “You’re damn lucky you didn’t go up, you’re very lucky”. He said “You’d have finished up with scrub typhus or more, malaria”. And that same bloke got a hell of a fright, he thought it was…I think it was only a pig

20:00 actually, he thought it was a Japanese sniper and fired an Owen gun range of bullets. There are some horrible stories on New Guinea, what the boys put up with.

Do you know any of them?

Only what I read.

Did anyone tell you stuff?

They never said much when they came back, that’s for sure. We just continued on as if they’d never been away.

20:30 I know I was down very bad with fever.

You said scrub typhus was a problem?

It was a shocking disease that.

In what way, how did it affect you?

It didn’t affect me except by the fact I knew the fellows who died from part of the regiment,

21:00 they’re still up there, of course. It was such a vile, vicious disease that when you got it you were lucky if you recovered.

Now you had problems with malaria, of course?

I did, yes. It’s hard to know when it was. I started off in Syria with it, and what I read lately, I thought it was malaria then,

21:30 but I believe it could have been triggered off by sand flies, there is some connection with that and malaria and I seemed to be going down every…even after the war I was going down, every two or three years you’d cop a dose of it. With that sort of fever what you would get was not hot and cold, you would get a hot feeling one day, that was after the war. You’d get really hot and really

22:00 everything like that but you never got cold and you got over it in about a day and a half. I know my wife she, we were in Perth at the time and she said, “Come on, I’m taking you for a walk”, and I recovered during that. See, that’s the sort of rotten thing it was. It’s something you’re with I guess all your life.

22:30 **What were the conditions like in Port Moresby for the Aussies?**

Conditions? Well, we were flat to the board preparing for air drops and all that. I was there for about a year too. I don’t know what the hell I did all the time, played poker, I suppose. You couldn’t go

23:00 far because Moresby’s sought of hemmed in by the mountains and the sea. I had a Christmas dinner there, had about four Christmas dinner’s away. I haven’t got too many memories of New Guinea except that I was left behind.

23:30 I sought of feel as if, I came back to Australia seven stone [44.5 kg], so that’s what it did to me, the climate.

You found it very difficult, did you?

Well, I didn’t think it was a very good holiday.

24:00 Then from there we came back to Australia to Townsville, home on leave. I think I got married that time, I think, 1944. Oh, New Guinea, thank you for reminding me. The biggest air armour ever seen. There was just bombers at the bottom and then the next level at the top and then fighters right away at the top, it went on for hours. There was just a huge

24:30 armada and I wish I was allowed to take photos but I wasn’t, and then going to New Guinea there was this convoy after convoy of ships with troops and ammunition and all the rest of it as far as the eye could see. I thought, “Gee whiz, what a lovely thing that would have been to film”. It probably was filmed by the official blokes, but this armada, as far as you could see there were [Boeing B-17] Flying Fortresses,

25:00 B-52, [Northrop P-61] Black Widows and all those sort of planes and the higher they went up, the smaller the plane or the faster the plane. They were the ones that were dropping, they would have dropped parachutes some of them but also they would have been landing at various places and bombing Lea [450km north of Port Moresby] and all those sort of places. You still didn’t know too much because nobody told you in case, in case

25:30 you were a spy or something. I don’t know what they were scared of, who the hell would know, but the little New Guinea kids were as honest as the day. They’d go through our tent and you could leave money

lying around or anything at all. You never worried about it, the kids were honest. A bit different today.

Did you learn Pidgin English by any chance?

No speaka da English. No, I didn't. A friend of

26:00 mine told me a few but I could not repeat them on tape. No, see we only had the kids to deal with. We didn't have adults, New Guinea adults. Next question, monsieur.

You went to Townsville and you did another 12 months training, what happened there? Tell us about the training after you got sent back from

26:30 **Port Moresby?**

There were a lot of, the next lot of training we did at the Townsville area was coming in, landing ship barges. And also, waiting for my daughter to be born too, that was a week early which was good. We did a lot of training, as I said before about the sealing up the carburettors on jeeps for going underwater. We did a

27:00 lot of training on, coming in by barge, we did landing invasions at Trinity Beach [20km north of Cairns], which is way up the end of the world, and we used to come ashore in big barges with water up to our throats, holding our rifles above our heads and we did that, we practised that a lot, a week or so at a time, as well as,

27:30 as well as training with the infantry as also coordinated training. But the fun thing was that I'd made up my mind coming ashore out of these landing ship barges that I was never going to go in the sea south of there unless they warmed the water up because it was beautifully warm even though you had all your clothes on, you were wet and warm. That was good fun. Good fun because

28:00 nobody shot back. That was great but we did a lot of cooperative training with the infantry and other… and when the Duke of Gloucester came out he was about 100 yards from where I was standing, he was governor general I think at the time. We had or they did, were learning how to use 'flamin' woofers' or flame throwers. That

28:30 sort of thing was going on for weeks at a time in preparation for Morotai Balikpapen. Yeah, I must have gone on leave because I had a little girl born about a year later. Going up to Morotai [island in the Halmahera Group of the Dutch East Indies (modern-day Indonesia) that was key staging point and airbase for American and Australian operations in the Philippines and Borneo], I was on a boat called the USS General AE Anderson, a Yankee [American troop ship] boat. And they loved olives, and I hate the damn things, so they fed us on olives

29:00 twice a day, that was our meal. And if we'd have been hit by any of the torpedoes we'd have been gone because we were housed in steel…I don't know what you'd call them? storage places down, with a ladder about [30cm] wide going up to the top, we wouldn't have had a hope. But also on that trip we were all badly

29:30 infected with tinea, is that what they call it? We had purple dye in all our crutches and under our arms and everything and we had to drink lemon juice to try and keep it at bay. The only blokes that got three meals a day were the fellows that helped in the kitchen. There were a lot of volunteers to help in the kitchen. Normally, they would "Forget it, we don't want to go there". That took quite a while to go from Townsville to

30:00 Morotai and we were disembarked there and that's where I went to hospital. I was only there a few days. We had a practise run at landing [for the later landing] at Balikpapan [a port on the south-eastern coast of Dutch Borneo (modern-day Indonesia)]. The troops had gone off to land at Balikpapan and I

30:30 was still…

No, we're going a bit too far, we haven't actually covered Morotai yet?

Oh that's right, that's when I went down with the fever real bad, real bad that I was silly enough to stay out in the open in the blazing sun on a stretcher or something and really bad. I got the unit, sent them all off, all their parcels and everything

31:00 and then they put me in hospital at the 2/5th AGH [Australian General Hospital], I think. I know this much, it's controversial but I lost my memory there, I gave them a different name, a different unit and I had a hell of a job to get all my personal gear back because I had a different name but I don't know how long I was in hospital, a week or 10 days.

31:30 Came out and then got put in charge of loading ships with coal. Now not too many know about this. Down in the bowels of the ship we were moving coal from wherever it was dropped right along in wheel barrows, there were sick blokes like me, there were wounded blokes that had come back from somewhere or other, they were being used up so somebody got in touch

32:00 with Mr [Francis Michael] Forde, the Minister for the Army [and deputy prime minister], and that got promptly stopped so no more loading ships. Then I had a job one day to go and get some firewood,

that's right, I was going to, only my fingers got, I was always putting my fingers under heavy things, my fingers got jammed on something or other, a truck or tank or something, and I didn't get to go and get this firewood but the bloke who took my place

32:30 did and got killed. He got mixed up with a land mine and I thought, "Better him than me". But that's where I was when the [atom] bomb dropped and they were getting very sulky, the troops. The war was over, the bomb was dropped. I said, "If you don't go and do some jobs around the place you won't get anything to eat".

What do you mean the 'troops were

33:00 **getting sulky'?**

Well, they just didn't want to do anything. I had them lined up to go and get firewood or something or clean up around the kitchen and they didn't want to do it and I don't blame them because most of them had four or five years of war and, as far as they were concerned, the war was over. I thought it was from there I left,

33:30 I left there and went across to Balikpapan on the landing barge Matheson, found what was left of my unit and found a few of my things. Most of them had all vanished. I don't know how long I was there because I know I didn't leave there till about December,

34:00 but there were some of our fellows still there. When we were preparing to come home I went from about one unit to another, we'd close down one unit go to another, close it down. Finally, I climbed up the cargo net onto an aircraft carrier which was coming in, but I had to leave a few things that would have been very handy for spare

34:30 parts at home. I had to leave them behind, well, I probably shouldn't have had them. I went up the side of the aircraft carrier, on the [HMAS] Burdekin, a little destroyer that the Japs signed the treaty on [Vice Admiral Kamada surrendered Dutch Borneo to Major General Milford, General Officer Commanding 7th Division, on 8 September 1945], up the side of the cargo net and up onto this damn aircraft carrier. They thought we were prisoners of war and looked after us very well. And something else I wanted to say besides that.

Can I

35:00 **ask you about Morotai, what actual aspect of the operation were you involved in, in Morotai?**

At Morotai there was no action, it was a staging…

So you weren't actually involved in the operation to take Morotai?

No, no, but there were Japanese still there. There were Japanese because we were camped along the airstrip, north south, on the western side of Morotai, we were camped on the airstrip with,

35:30 in actual fact, there was a cousin there and I didn't even know he was there and that's where they did their practise landings on that area somewhere. I know there was a little cemetery up one end. What was the rest of that question?

So Morotai was basically a staging ground?

Morotai was only a staging because

36:00 they'd starved the Japs and they were fairly well inland, although we did pick one up. A cousin of mine got one of those. I think he was a cousin of mine or sought of a cousin, he was a driver for [General Thomas] 'Tom' Blamey. I said, "Why didn't you tip him out?" "You've got to be nice to 'em".

Do you remember at this stage when you were in New Guinea, do you remember the propaganda broadcasts of

36:30 **Tokyo Rose [Radio Tokyo propaganda radio host]?**

No, but going back, jumping back two pegs on that one, we used to hear the one from Berlin [Germany]. Remember I had that little square taxi wireless that I had to look after so we didn't lose it and we used to hear the Berlin, whatever her name was from Berlin, calling us up. One of my jobs there was to listen to the news and then [transmit] it onto the rest of the boys around. I had to memorise

37:00 whatever was going on. Tokyo Rose, that's where I left the radio wireless thing in Borneo. I wonder where it finished up? Of course, I couldn't carry it home because I had enough other stuff. I can't recall anything about Tokyo Rose,

37:30 yet I had the facilities to do that. Nobody said anything about 'Shepparton Ray' either, they missed out on that one. Did you know him? You laughing your head off up the back there. I told you I was going to stir you a couple of times. At Balikpapan

38:00 we went ashore off this barge and, as I said, found what was left of the unit. I didn't have the highest number of points to come home, I might add, I was fairly close to it so I just wandered around the place a bit and saw all the devastation and, of course, it was just mass exodus from

38:30 there. Then home on this aircraft carrier and inside the, what do you call inside of the [Great] Barrier Reef? You come down the inside there, down to Sydney, send a telegram to Margaret and I got down to Melbourne by train. I should have let her know I

39:00 was coming but I didn't and I just, ooh I got into trouble over that one. Walked in and she'd bought a red feather and that was apparently the thing in those days, red feather in their hat. You know, up market tarts. So, walked straight in and there's a baby, she's feeding a baby in the high chair and covered in Farex [producer of baby food] all over its face. I think I could have had a better reception instead of

39:30 walking straight in. I remembered not to do that again, but it was lovely to be home, it really was. After a few weeks there, discharged from Royal Park, 2000 and something odd days wartime, about 600 peace time.

40:00 I thought I'd better do some work and went for an interview with a jersey stud [cattle] breeder at Frankston [60km south-east of Melbourne].

I have to stop you there because we've run out of tape.

What? We've got six weeks to go yet.

Tape 6

00:33 **Alright, I'd like to take you back a little bit now and just ask you a bit about the time after the armistice had been signed in Syria, when you went up to the Turkish border, up to the Turkish border?**

Mm.

Could you tell us a bit about the time up there and what you were actually doing?

The division or myself?

You, yourself.

01:00 Driving this vehicle with an officer who was inspecting the gun sites and the guns themselves and checking on any spare parts that they might require or uniforms or clothes or anything like that. There might be a little something in it we'd need. That's all, about all it was because it was fairly hush hush, we didn't want to let too many people know what we were doing, what they were doing.

01:30 **Did you have any interaction with the local people there?**

Never saw any to my knowledge. Although I did spend time in Damascus, as I said earlier I've got a picture of me cleaning my shoes or somebody cleaning my shoes, I didn't. A westernised-oriental gentleman was cleaning my shoes. I must have been on leave. As I said earlier, if I had a quid [pound] in my pay book I could go anywhere because army vehicles

02:00 carted you everywhere. I have no adverse feelings or thoughts about that area. I think I felt as I've done quite a few times, I've felt "I'm free. I'm free." That part of the war is over because we didn't know where we were going next. No way could we have found out.

Now you mentioned you got some leave at this

02:30 **point to go to Jerusalem?**

Jerusalem, yes. Now on the way down from Syria to Jerusalem, I remember I slept in a drain near an aerodrome on the way down, stayed at the Hotel Palestine in Jerusalem where the escaped troops from the 8th Battalion through from Crete, we were all gathered

03:00 there for Christmas dinner. Lieutenant Colonel Eugene Gorman, the Patriotic Funds Commissioner, was there and there was quite a number of 8th Battalion blokes and other fellows, we all had Christmas dinner together and then we dispersed and I took a taxi up the Jordan valley area,

03:30 up to Jericho, round to the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, the Bethlehem area. Did all the churchie things that I knew I'd be in trouble for if I came home and didn't, hadn't seen them. It was an eye opener to me all those places. Jerusalem, oh, of course, I heard the

04:00 bells of Bethlehem going and, as I said earlier, the white hail storm, but you had to be very careful that you didn't wander off into alley ways where you shouldn't be because there were very undesirable people in those areas. And then after a week there, back to Syria. It was a bit different going back the second time,

04:30 to what it was the first time.

Well, you had Christmas dinner in Jerusalem?

Mm.

Can you tell me a bit more about that?

We pigged out [ate like pigs]. It was super. I have the photo, it only shows the top part of me before I put on any weight. I think it was very, we were very fortunate to be able to be in Jerusalem on

05:00 Christmas Day to celebrate the Christian festivities and everything, especially the Christmas dinner in amongst the colonels and majors and captains, that was alright. We all ate all the same food and it was good.

What sort of food did you have?

No idea. You've sprung me on that one. I don't think I've even got it recorded

05:30 anywhere, but it would have been good because Eugene Gorman was there, the comfort funds bloke, he was there so it would have had to have been good. The manager cared for us very well, made sure that we didn't want for anything. I've got a photo of him, too. After all these years it's still alright.

Now,

06:00 **you mentioned you went around some of the Holy sites, what impression did this have on you?**

It had a, I guess as a country boy, it would have had a fairly solid impression. I've got a little note given to me by a Greek archbishop recording my visit to where I was in Jerusalem, I still

06:30 treasure that. The YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] building, I got into strife with this one at home, I didn't think much of it, I just took two photos, the top half and the bottom half of the YMCA, and my wife, she wasn't my wife then, she wrote back and wanted to know a bit more about it. I said, "That's all I know, it was the top half and bottom half". She said, "Yeah, you get a chance to go over and see these things and then you don't

07:00 know".

Did you go to any of the brothels in Jerusalem?

I looked into one, yes. A mate of mine wanted to 'relieve' himself, I sat outside and waited for him, thank you very much. They had a 'red light', I think that's what they called them, 'red light' districts, where you go in and you get yourself dosed up if you've been where you shouldn't.

07:30 **What do you mean, a surgery?**

It was like a surgery. You had to go in there and have yourself sort of bathed with some antiseptic, I think, but that fellow who went with me, I think from memory, was the bloke who was the armourer. There were a lot of our fellows got syphilis,

08:00 even back in Australia. There was a chap up with us in Queensland and his wife came to see him and I had to tell a whole pack of lies to cover up his disappearance or his whereabouts, "They had him out…", according to what I told her, "… had him out on special duties miles away", so she never caught up with him, not then she didn't, she might have caught up with him later.

You said you had a bit of a look inside

08:30 **the brothel, what did you see?**

Couches, couches, and females sitting on couches. I don't think I was very impressed. I certainly wasn't inveigled that's for sure. I probably wouldn't have known what to do.

Had you been given warnings or

09:00 **lectures about the dangers?**

Yes, right from the time we left Australia, onboard ship, the medical officer would tell us all the things that could go wrong with us and probably frightened the life out of me being a little country kid. A lot of our blokes did get VD [venereal disease]. That's something else that reminds me, thank you. It reminded me, the VD camp

09:30 hospital at Puckapunyal, I had to guard that place one night. How do you guard it? You sit inside with all the blokes that have got VD. I tell you I was glad to be relieved, in more ways than one, of that job.

Why, what was so bad about that job?

I think it was just the thought about it all. I don't know how many blokes I had to look after. I was not married, of course, looking after them but that was

10:00 where, right next to some building in the guard house, I guess, where Noel Coward came in later on but that's right, I hadn't remembered guarding that damn VD place since then, probably.

Did you talk to some of the blokes?

Oh yeah, they were sitting at the same tables. We all had our meals at the same tables, so you kept your fingers crossed and everything else crossed too.

10:30 I don't think I ever told Margaret that one. I wouldn't have thought about it.

Had you been shown films or had you seen pictures of the effects?

No, only just verbally by the medical officer. It's a terrible thing to be told you can't go into places, there was a war on.

11:00 **I mean, you say you were just a boy but you were 22, 23 years old…?**

Oh yeah, but I was a country boy, I wasn't 'worldly wise', put it that way.

You must have had some experience with girls though?

No, no, I didn't. I'd run a mile rather than go near a girl. That was sought of,

11:30 that's the way I was. Yeah, that would be right. When we were taught to dance, I wouldn't dance with the young kids or the young girls, I'd dance with their mothers, I wasn't game to go near those critters. There was a girl asked me, on the first leave I think, there was a girl, a sister of my army friend who was a POW, she said, "Will you marry me?"

12:00 "Ah, what for?" That was the end of that romance very smartly.

Tell me, in Jerusalem did you go to some of the bars or the markets?

Probably not because there was the difficulty of carrying stuff back off leave,

12:30 the difficulty of posting stuff. I don't think, I've got a piece of souvenir in there, a piece of cedars souvenir that I bought at cedars at the top of Lebanon, that would have come home in my kit bag, I wouldn't have posted those. I guess there wasn't much room for us to carry things home from leave,

13:00 back to the unit from leave.

Now, when you came back from the Middle East I understand that's when you met your wife to be?

That was before I went to the Middle East.

What happened?

What happened there, and part of it's in that story, a true love story, wartime love story.

13:30 Somewhere, somehow, I wanted to learn Arabic, I said "Right, where do you get a book on Arabic?" In the bookshop. So I wrote down to Robinson & Mullins in Melbourne requesting information on what was available to speak Arabic. I got some leave and went down and this little tart behind the counter, she's not listening, standing behind the counter, and she was the girl that got the letter.

14:00 **Sorry which letter?**

I think she was a very forward girl, she was much more forward than I was and, anyway, we decided that we'd go for a walk down the street and I don't know whether it was that time or another time, I'm getting the two times mixed up, I carried her across the flooded street and that's,

14:30 she said, "That's when I won her heart", just carrying her across. She was only a little light girl and me a big strong soldier, I carried her across the flooded street and from there on the romance blossomed. She used to stage a one girl strike when I walked into the shop, she'd drop everything, customers had to look after them damn selves.

15:00 We walked all around Melbourne. We must have been a pair of doves in a dream. That was 1941, so I knew her three years before we were married. And she used to always write her letters to me in green ink so when the mail came in I just picked mine out of the heap, no troubles. Her father was

15:30 the DCMMM [Distinguished Conduct Medal, Military Medal?] winner and he and I got on real fabulous, and from then on there was no problem with marrying his daughter, which we did in 1944. I didn't know whether I'd be home in time but Margaret's parents and aunts and everything arranged the funerals, sorry not funerals, the marriage. They arranged it all, all I had to do was be there,

16:00 but where was I? I was up in New Guinea and I just got down, I think, with two days to spare and we were married in Wesley College, Wesley Church in Melbourne. One lot were ahead of us, one lot in the middle and another lot, "Come on, get moving. We've got another lot to get married". Poppa George hired a bus, a little old bus and carted all the guests around, because wartime

16:30 the petrol was practically non-existent, and then went back out to Hampton after the service and then

we headed out to Healesville [80km east of Melbourne], yeah Healesville, that night, not that night, the following night. Stayed at her uncle's place the first night, the second night out to Healesville, and she got sick out

17:00 there eating mushrooms. I said, "Serves you right for pigging out on mushrooms". Of course, I had only jungle greens [army uniform] and, of course, I got pulled up by the military police somewhere in Melbourne and I had Margaret with me and they said, "You're AWOL [absent without leave]!" I said "No, that's one thing I would never do". I had my leave pass. "But look at your clothes,

17:30 you're in jungle greens!" I said, "Of course I'm in jungle greens, I don't have any other clothes". That pleased him. We went out to Healesville and when the bus pulled up out there, somebody got in via the door and said, "We want, are there any married couples onboard?" That's right and there was about eight or nine sets of us. So we disembarked and

18:00 went to go to bed that night and put my foot on the bed to get into it, something I hadn't done for years, get into a bed, and what happened, there was a bell under the bed, CLANG! CLANG! CLANG! "I'll kill that bloke if I ever catch up with him!" And then the young couple, married couple, newly married couple in the next room, they had chaff I think it was, chaff or something sprinkled all in their bed.

18:30 It was lovely down there. We went for long walks in amongst the, we found a place for tea and coffee and went there and just talked, I guess. It was just the freedom of being away from the war zone at that time. As I said, that was three years after I met her so it wasn't a rushed job. It was a rushed job at the finish, probably.

19:00 No, she was a good kid, a very good kid. Of course, I got on well with her father and that made a big difference too.

Now just straighten me out a little bit, you say you met her in '41?

'41, yes.

Was this after you came back from Syria?

No, before. No, it was before.

19:30 **So before you left?**

Yes. Yeah '41, that's right. I don't know when in '41. '41 then there was '42, '43 and then we got married in '44 and lived happily ever after, nearly. So we had a lot to go after that.

20:00 **Right, now before you went up to New Guinea, I wanted to know what did you know about the Japanese and what had happened so far in the war?**

Nothing, because we were never told. That is one of the things they made a big boo boo on somewhere and none of the army hierarchy told us anything much about the Japanese. We thought we were just sailing home nice and free and

20:30 unsuspecting and I had no knowledge, personal knowledge, of the Japanese at all. There is nothing I can enlarge on that one…well, sort of, when I was on guard at the Maroochydore Beach [120km north of Brisbane], which was on the Brisbane line somewhere, I was on guard on the beach there one night and I thought every wave was a Japanese

21:00 coming into catch me, and that's probably the nearest I can get to that one.

Had you heard any news about the war that had been going on in New Guinea before you got there?

No, not much. We knew very little about Pearl Harbor [Japanese attack on the United States Navy base on the island of Oahu, Hawaii, on 7 December 1941], I have seen it since. We knew that something had happened and they had bombed Pearl Harbor but nothing beyond

21:30 that.

Had you heard about the bombing of Darwin?

No, I don't think so. No, I don't think we heard that. Going back to the Japanese, I was told by a POW friend of mine that I would have survived eating rice whereas he would have died. Neither of us died, so we said alright. What happened he said, "Being skinny, I didn't have much…" I was only about eight stone [51kg]. He said, "You didn't have much

22:00 body to feed", but Bob was a fairly thick set bloke, he needed a lot of food, so I'd have got on alright as a Japanese prisoner of war, he would have carked it. Most of my district did, unfortunately. Swinging back to that, I didn't wait for them, I cleared off early. I said, "Come on you blokes, you get a move on", but I was ready to go.

22:30 So we didn't have much, even though we had the book called Guinea Gold to read occasionally, they never told us anything. I think behind it all was the fact they didn't want to worry us and have an army full of disturbed, worried soldiers worrying about their kids and families at home. I think they just

deliberately not

23:00 released any info to us. That's my theory on that one.

Well, when you did jungle training did they tell you anything about Japanese jungle tactics?

If they did, I don't remember because it was mainly climbing under and over logs and up rope ladders and all that sort of thing. It wasn't too

23:30 popular that lot either. I was given the job of training, jungle training, men senior to me and they don't take that very kindly when a corporal tells a warrant officer you've got to go along that rope bridge or something. They got even on me later on. They made it pretty difficult for me. The same blokes, I think they 'borrowed' a bit of equipment to take home. I was going to

24:00 dob them in, I didn't think that was right. They said, "Right, you tell on us and we'll crush you". So, "Alright, have it your own way". That was the end of the story that.

Alright, tell me how you felt about the 'chocos' [militia; chocolate soldiers, meaning not 'real' soldiers]? I know you were a choco yourself once but there was a lot of animosity between the…

I believe so. There was animosity and I don't know why because

24:30 we were all, whether we were AIF or whether we were chocos, we had all been trained to defend the country irrespective of whether you liked it or not. But I thought the chocos to me was an escape. I could get away from home for a week, fortnight or three months, like we were in [training] camp. I was able to get away and be free and do all the training

25:00 and very proud to be number one, as well as being number one soldier, I thought. It was just my life and I couldn't understand why other people didn't want to be soldiers but I did, and I think it was because father-in-law, uncle, stepfather, they were all soldiers and, I thought, "That's me too, I'm carrying

25:30 on the tradition". I just loved the camps, even though there was a horse stampede at Torquay and I saw but didn't get involved. There were so many and there were apple pies that got wet in the rain that I was supposed to deliver. There was dust at Bendigo, where I slept on the ground there and I coughed all night, still

26:00 cough. What other things? There was the fire at Bannockburn, down near Geelong, where our troops were involved helping put it out. You see, to me it was a new world. A whole new world away from pumping sand and building houses, driving the mail bus.

Tell me a bit about the stampede at Torquay?

Right, that's an easy one, because that's never faded. Imagine

26:30 yourself at about 7 o'clock in the morning, 6 or 7 o'clock in the morning taking your horses down to the beach front, sea front, to exercise them and get them water and the sun's coming up over Tasmania or somewhere, wherever it comes up, and shone on the water, what happens? It glints and the horses saw this and panicked and off they went and luckily they

27:00 missed my row of tents, they got the row at the back. I don't know how many horses there would have been, there'd be, say, 100 or more, they went through the tent lines and some were never found. The majority of them got back alright but some were never found and that story is still related at our reunions. We've just had our reunion at Tongarra about a month ago,

27:30 November 23, further back. It gets a bit embellished sometimes, but we were lucky and our row of tents, they missed our tents, otherwise they'd get tangled up in ropes and things like that, but I was lucky enough to see it, I was up early enough to see it as the sunrise was coming up.

28:00 The stampede at Torquay…they put up a plaque at Torquay about three years ago and unveiled it on Australia Day, but unfortunately I was committed to the Australia Day flag raising here, although I found out since I could have gone down, the transport was right to cart me down there, but I would have loved to have been there for the inaugural opening of the plaque of the light horse,

28:30 commemorating the light horse and remembering the stampede. That was great.

Let's talk about Port Moresby when you went there, can you tell us a bit more about your work with the 25 pounders?

My work with them was mainly making sure they had

29:00 seals for the guns, making sure they had buffer and recuperator oils, making sure they had tyres and tubes and any other specialist parts that they needed that I had in the vehicle. For the air drop,

29:30 of course, that was a totally different set up making sure the dismembered parts of the gun weren't too heavy and that everything was properly wrapped up, making sure that there was enough sealing material for the vehicles that go underwater anywhere up there, and trying to keep away from scrub

typhus and keep away from fever again, as I had

30:00 one lot up there. Uniforms, that's another thing. We had some mechanics uniforms sent to us but they were supposed to be sent to the WAAAFs [Women's Australian Auxiliary Air Force], the air force girls, and they were all too big for our boys, they were like that. I remember I had to send all those back, but I had to make sure the boys had good boots and generally good clothing and stuff like that. Make

30:30 sure I had some in stock and try and keep out of trouble. Make sure I wasn't anywhere where the planes were dropping down on us.

Now, did the rest of your unit move on to Nadzab?

Mm?

From Port Moresby, I thought you said that the rest of your unit went on ahead?

They went ahead to

31:00 Nadzab but they didn't have to drop by parachute. They went at the same time roughly, but they would have followed the parachuters either the next day when they camped at the airstrip. And our blokes had a fair bit of stuff, repair stuff with them too. It's no good them going up there and leaving the repairing gear behind, so they would have taken some up there but they were landing on the strip, not dropping, so they could carry that stuff.

31:30 **Why didn't you go with them?**

That's always hurt me, as I said, I was left behind at base with a warrant officer and my job was to, see, you couldn't send all the equipment up because you couldn't carry it, so my job was to make sure that anything they wanted, I was able to send it up and being left at base meant that, I think I mentioned that in the, that

32:00 if my unit was wiped out, I was able to start a new one because I had all the bases, all the equipment there, but I didn't know that till later. I was very, very hurt and I tried to leave my unit and join an infantry unit, who the fellows I knew quite well from Syria. I took my application to the lieutenant and [he] said "Forget it,

32:30 go back and have a sleep. You're not going up there. You know too much". And that was one of the reasons why I was left behind because I knew regimental numbers of my unit, I knew spare parts numbers and I could quote them, all those sort of things, I knew. Whereas if I'd have gone to the infantry, I wouldn't have been any damn good there, only carry guns, rifles around with 'em. I believe that was the story of it, but I've got a letter that I wrote to

33:00 my family saying that I wanted to go the infantry and I felt I hadn't done enough. By that time I was probably troppo [mentally disturbed].

It was the end of the war?

Well, towards the end of it.

Do you think you are?

Mm?

Do you think you went troppo?

I don't think any of us missed out. I guess, no, I don't think I was really round the bend.

33:30 I, like hundreds of others, was getting a little bit tired of five years of war and, of course, in my case of course eight years, three years militia, known as chocos. I think we were getting to the stage, Colin, where we needed help. It came later in the form of a questionnaire, 'Do you want to be a farmer?' or 'What do you want to do after

34:00 the war? We've got land available'. I decided I wanted to be a farmer in the free and open away from the maddening crowds. That's another story, isn't it? I think we were a fairly closely knit little unit. That bloke is going to write the 7th Division book which is coming

34:30 out shortly, all about this little unit I belonged to. He said, "This nothing much read about it, there's nothing in your records much about it." I said, "Nothing to be spectacular about either". I ran enough photos, I've sent him typewritten stuff ready for his 7th Division book and I'm happy to send it all on because when I'm gone, all that

35:00 information's gone unless I write it out.

Just tell me a little bit more about some of the other chaps who, perhaps, really did go troppo?

No, there was none in my unit that I can recall. They smoke and they drink,

35:30 I guess that kept them fairly sensible and sober. See we started off as a unit of 13…12…13, and then

later on, the [gun] batteries all had their armours and artifices and all those sort of people and then they would become part of my unit or our unit. I can't recall anybody, oh look, yeah, there were two in the Middle East, not in my unit, in the regiment,

36:00 two in the Middle East who drew ducks in the sand, they got sent home. There was another one, what did he draw? He probably drew something else, but they got sent home. If you wanted to go home you fired a rifle through your foot, but I wasn't interested in that. I was there for a job not to be playing ducks in the sand and being sent home.

36:30 **You mentioned at that stage in the war that you just needed help and that's how most of the blokes were. Were there any that just couldn't take it anymore, they'd been going for many years?**

There would have to be, there would have to be others. I'm only a small unit of about a dozen or 15 or 20 later on, so I would have known in that unit, but in the regiment

37:00 itself, with 1000 soldiers, there would have had to be some that had needed help, that's for sure.

Around this point you mentioned that you got a recurrence of sandfly fever and actually got amnesia.

That's right.

Can you tell us a bit

37:30 **about that and how it affected you?**

Well, sandfly fever, I'm pretty sure I copped that in Syria, because two boys out of the [2/]2nd and [2/]22nd Battalions picked me up out of the street where I'd collapsed and took me into a café, got me something to eat and drink. That was my first episode, then in Queensland I got it again. In New Guinea I got it again, but when I got it the fourth time in Morotai,

38:00 I lost my memory, that's when the amnesia came in on that one. Then I copped it, after discharge I copped it about every two or three years.

What actually happened when you lost your memory, and did you get it back?

Yeah, when you lose your memory do you get it back? Yes, I often say I never got it back but it took quite a while before I finally…when I was

38:30 discharged from the hospital. The hospital, by the way, was a big marquee and hundreds of us, hundreds of us were down with this damn fever. Barge loads went down and nearly upset the war in Balikpapan. We went down with this, see, I've got amnesia now but the trouble was getting my personal gear back. They said, "No, you're somebody else. You've got a different name".

39:00 I don't know what name I gave them, I have no idea, but I don't know how long I was in hospital. My medical records, which I've got all my records, that will tell me.

So when you were in hospital, you gave them the wrong name?

Yeah, when I arrived at hospital I said I was Bill Jones or Tom Smith or somebody and that's where the thing sort of fell apart a bit.

How much do you think you lost at that

39:30 **point, I mean you'd forgotten your own name, did you forget your whole life or was it just a few years?**

No, I think it would be a very minute internal set up of…that's a good question, I don't know. All I can remember, there was some lady, not lady doctor, a doctor there who wrote in very small hand

40:00 writing and I can remember him writing up my records, which I've got now. That's interesting that, you don't know how long you've been 'out to it', as the saying goes, or how long you were there. I must have come good because they sent me on to Balikpapan.

Did you get any treatment for it?

Yes, the treatment was a huge

40:30 pill about the size of a 50 cent piece and twice as thick, at 10 o'clock every day. That's all I can remember about that. That's what they treated me…mainly at about that time of the day I got terrific head pains and I still get them, too, but I don't have those tablets, not that size. That's right, they were huge, huge tablets.

Do you know what they were?

No, I've got no idea. They must have worked.

41:00 I came home and had some kids. That part of it must have worked.

Alright, we'll leave it there, we're at the end of a tape.

Tape 7

00:37 **With your experience in Africa or the Middle East, what did you think about your enemy, the enemy you fought against? The Vichy French?**

I think if I was to be honest, I would say they were one damn good fighters. They had us cornered on more than one occasion. They could have

01:00 annihilated us and when they went past, when the general looked, I can't think of his damn name [General Henry Dentz was the Vichy French commander], sorry, when the general went past to sign the surrender document, I just felt numb, I had no other feeling for him thinking about all the fellows his troops had killed. The Senegalese blokes, they were bigger than you, much bigger than you, they were guarding the ammunition dumps

01:30 and they were friendly, I suppose, in a way, the war was over. They were like me, we were free then, virtually.

But what about when you were actually fighting them, what were they like?

Up near the front?

The Senegalese?

We didn't see them then, we only saw them afterwards in the main. Gosh they were big blokes and at night time, of course, they're jet black

02:00 and their eyes would look at you because they were standing behind the ammo [ammunition] dump.

Were they scary blokes to look at?

No, no.

Formidable?

Oh, formidable, ooh yeah. I don't think I could have been scared. I was only scared the time I, have I got that recorded about the camels? I ran into the camels in a wadi?

I'm not sure. You can tell us about it though.

These camels were on a route march too, of course, and I was on a route march with a few soldiers up

02:30 and down the waddies and backwards and forwards and went straight into these camels because I didn't see them coming, pitch dark doing night marching, and I think the camels got a bigger fright than what I did. Their big mouths like that and I think I took a couple of extra deep breaths, too. We laughed like hell about it afterwards, "What happened, corp [corporal]?"

03:00 Oh yeah, the bloody camel got a fright when it saw me. You've got to be careful how you tell that story otherwise it bounces on me.

Did you ever run into German or Italian POWs?

Yes, Italian ones by the thousands. Where the hell was that? Kristina [?] in Palestine. They were glad to be out of it. They didn't want any damn wars.

You ran into them in Palestine in the POW camps?

In Palestine, in POW camps.

You actually never fought

03:30 **the Germans or the Italians?**

No, that's dangerous. You can't do that, no.

Was there any German presence in Syria?

There should have been, because that's where the idea of the whole war up there was to stop the Germans coming down through Turkey and into Syria. I don't recall meeting any of the Germans. I met the Senegalese and the

04:00 Vichy French. We shouldn't have been fighting them in any case. They were on our side in World War I. So were the Japs, too.

What was the morale like for your unit?

No problems. No problems.

…in the Vichy French campaign?

I don't think we had any worries about morale. I think we were young and silly and wanted to shoot people and fight and

04:30 get medals. Shoosh up there…and all that sort of thing. I think morale was very good, I can't imagine any reason why it shouldn't have been.

How important were medals for the troops, from your point of view?

Yeah, from my point of view…

…or to you, for that matter?

I was very

05:00 pleased when I got the first ribbon, which is the one on the left hand side, up there, that '39–'45 [Star].

Star?

Star. I got that in the Middle East somewhere. I can remember coming home with that one and then the other, the second one along, the Africa Star, I had to wait 50 years to get that one. I always knew I was entitled to it but there was a few

05:30 hang-ups on that one.

What did you get the Combat Medal for?

Syria.

Syria?

Syria. Oh yes, I don't wear it because it's not an official one. The Foreign Services is the whitish one on the left of the Combat, the Combat Medal…

Who were these issued by, the Australian Government or the British Government?

Oh yeah.

The Commonwealth Government?

No, the Australian Government. I've got the Dutch War Cross, which is right on its end next to

06:00 the one I was presented with.

And what did you get that for?

The Dutch War Cross was for several months in Borneo, Netherlands East Indies. They call it the Dutch Commemoration Cross or something [Netherlands Indies Commemoration Cross]. That's one we're allowed to have, only you've got to buy the damn thing. The next one to it is the one I got presented by Lieutenant General Cyril Clowes, who was in charge of the Milne Bay operations in New Guinea. He

06:30 presented me with that one. You can tell it's different to the others, it's an oval and then there's various other service medals along.

Did the Balikpapan operation affect you in any way? How did it impress you?

Well, I was disappointed that I missed the landing because I was in Morotai hospital. By that stage, I

07:00 think they were trying to be very careful of us older blokes, that we didn't get killed on the last day. I think they were mindful of that, they had set in train all the numbers you needed to go home on discharge. I was still a bit silly from the Morotai hospitalisation of that stage. Well, I found what was left of my unit.

07:30 **When you went back to Balikpapan, did you meet any American soldiers there?**

No, I met the American soldiers in New Guinea, but not…no, it was an all-Australian invasion, I think. I can't recall any Yanks [Americans] being there, otherwise I would have sold them my beer. Horrible damn stuff it was.

08:00 YUK!

What were the natives of Borneo like?

There weren't many of them there because the Japanese had cleaned a lot out and we apparently killed some, but that's where I expected we'd find our prisoners of war, the ones from Rochester that were taken prisoner in that early convoy, but they weren't there, they were gone, including

08:30 there was one bloke got away. He got torpedoed when the Yanks torpedoed this prisoner of war ship, he

swam till they picked him up and he finished up in Japan, but the rest of the boys from Rochester and Nanneella were KAPUT [dead]! I only found out in the last couple of years what this one bloke died of, all these years I didn't know. I was sitting by the grace of God.

09:00 **What was your view of the Japanese?**

I probably was concerned what they'd do to us if they caught us. I believe what they did to some of our boys at Milne

09:30 Bay, you can't repeat it, and I know what some of our boys, and I only read this, what they did to the Japanese at Milne Bay, it happens on both sides, but I wasn't close enough to really hate them. Mind you, nowadays, I haven't changed my mind a great deal about them.

Well, what do you think of

10:00 **them now?**

My son, when he was in Ansett [airlines], used to have to handle the Japanese luggage as it came off the planes. He said, "Handle your own damn luggage, you don't know what you did to my Dad". I said, "Good on you, Jerry". They're like the rest of it, we're all human beings. Why the hell should we shoot and kill each other. I don't hate the Japs. Actually, I'm quite delighted I got a good

10:30 pension out of it, through the war service. I don't hate the Italians or the Germans, why should I? It's only when they do something wrong to me that I might get my nose out of joint. I've got to ask those same questions in the questionnaire for my book, 'We Were There'. In those 150 questions, there was that one, "What did I think of the Japs and the Commos [Communists]?" And I didn't know what they were talking about.

11:00 **Would you say that the atrocities were committed by both sides, both Aussie soldiers…like on the battlefield, there wasn't much mercy between the Japanese and the Aussies?**

No, particularly if you've read some of the books, Russell Braddon's book, which I've got here,

11:30 there were some pretty tortuous things, I think done around Johor [Bharu, southern Malaysia] and the Straits and all them places, but I've only got to go on hearsay and what I read. I would accept the fact that they didn't accept our men as men. They accepted them as unwanted soldiers and that

12:00 sort of thing. The Japanese didn't consider our troops as soldiers. They surrendered and that's a no-no to the Japanese, they don't surrender. Very few Japanese did and mainly for the Americans.

Did you ever see any Japanese POWs?

Mm?

Japanese

12:30 **Prisoners of war?**

I only saw one. One bloke walked into us at Morotai or Bayek [?]. They were on Bayek when we went past, they must have been on Morotai. What happened to the Japanese in the finish, they starved. They had no provisions. They wouldn't sought of surrender, they sought of died most of them, but the ones

13:00 who had enough sense to surrender, we looked after them. We treated them as prisoners of war under the Geneva Convention…I don't know what they would have done if I'd surrendered, probably what they did to our boys in Changi [Japanese administered prisoner of war camp (for Allied personnel) in Singapore], but I didn't. I run too fast.

13:30 **You must have lost quite a few friends to the Japanese?**

There was all the scrub typhus blokes at New Guinea. I don't know how many there were there, there was quite a number. Then there was the boy that got killed at Balikpapan, we were almost at the finish, which was a terrible shame.

What happened to him?

He was sitting on top of a Bren gun carrier, I think, and a sniper got him,

14:00 which was very, very sad, especially when the war was…the needless part of the war. They didn't need to put us into battle because the Americans had them cornered. I was lucky, I feel I was lucky. All the way through I felt I was lucky that I was either in front or behind or out of the way or escaped or something like that.

14:30 I just, I didn't think this during the war either, it was only afterwards, I thought, "I got out of that". I know that last day when the bomb dropped I said, "I'm free. I want to go home to my wife and baby daughter". I didn't want any more 'fighting'. I went home and finished up with a nice home and a dairy farm. You haven't got to that part yet,

15:00 post war.

So how did you find yourself once you got home, how did you find…?

In a dream.

Did you find yourself difficult…

Yes, so they tell me. I was sought of, couldn't think for myself because when you've had five years plus, plus, plus with officers telling you what to do, you lose the ability, in my case it wasn't so bad as I was NCO, but you lose the ability to…and that's in that

15:30 book, wherever that book is. That's in that book. I'd lost direction, five years not doing anything for 24 hours ahead, you don't know. I was really not with it, but I coped because when you've got a wife and baby, you have to cope.

16:00 They were sort of wondering years, wondering of how I was going to cope and whether I was going to fall apart with dengue fever again, well, that's what they called it later on, dengue. In fact, it's in my medical records, 'dengue'. I'd rather have sandflies than dengue.

For how many years after the war did you find it tough?

16:30 [In] 1947 we went up on to the farm and the Soldier's Settlement [Scheme] had allocated us 100 acres and I went up there and worked on the farms. Left my wife and kids at home in Melbourne, went up on to the farm to work. I worked on another friend's farm setting up irrigation set-ups and arrangements and lived in the army hut with the hole in the floor [toilet], no windows, no glass. I think it was

17:00 probably good for me because I was away from the war element, even though all the rest of the people were diggers too I was away from that. And it slowly evolved where we got put out onto our farms and they put big huts on the farms where we could sleep in and built us a house and a dairy and all that later on. The irrigation was there. Then I joined umpteen,

17:30 umpteen organisations, we had a fairly close-knit settlement and stayed there till 1973, I think, I sold up and left, but we were free, the little kiddies could run around in the paddocks and they were free

18:00 and it was a bonding, a bonding with this new family. I went down with fever, of course, several times, as I normally did. Had no money at all. To start a farm I had to borrow money from the government and had no equipment. I couldn't have been any worse off because we had nothing so we

18:30 couldn't have gone any lower down. We only had one push bike to start running a farm. Later on, of course, we got a tractor and much later we got a tractor when we should have had it years before. They were happy times but very, very tough. We had no water and no septic systems or toilets or any of that stuff. Made my own

19:00 Coolgardie safe out of hessian and water dripping [to keep food cool and edible]. It was free where I had 100 acres to roam around and nobody could tell me what to do. I was free. We had many happy memories and happy years there and then when Margaret started to, her health started to fail, we decided we'd move down to here.

19:30 **Did you, sorry to interrupt, but did you dream about the war straight after you'd finished? Did you find yourself for the years after?**

Dreaming about the war?

About your experience?

Yes, you can't help but dream some of those things, especially with the Japs trying to get you with a bayonet and you can't move out of your bed

20:00 and they're coming at you. I thought I'd told you about that bit. Margaret used to wake me up…

Sorry, just before you proceed, you were saying about the Japs charging at you with a bayonet, that actually took place?

No, it never ever took place.

Why did you dream of that, can you remember?

Why, I don't know. Why should I

20:30 dream about that? It was either Japs or Germans, mostly Japs. I don't know what…something might trigger it off, like you might read something about it, there might be some article in the local paper about Japanese students or something and somewhere in the back of my mind it would start to cook and that's when I'd wake up screaming. Oh, some, even now, some nights

21:00 and I shouldn't be, I'm terrified when I hear noises. I think, "All those doors are locked, it couldn't be…", then I'd wake up proper, but there's many a night here I've just been terrified and, you know, why should I be? I'm a big boy, I can look after myself.

You said that your wife used to shake

21:30 **you?**

"Wake up Raymond!" and "What are you dreaming about? Oh", she said, "I should have known". It never leaves you, even though I wasn't closely involved like a lot of the troops were.

What did you find most difficult to get

22:00 **over?**

Wow, that's a good question. The most difficult…

About your experiences?

I think fever would have been one of them, that's on the medical side. Fever would have been one and I think it takes a long time to get over discipline. I'd disciplined myself for so

22:30 long, going right back to when I was 18 years old, right through, and disciplined myself, I think that's the one that, because it's embedded into your system that discipline, and I think that would have been to shake off officers and warrant officers and sergeants, to shake them out of your system and you're free to make your own decisions and not have to wait till somebody else makes it.

23:00 That would probably be the hard part. Leaving your friends that you've slept with, I use that word differently, slept in the same tent for five years to suddenly find that they're not there, they're not there to talk to, God knows where they'd gone, home somewhere. That would be a very hard one because you're a very close-knit group when

23:30 you've got to live together like that. You can't have any undesirables or you can't have any hard to get on with fellows. You soon straighten them out. Yeah, that would be one of the hard ones. To suddenly think, "Where's Bobby? Where's Jimmy? Sorry love, it's my wife, yeah". That's

24:00 one of the hard ones to shake off, which you do eventually. We have reunions. We just had the, from our light horse days, we've just had our 100th reunion at Tongala.

How soon after the war was over did you have a reunion?

How soon?

After the war was over, did you have your first reunion?

The regiment have a reunion every Sunday, the first Sunday in October

24:30 they have a get together in Melbourne. There's not many of them left, I might add. The light horse reunion has been every two years of recent times. I'm not sure whether we'll have another one because I'm now past kindergarten age and I don't think they can travel a lot of them. Luckily for me, this year it was just 25 miles away and that was no problem, but

25:00 I think we've got a magazine called Barrage, which we'd all write down to telling them of all our diseases and everything that was wrong with us. I thought, "Oh God, what a pitiful thing to read." and "Somebody's got this and somebody's got that." But that was our way of keeping in touch with each other. It's alright for Melbourne blokes, they can hop on a tram

25:30 or something, but for me, who don't drive anymore outside Shepparton, I don't get to reunions but I'm relying on this Barrage magazine, that keeps, and I contribute to it and have a bit of a skite every now and again.

What did you talk about when you caught up with your mates?

Oh, that's an easy answer, see how many damn lies we can tell.

26:00 You talk about your war days, "Do you remember when Jimmy fell out of the truck? Do you remember when John fell out of the truck and he didn't have any clothes on and he fell off the truck and got his backside hooked on the towbar on the truck?" I saw that one. "Do you remember when we pinched the taxi?" Luckily those two buggers are dead. There's not many of us left to talk

26:30 about it and I have difficulty in the few occasions I go to Melbourne, remembering who the hell they are because they look a bit different now to what they did 20-odd years ago even…

How did your wife react to all your personal stress?

Well, she was a soldier's daughter for a start, Poppa George up there, and Margaret of course wanted to be in the,

27:00 in the services and I told her she took a long time to hear the bugles playing and she joined up as a signaller in 1942, yeah '42. She liked being a soldier, she was an NCO as well and she used to, a bit like me, a bit of a disciplinarian, so we used to have some great arguments later on at times

27:30 about who won the war, “I won it, I was there before you”. But she was very sympathetic with the way I was reacting. I never bashed her up, although, I thought about it a few times, you’re not allowed to do that.

Did you feel a lot of anger, frustration? Not towards her but just

28:00 **generally at the massive changes in your life?**

Because there were massive changes too, I reckon I would have felt frustrated at times, that I wasn’t getting the farm thing built up and all that sort of stuff and I was impatient probably more than anything else. I guess there were many

28:30 times when the war broke out again, I wasn’t able to cope.

Did you write to your wife a lot?

Mm?

You wrote to her quite a bit?

Wrote to her?

Yeah.

Every Wednesday. Every Wednesday, the whole family did that and my foster father he did that, he wrote every Wednesday. Our letters used to

29:00 cross of course, but Margaret wrote every, it’s a wonder Margaret didn’t write every day. There always seemed to be hundreds of green [ink] letters. She would have written two or three times…cause she wrote to her mother when she was in the services, wrote to her every day in Tasmania. See the problem was there about writing was to get writing material. You had to find a YMCA or a YWCA [Young Women’s Christian Association] or a

29:30 Red Cross or Salvation Army place to get writing material and stamps and all that from there. They didn’t come easy. The best letters I ever wrote to Margaret, I’d have a glass of beer at a Red Cross place in Brisbane and she’d tell me I wrote the best letters ever from there. I don’t know whether it was the glass of beer that did it or not, I have no idea. She said they were good letters. Some of her letters

30:00 I still have and I still have some of my letters I wrote to her. They’re pretty damn hot letters too, they’d catch fire if you let them out. We used to, if I’d write home I’d write a part of a letter everyday onboard the Elaneese and I’d write home every day just to, of course you couldn’t post it because you weren’t supposed to. I was a good correspondent

30:30 even though I didn’t describe the YMCA in Jerusalem very well, which I got ticked off for that. I always just wanted to right and Margaret was better than I, she could write reams of material. You were restricted in what

31:00 you could write about too. You can’t say, “I’m up the front line in New Guinea” in case the Japanese open the envelope, of course.

Did you feel like, throughout the war you were fighting for the British Empire?

Yes, being pommy born I had that feeling that this was right, I was fighting for them. Yes, in a sense I would say yes on that one.

What about Australia, though?

31:30 Well, I didn’t know much about it. We had no television or anything in those days. I think Australia would have been running second on that one. Being English born, I had a grandma over there who used to write to me and I guess I got more loyalty to them than I did…if I was pushed, I guess.

32:00 **Tell us, do you still believe in the Empire or what it stands for?**

I’m a monarchist.

You’re a monarchist?

But I also accept that there’s got to be a practical reason for the world today, in that we’ve got to realise that England’s a damn long way away. I won’t vote for the republic but, eventually, that’s going to happen and that’s where my loyalties will go because that’s my country I live in, their country,

32:30 our country. I’ve always watched, I had Prince George, Prince George? Yeah, I had a picture up of him on my bedroom wall at home. I’ve always admired him, so I guess that’s where it all sort of starts on me.

33:00 Of course, Mum being English, I guess I’m still, well, she’s English and I’m English born so I guess it’s in the blood.

Did you feel proud of the Anzac tradition?

I loved Anzac Day, I've never missed one from my side of the war, not pre-war of course. No,

33:30 I've never missed an Anzac Day. I've missed a few, quite a few early morning parades but, no, I don't think I've ever missed an Anzac Day. Even when I was in the militia I had to line up on Anzac Day and march down the street of Rochester. In Cobham, I started the Anzac Day march in one year, no,

34:00 another year, no, Remembrance Day, I had a little service for that and it grew and grew. I led the march when I was RSL president in Cobham and I led the march on a couple of occasions there so I was well into the Anzac Day tradition. And every Anzac Day here, I lay a wreath on behalf of my service club.

34:30 I've done that 20 years now, I suppose.

Did you tell your children about the war?

Yes.

To what degree?

Not the girls. The two boys were staying somewhere in New Zealand and the eldest

35:00 boy wanted to know, he said "Dad, I want to know how I would have felt in your position", so I told him the whole story of the war and my part of it, and then the youngest bloke, I don't know where we were, he wanted to know the same thing. I realised afterwards they wanted to know how they would feel in my place.

35:30 They got it, it took three hours to get through and I didn't tell too many lies.

You didn't tell them the deep stuff, did you?

You've got to be very, you've got to be a little bit sensitive to some of the gory bits, such as the hole in the back of the officer's uniform where the bullet went through and all that, you can't tell them that because I don't want them to know that.

But why don't you want them to know that?

No, I

36:00 think they'd had enough. Well, they both missed Vietnam, their names went into the barrel [Australia's National Service Scheme (1964–72) was based on a birthday ballot of 21-year-old men, which was drawn out of a barrel, required those with the drawn birth date to serve for two years in the army, including combat in Vietnam] but they both missed on that one. One would have been happy and one was unhappy.

One wanted to go?

Yeah, one would have gone. The eldest bloke would have gone. The youngest bloke didn't want to go.

Why didn't he want to go?

I think he had certain ideas about Vietnam, and I was quite pleased when I found out they both missed

36:30 out.

Do you think Vietnam was a war that Australia should have been involved in, now or at the time?

It's hard to say any war is good. I don't think they are. They tell me you've got to settle a war to sort a war out.

Was the Second World War a just war?

Oh, definitely. I wanted to go. The Second World War? Well, if they hadn't shot…

37:00 no, that was the bloke in Syria, it wasn't World War I. I guess it's changed a lot of peoples ideas about war. It should have changed it after World War I. They're still digging up bits of bodies.

37:30 **When the Vietnam War was on, what was your view of the whole thing? Were you against conscription?**

I don't believe in conscription, I don't believe in that. I think if you want to go to war, you go to war under your own volition. If it has to be conscription, well, if our blokes are getting

38:00 skittled left, right and centre without support, well, yes, we'd need it, we'd have to have it. I didn't get involved with any of that. I was aware of it.

Was there a division in the RSL at

38:30 **that stage? Were you a member of the RSL then?**

Been a member of the RSL since 1942.

What did the RSL have to say about the Vietnam War from your perspective?

I think the RSL were supportive of our troops up there. They probably didn't like the idea of it, the war, but they were supportive of our boys up there. What did we lose? About 300 or 400?

About 500 .

500 was it? Yeah. That's right,

39:00 on the day the boys from Vietnam marched through Sydney, they had a big march, I cried all day, so I must have been very emotionally supportive of them, not of their losses, of course.

39:30 I would have liked to have gone myself.

To Vietnam?

I would have liked to have gone to Vietnam but I had a farm, I couldn't. How could I cart a farm up there and back., but I thought of it fairly strongly. I thought, "Now I can get back into the army, I'm still a reasonable age and go off back up to war again". That's the way I was feeling.

Why would you do that?

I didn't want my boys to go. I'd rather go and leave them,

40:00 leave them home.

Even if they didn't go, would you still have wanted to go?

Yeah, I think I still had a bit of the fighting spirit left in me.

You're a digger and a half, aren't you?

As I said, right at the start I said "I want to be the best soldier in the world", and I think I was reasonably close to it.

Tape 8

00:36 **Okay, now you mentioned earlier on that, and I'm not sure where you were doing this, but you had the job of listening to propaganda reports from Europe?**

Oh yeah, that was the equivalent to Tokyo Rose. Remember

01:00 the taxi that had the radio in it, it was a steel-framed box, that was the taxi radio that finished up in my lap and it was my job to listen to the broadcast from anywhere I could pick it up with the old set and pass that on to the troops.

Where were you?

Syria.

And was this Lord Haw Haw [British name for countryman William Joyce, who broadcast Nazi propaganda from Berlin during World War II; after the war he was executed for treason]?

Lord Haw Haw, that's the bloke, yeah.

01:30 **What sort of things did you hear?**

Mostly the fact that we were losing over there, it was pretty predictable but mostly that we were losing and they were winning and England had been bombed again and London decimated and all that sort of jazz. And, of course, I didn't pass that on to the troops, they had enough worries as it was without that. That's what it mainly was. You'd get some music. It was mainly that…

02:00 I must have got some good news because I had to tell the boys about what was happening, but then there was not that much happening in the world then that you could pass on without the censor having a crack at it.

So it went from you through a censor before it was shown to the men?

No, the censor would come in on the other side of the set. The,

02:30 oh, I get this mixed up a bit, I would listen to the Lord Haw Haw and if he passed on any information that I reckoned was alright, I could pass that on to the troops. It was interesting to have to remember…I can't remember what was on the radio five minutes afterwards now. Then I had to remember what was said on the radio that was applicable to us,

03:00 so I guess I was a censor. I'd just forgotten about that one. I wonder where that set is?

Now you mentioned earlier that you learnt some Arabic phrases, can you tell us some of the ones that you weren't so game to mention before?

Well, I don't know any swear words for a start.

I thought you said you did?

03:30 'Ishmeal ballard' is what's the name of the next village? 'Tita towa' is I don't know, 'tita towa' is I don't know, 'tita' is no. 'Tita bagoos' is no good. 'kwayes ketir' is very good and the words from one to six are: wahid [one], ithnein [two], thalatha [three], arba'a [four], khamsah [five], settah [six]. Or

04:00 if you'd like it in Malaysian it's: satu [one], dua [two], tiga [three], empat [four], lima [five], satu, dua, tiga, empat, lima. I didn't learn any more than that I don't think, because I wasn't involved with any of the locals that way but, see, in Syria, all the little 'woggy' kids all speak Arabic so it was no trouble to bargain with the people in Beirut, Jerusalem and all those sort of places that speak Arabic and

04:30 I wished and wished many times I'd learnt the language proper like. But, as I said, I had fun talking to the new kids, the little kids that speak Arabic at school and their faces light up even though I don't know much of their language, but the fact is that I know one or two words is a break through to them. Little Fatima, she smiled like, she had a smile a mile wide, and I thought,

05:00 "I've made a break through". But I didn't learn much French, just 'cantaloupe' for 'how much?'. That was probably the only thing we knew.

You learnt a bit of pidgin [English] as well, tell us the pidgin you learnt?

Pidgin? Pidgin English, no.

Yes, you did, you said you learnt a few phrases from your mate.

05:30 If I did I can't remember them.

In New Guinea?

Yeah, they've got a funny language up there, that pidgin English, it's English, good English mucked up. That chappie who I might get to come down tonight, he was stationed up there post-war and he learnt a fair bit of pidgin English, but, no,

06:00 I'm not onto that one at all because it's only good English mucked up. So why would I learn it?

Okay, now, when you were in Balikpapan, I think?

Balikpapan, yes.

You were working shifting coal?

Oh yes, now that was in, was that in

06:30 Balikpapan or Morotai? My memory's let me down on that one. It's either Balikpapan or Morotai.

I'm not sure either.

No, it's Morotai because that's where the hospital was and that's where they took us from the hospital to the ships to have the coal loaded into them, and I spent one day in there and I was horrified because there was wounded blokes also in there. They were

07:00 wheelbarrowing coal to the bunkers. That's where somehow, somewhere, someone got in touch with Mr Forde, the Minister for the Army, to get that promptly stopped, because we were too sick to be doing that sort of work. Can you imagine how hot it was down in the hold or the bowels of the ship?

07:30 To me, I think that would have been worse than facing the Japs. It was shocking. And I know it got stopped very smartly once the Minister for the Army found out.

Was this under Australian command?

Yes, yes. I don't know why. All I know is I spent a day there and that was it. I was silly enough as it was, before I went to hospital, without that

08:00 happening. You see, it's no wonder I came home practically a scarecrow, I think I had to get three lots of uniforms in a matter of weeks after I came home, I started putting on weight. Seven stone [44.5kg] is seven stone. When I got home, if I stood sideways the bullets would go past. So that was

08:30 Morotai! Oh, I don't think I really want to revisit it.

Had you heard much from the home front while you were in Morotai? You were getting letters from your wife, weren't you?

Yeah, I was getting letters from home and from my foster parents, but they couldn't say much because

of censorship. They would say “Oh Bill’s out today” or “Tommy’s doing

09:00 something”, “We put the roof on the house last week” or “I pumped some sand” or “Fixed an engine” or something like that. That’s the sort of…we wouldn’t have got any news about the war because they may not have known, and they wouldn’t have been allowed to write about it, I don’t think. I don’t know on that one, supposition.

09:30 **Were you worried about your wife?**

That she might run away? No, she was a corporal, too, and she could look after herself. She had a very good family to look after her.

Was she in the Land Army?

No, she was in signals. No, she was in signals. She went to somewhere in Sydney, near Sydney for training, she went to Hobart and

10:00 heard the, what they thought were Japanese ships coming up the [Derwent] river and she was involved in that through the signalling. She was a Morse code expert. She was a flag-waving signalling expert and all the rest of those. She went to Melbourne University and high school and that sort of education and smarter than I

10:30 was. I could never have an argument with her because she was too smart so I put a hand to that by not arguing. No, she was, and when I took her up to show my folks on one of the leaves and my foster father was a bit crude, I thought he said, “Huh, she’s a school teacher, is she?” But she enjoyed it, she

11:00 enjoyed it.

Now I know you mentioned this in passing before but could you tell me a bit more about the night when you heard that the [atom] bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima [Japan]?

Oh yes, there’s some parts of it I haven’t told you yet. I was at Morotai when they dropped the first bomb, or the second bomb, and the Americans went

11:30 berserk, all the American sickies [ill or injured] that were stationed there. They went berserk, they fired guns in all directions, and I hid under my bed. And that night was one of the, I would suggest, one of the most frightening nights I’d had almost right through the war, by my own side, our own troops, or our American troops, and next morning they were alright, they’d probably sobered up. But that was

12:00 my feeling that the war is over, I’m free, I can go home to my wife and baby. That same question was asked of me at a Scout’s training session here in Shepparton one year and the training folks said, “What was the most thing that impressed you the most?” I said, “I’m free”. And when I received the citizen of the year award, that’s also what I said, “I’m still free,

12:30 I hope it stays that way”.

Well, can you tell us a bit more about what the Americans were doing?

Not a great deal except drinking my beer.

Well, what frightened you so much?

I think their casual attitude to safety. That’s about all I could put on that one. They were, they had the best equipment and still

13:00 have. I don’t know whether the best training because I didn’t go and fight with them.

Did you think you might get hit by a loose shot?

Yes, it was very, very positive that, that could have happened and I felt sure that if I hadn’t gone under the bed I’d have been shot because, I’m not sure whether it was fact or fiction, there was a hole in the tent and whether it came from them or not, I don’t know, or

13:30 whether it was just a tear, but that’s ‘fact or fiction’, under that heading. They were dangerous, they just went off the rails. They didn’t seem to care who they shot or, there were two killed that I know of. That’s Americanism. That’s victory, madness and victory.

Well, how did you actually hear about it and

14:00 **what did you actually hear?**

Yeah, how did I hear about it? An officer, a senior officer must have told us that the bomb had dropped and that the war was over because a hell of a lot had to happen after that, had to round up all the spare Japanese. I went up the, I’m jumping a bit here, jumping from Morotai to Balikpapan,

14:30 over at Balikpapan I went up river in a motorboat and it was still very scary, very scary, because there were still pockets of Japanese up there, and I bought a little dress for my new baby and misjudged the size of it. I bought a dress too small, I didn’t know babies were so big and misjudged that one, but that

was right up in the middle of Borneo in there.

15:00 I don't think there were any Americans up there because it was an Australian invasion. Those memories keep flooding back, gosh.

Now apart from your own personal reaction in terms of being relieved that it was all over, how did you feel about the,

15:30 **the bomb? Did you …?**

Well, it saved a lot of lives. It would have saved tens of thousands of American lives. I thought it was good. I think it was a horrible damn bomb to have, but it certainly shortened the war, that I've read about that. Yeah, I think it was a horrible thing to kill all those Japanese even though they were the

16:00 enemy till the bomb dropped, killed all the ladies and the children and all the old people and everything like that. One boy from my district was only about half a mile or so away from where that bomb was dropped and he suffered not badly but he still suffered with the radiation.

Now the point at which

16:30 **the first bomb [Hiroshima, 6 August 1945] was dropped was not really the end of the war?**

No, Hiroshima?

Another couple of weeks after that, there was another bomb in between [Nagasaki, 9 August 1945]?

I'm not sure whether we knew about the other one. We must have. I think we were living in a state of half shock, I think. I certainly was because I was in hospital, I was in convalescence. I guess we didn't know a great deal about it because it was fairly…

17:00 I think it was an awful way to end the war. There were no bands playing or red carpets out or marches up the street, although we did march in Melbourne later on. To me, I expected when I was discharged to walk out of the hut at Royal Park where I enlisted and had a red carpet and a general to shake my hand and say, "Thanks, Ray". Nothing, there was absolutely nothing. "There you are, there's your discharge certificate. Go home."

17:30 I thought, "For five years I've worked for these fellows in the front office and that's all he says, 'Go home'". What a let down. I should have started another war, had a rerun.

Was there any celebration when the Japanese actually surrendered?

No, apart from the Americans shooting us up. I wasn't aware of any. Some of our boys, as I said earlier, were

18:00 a bit reluctant to do anything to help themselves. Stripes didn't mean a thing much to them once the war was over but they came around to it. I can remember we were at that parade, they were solemn, they were unhappy, they just didn't seem…they just, I think they'd been in the war too long and they

18:30 were sick of the whole thing.

Tell me about when you first arrived back in Australia, it must have been great to be home?

Yes, even though I got ticked off. I guess it was sort of jubilation in a way. Also a feeling of

19:00 satisfaction that I'd done my training, I'd put it into action, I got through it alright, I've survived, I'm home and I'm not wounded or lost a leg or an eye or an arm, like a lot of the boys did. I think it was a great sense of satisfaction and it was all over and I'd come through it and I was

19:30 still alive, had a wife and a baby to come home to. I think it must have been a great sense of lightness, a weight lifted off my shoulders that I didn't have to win the war again on my own, so I tell people, "Oh, a few blokes helped". Coupled with that was the feat, "What am I going to do?" I was five years without a,

20:00 without having to work for anybody apart from the government, what was I going to do? That was probably starting to weight a little bit on my mind. I've got a wife now, I never had one when I left, I must have picked one up somewhere, and what am I going to do now? Luckily, my father-in-law, who was Poppa George up there, he said, "You don't have to go anywhere, stay with us.

20:30 Stay with us." So we stayed with them for a few weeks and then a job became available running a jersey stud farm at Dandenong, no, sorry, Frankston, Frankston, and I got that job easy.

Before we run onto that, tell me about when you first arrived home and saw your wife?

I walked in, I walked in the back door, I think I walked in the back door, I came in and surprised them. She was feeding the baby,

21:00 who was in the high chair and I think they were all shocked that I'd sprung them. As I said, she got that 'red feather' to wear in her new hat to meet me at the station and walk home from there, but I got in

first. It was good, a great welcome home. The Methodist Church had

21:30 several ‘welcome homes’ for the troops. We had one at Rochester from where I left from. I’ve got all those certificates still here somewhere amongst the war stuff. Actually I’ve got a document book about that thick with a lot of that stuff in. Then there were all the uncles and aunts, Margaret had a fair swag of them. I think

22:00 it took a while for me to settle. I was still hyped up, because you can’t just stop having a war and then forget about it in three months time, it’s still in your system, you’ve got to get it out of your system somehow, and that probably took a while. That’s when I was told I was ‘bomb happy’, I think.

Before you came back to Australia,

22:30 **had you seen your daughter at all?**

No, no she was over, she was about 18 months old before I first saw her. Of course she was sitting up in a high chair being fed. That was the first time I’d seen her.

What did she make of you?

I don’t think she thought, like all wartime mums and dads and babies, I don’t think she really thought I was who I was supposed to be.

23:00 Oh golly, it took a while to bond, and that’s only natural, I was a stranger and I wasn’t used to looking after babies either, so I guess we were fairly mutual in that respect, but she’s the one that died six years ago, last week. Last week? Yes, no, March 31st, that’s right,

23:30 but she was my wartime one and I was marching up and down, not marching, I was walking up and down Trinity Beach in Queensland doing these amphibious landings and I was a week too early, walked the wrong week. I thought she was going to arrive early but she didn’t.

I don’t quite follow, sorry.

I was told the expected date for when the baby was due to arrive,

24:00 but I walked the beach of Trinity Bay or beach, whatever you call it, I walked that a week too early, so I had to wait another week before she was born and then I don’t know where I was after that.

Why were you going to walk the beach though?

Well, that’s the practise apparently, new fathers have to walk the wards or the beach or the roads, in my case it

24:30 was Trinity Beach so I had to walk it all over again a week later, but I never told anybody in the tent. You can keep secrets. The boys in the tent never knew I was an expectant Dad. The officer knew, Lieutenant Crawford knew, he knew because he had to censor the letters. He was very good that way and he still corresponds with me. I think it was around about that time

25:00 I won, in a raffle or something, a 10 gallon keg of beer. I think we celebrated that. I don’t think I got a drink out of it. None of the blokes did. So some of the things are good not all bad.

What was it like to see your stepfather again?

Old grumpy? I think he was proud.

25:30 He didn’t actually show it very much, but I think he was proud. He was worried because they didn’t expect me back. They thought I’d be either shot dead or a prisoner of war because all my clothes and all rifles that I had at home were gone, he said, “Ooh, we didn’t think you’d be back”. I think he’d have been very proud. Even though he was a ‘downer’ type man, that was caused by the war.

26:00 Well I hope it was anyway.

Did he think you’d grown up while you’d been away?

Oh yes, yes. He said I was a totally changed boy. He said, “You grew up, you’ve aged five years in the two years that you were away”. That was the first time, I came home three times. He said, “You have aged five years”.

26:30 I wasn’t aware of it but it must have shown somewhere along the line. I’m sure he was happy to see me eventually arrive, him, even though I had a wife and baby to go with me.

Now, tell me about the march in Melbourne?

The 7th Australian Division marched through Melbourne, I

27:00 was down with flu again and the only way I could fix that was I got a bottle of plonk [alcohol], I think that’s what they call it, got a bottle of plonk and drank that, and by the time I recovered from drinking that I’d got over the fever and I was able to march. In this book, in the regimental book, is a picture of myself in amongst the troops marching up the streets in Melbourne. Then we went back

27:30 up somewhere, I don't know where we went after that, it was, see our division wasn't promoted like the 9th [Division] and the 6th [Division]. We were quiet in our endeavours and we…I don't think we boasted like the 6th and the 9th. I'll know more about that when this doctor brings out this new book, the 7th

28:00 Australian Division. He features in that book quite a few photos that I took over there and, incidentally, the camera was, I bought the camera, a little square one, I bought it in a place in Beirut and there was my picture on the front, 'Presents from Beirut' was on the front of this little shop [it was offering a postal service to anywhere in the world], and I got the camera back about two years later, still intact, and I've got

28:30 those photos I'd taken of the Dead Sea, the River Jordan, all those photos that are on the table. The camera worked. It was an old fashioned camera with a wooden spool, I think that 127 was the film, and it's now in a museum in Shepparton. That's just sort of on the side, that one.

29:00 The war was good to me in many respects, even though I was damaged a few times. They are looking after me wonderfully well now, even though I am extremely disabled. As my family say, "Most of its above the shoulders". And they look after me very well. Hospitalisation here is terrific. I go into a private hospital every time I need help

29:30 and I've had a lot of hospitalisations, including five bypasses and open heart [surgery] and all the rest of it. Lots and lots of haemorrhaging, and I haven't had to worry about a penny. There's always, they reckon there's a permanent bed booked for me up there. They say, "What, you again?"

Tell us about some of the positive effects that the war had on you,

30:00 **I mean, you got to put into practise all the training that you'd had and you'd had some responsibility as well?**

I guess it taught me responsibility. I remember the first time I took charge of a troop of would-be soldiers in Rochester, I had them marching up the wall, they kept going and I forgot to say left or right

30:30 turn and I guess that straightened out those sort of things. Also, there was the bondage amongst the boys, they were like part of a family, which we'd go to all the things around the district and all that, ride our bikes to Bendigo and Echuca and all those sort of places to a

31:00 dance, but we were still, while we didn't have our uniforms on we were still good mates and I was terribly sad to lose most of them in Changi and…good mates. We were camped down near Geelong somewhere and we were eating,

31:30 we'd caught some rabbits and I was cooking them for the troop and I got a message to say, "The 'enemy' were coming", and we had to suddenly load all our stuff, cart cooked rabbits on the back of a truck and away we went, and George Rankin was the GOC [general officer commanding]. I'd read an article that he'd led the charge to fight the bushfires, but I don't know where they were? In the pub, that's where we saw him.

32:00 One thing I can remember apart from Torquay, was the Bendigo camp in the militia was that thick with dust and we were camping on, sleeping on boards, on top of the dust. All you could hear at night time was coughing, no wonder I've still got it. Also, unfortunately, it had rained, it had rained that week we were there too, so we were taking

32:30 some tucker somewhere to the troops and all the apple pies got wet through. I don't know whether they ever ate them or not. In Geelong, not Geelong, my first day in the 2nd AIF was at Royal Park and I had the job of training soldiers there and marching them around. Hundreds of them, lost half of them. They dropped off.

33:00 Because I was an ex-soldier, I suppose they called me an 'ex-soldier', they thought I could do all these things and that's how I…and I would never stand any shenanigans and I didn't do…another one of the jobs I had to do there, I'm chopping from one to the other, in the 2nd AIF was weed out the undesirable blokes who thought they wanted to

33:30 be soldiers. Some of them with two left legs or something like that. I'd get given three or four fellows who thought they weren't suitable for army life and I'd just see if they were with it. Most of them weren't, of course.

Well, tell me, you mentioned your cough before, you smoked quite a bit, how much did you smoke during the war?

Oh, now I

34:00 never smoked before the war, I only smoked during the war, and mostly because cigarettes and tobacco were given to us, especially American Black & Whites], they were the worst, and that's the ones that finally finished me off. We smoked, I had a survey from [the Department of] Veterans' Affairs about that and in it they wanted to know why I smoked. You smoked because,

34:30 one, it was free, it was given to you and, two, you had to do something to try and steady the nerves and

that's why we smoked. And the night Stella Wilson sang to us and we were walking home and I coughed and coughed and coughed, home as the tents fly, coughed all the way and I threw out all the cigarettes. Cigarettes, gum rice papers and matches. I saved the tins of tobacco for my foster father.

35:00 I took all them home, 30-odd tins of those. Even today, I can't, I'm not telling on you! If you smoked in here, I'd be sick with head pain, I'd be spitting my lungs out. My own son when he comes up, my eldest bloke, he goes out on the back veranda. His son said,

35:30 "Dad," he said, "Grandpa doesn't like you smoking". I thought, "Shut up, you little rat".

Well, how much did you smoke?

You'd smoke a packet of cigarettes…cause, I think we got a packet of cigarettes every day, you'd smoke those, but what I did later after I'd given up smoking, I still had my ration and I'd either sell them to the blokes in the unit or take them down to the Yanks, if I could find some. They loved our

36:00 cigarettes, but they also gave us a bottle of beer. I think that was every day, too. Horrible damn stuff. You just didn't feel right drinking that damn stuff. So I've been free from smoking now since then.

What was the point where you gave up, you did mention this off camera?

Coughing, coughing. Yes, coughing after the concert, but how I managed…

Sorry, you told us off camera about the concert,

36:30 **but could you tell us again on camera?**

About giving up smoking?

Mm.

Right, what I did was, when I threw everything out of the tent, sorry, tent fly, didn't have tents, I decided there and then I was going to quit smoking because of what it did to me, and still does, and how I stopped that was if you can stop for 15 minutes, why not 30? Why not double it and keep on doubling it all

37:00 the time. That's what I was doing, stick to your two hours, then four hours, right through, and keep doubling and add to that, put an open safety pin in your pocket and every time you put your hand in your pocket you stuck your finger on the open safety pin and then I chewed sweets, lollies and anything like that.

Tell us about the concert?

The concert was Stella Wilson, who she was apparently a well known recording artist, whatever they were in those days. She'd

37:30 sung to the troops at a concert in New Guinea. Mind you I still didn't know the Japanese were up on the ridge. I can't remember what she sang, but I know that was the concert I came home from. That was, no, I don't know what she sang at all. That was the night I quit smoking.

38:00 I haven't had a cigarette since. All I can remember is Stella Wilson's concert entertaining the troops. Another thing about New Guinea, my puggaree on my hat, I was coming home from somewhere up there, and I lost my puggaree and I walked back, several miles it felt like, and I didn't realise but I'd stubbed my toe on my puggaree on the ground on the road in the

38:30 dark, and I've still got that puggaree. Have I? No, its gone to Townsville, that's right, to a museum up there. That was a miracle. That was my original puggaree.

Sorry, I don't understand?

Puggaree? Band around your hat?

Yes.

That was my original one that I was given when I enlisted, because in the militia we only had a little grey coloured, no velvety-coloured puggaree around our hats.

But what do you mean

39:00 **about stubbing your toe?**

Mm?

What do you mean about stubbing your toe?

I didn't get that.

You said you stubbed your toe?

Oh, that's right, on the hat. It had fallen off my hat.

Oh, I see.

Out of 15,000 troops I reckoned that had walked over it that I was just lucky enough to stub my toe on it and very relieved, very relieved. Because losing things, when I came out of hospital in Morotai and got back to the unit

39:30 all I had left, and I still have it, is one fork. It's got a bit of an inscription that my foster father put on it. I lost the knife, I lost the spoon, I don't know whether I lost the dish to put your meals in. I know I lost those things. What happened to them, I have no idea. At the landing it would have been a

40:00 shemozzle [bedlam].

Did you continue drinking after the war?

Mm?

Did you continue drinking after the war?

How often's pancake day? Very, very seldom. I just didn't have the need for, felt I had the need for, I haven't had a drink, alcoholic drink, for 10 years, I suppose. Oh, there's

40:30 some bottles of it in there that I won in a raffle. No, the smoking's gone, I have no desire to drink, although at the war I drank every day. Now that's something we did do. If we could get something that was good to drink, I'd have a drink every day, but only ever the one. Being a non-commissioned officer you had to be fairly reasonably sensible with your drinking so that you

41:00 weren't tiddly [slightly drunk] when something had to happen or had to be done. I think that's self discipline.

Okay, we've got about a minute left, is there anything else you'd like to add?

You've done a very good coverage, better than even I anticipated. I'm not sorry that I went to war because that's what I

41:30 grew up wanting to do. I'm terribly happy that I came home from the war unscathed. Very happy to have a very good family that never went off the rails, to my knowledge. They've all been very good and, as I said, I've only got the two boys left now. I only see them once every now and again so it's a lonely existence

42:00 but I've got...

INTERVIEW ENDS