

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Norman Johnstone (Johnno) - Transcript of interview

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### Tape 1

00:43 **Thanks for this from us and everyone at the office, thank you for taking part. Couldn't do it without your generous support. The first thing we need to start the interview is a summary of your life, so maybe you could start at the beginning, where you grew up and your**

01:00 **family.**

I was born in Moss Vale, in the New South Wales Southern Highlands, lived for the first seven years of my life. My father was a Clerk of Petty Sessions at Moss Vale. Lived in the one house for most of the time, and Dad built a house while he was there

01:30 and we lived there for a couple of years, and I think the rest of our family consisted of two older sisters and there was an elder brother who died in infancy, and myself, a younger brother and two girls. The last was born in Moss Vale before we left. There we

02:00 moved to Yass in the wool area of New South Wales. We lived there for about two years. I started school when I was seven at Moss Vale, and went to school at Yass and

02:30 from Yass my mother was given a death sentence of breast cancer while we there, and we moved to Sydney where she went into hospital and died in the January 1928. When I was eleven at the time. I went to school at Chatswood

03:00 Intermediate High School for about a year, then from there we moved to Cowra and stayed there for a couple of years where I went to, I think for about second year at

03:30 high school. From there we moved to Narrandera and spent a couple of years at school there and did the intermediate certificate at Narrandera, and from there were only about three schools where you could do the leaving certificate in the Riverina

04:00 one I think at Albury, Wagga and Hay. So I was sent to Hay and boarded at a church hostel there and eventually did my leaving certificate in 1932.

#### **Where did you go on to work after school?**

Dad had been promoted to Police

04:30 Magistrate and he had started at Cootamundra and happened to be moved to Hay, so when I left school, I got a job with the Bank of New South Wales and started at Hay in 1933. Stayed with the Bank, I went to Yenda from Hay, then to

05:00 Ganmain and where did I move from there? That's right from Ganmain I went to Wau, New Guinea, and was there for about a year when I contracted scrub typhus.

05:30 I was in hospital for fourteen days, those days most of everybody who got scrub typhus died. But I was fortunate I got over it, lived on ginger ale for fourteen days. That's all you could keep down. They used to reckon in those days you would convalesce properly up there

06:00 so I was then returned to the mainland.

#### **Was that with the Bank of New South Wales in New Guinea?**

Yes. The day I landed in Sydney I got malaria, and went into hospital at Paddington, the Scottish Hospital at

06:30 Paddington I think it must have been. Had quite a nice time there because the doctor went on holidays and they wouldn't let me out until he got back, so I had fully recovered and just amused myself in the hospital, I don't think you could do that these days, and from the Bank

07:00 then sent me to Wagga. That was 1939 I think, and when war was declared I enlisted at Wagga.

**You could take us through your service career, where you trained and served after your enlistment?**

I actually moved to Griffith before I was called

07:30 up and I moved with a group of contingent to Ingleburn, got there on 3rd November 1939, when I was posted to the 2nd 4th Infantry Battalion and not long afterwards I was given

08:00 the job of Company Orderly Room Clerk and I stayed in that position for three years.

**Where did you go?**

On the 10th January 1940, I went on the Strathaven and landed eventually in I think it was a place called Kantara in the Suez Canal and went to

08:30 Palestine as it was called then and into a camp at Julis and we trained there for around about nearly twelve months because I think we then moved to Egypt to a camp at a place called Burg el Arab , just out of Alexandria in the start of the Western Desert

09:00 and we trained there for not too sure how long, but in January 1941, we moved down the desert and started the Libyan Campaign. Our first action was just on the receiving end of some

09:30 artillery fire. We were supposed to be guarding our guns, for one of our artillery regiments, and the second day we were supposed to mop up what was left of the first day but there wasn't really anything left, so we did a pretty quick tour along the

10:00 positions, actually they had given up, the Italians. So we then went to Tobruk, I think it was round about the 20th January. So that was our first real action and we attacked at dawn and the enemy

10:30 artillery plastering us and what not and we attacked behind a barrage and eventually took the Italian HQ [headquarters] which was a huge complex under that, quite luxurious HQ for their general staff. Captured the general

11:00 in charge of Tobruk, I am not too sure of his name, but I remember he was a tall fair headed bloke, nothing like an Italian you would expect. After Tobruk we went to Derna Wadi, where we saw a bit of action. Matter of fact it was some of my worst moments of the war were going

11:30 up and down Derna Wadi, which was round about a thousand feet deep. Took two hours to get from one side to the other, we were going backwards and forwards. But eventually anyhow we chased the Italians down to Benghazi and we stayed at Benghazi for a little while until they decided to send us to Greece, so we came back up the desert, the

12:00 9th Division came down and took over from us and we got on ships at Alexandria and went to Greece, and we camped in a camp named Dafni, just outside Athens, and I remember I was supposed to get leave on the

12:30 second day but I wasn't lucky enough to get it, we moved on the second day and went straight up to the northern border of Greece where we were we could see Albania, Yugoslavia and some other country, I am not too sure.

13:00 But that was our first experience with the Germans, we were overrun by the Germans, virtually the day or so after we got there. Lost quite a few men, we lost a whole platoon that didn't get the message to withdraw in time. And the next day we were

13:30 fought a bit of a rear guard action and then got in trucks and went back a few miles. We kept on preparing defensive positions and being out flanked and moved and retreating or withdrawing as they would say. And

14:00 until eventually we did a bit of a stand at Brallos Pass, which I think was the old Thermopylae, and then went down to place I think it was called Megara. Where we were lucky enough to get taken off

14:30 and we were taken back to Alexandria and we had eight hours of Stukas bombing us, we had two cruisers and about a half a dozen destroyers, I think one destroyer had a near miss and the steering was put out of action, it was sunk by the others, they took the men off and sunk them.

15:00 One destroyer had to return to Crete. I think I have erred there, when we were taken from Greece, we weren't taken back to Alexandria we went to Crete. And we had about three weeks there.

**And then the evacuation from Crete was back to Alexandria?**

Yeah. Went back to Alexandria and

15:30 from there we went into Syria, the Syrian campaign had finished and they were expecting the Germans

- to come down that way so we took up positions in the mountains not far into Lebanon really, and
- 16:00 then I think we eventually moved back from there, to camps in Palestine again, and I think we were still there when they sent us, supposed to come back to
- 16:30 Australia, that's right we stopped at Ceylon for sometime and got taken back to Australia where we landed at Perth and then back to Adelaide where we went into,
- 17:00 actually our battalion was up in the Mt Lofty, and we stayed there for a while until we got home leave, and then eventually taken up to the tablelands where we did a bit more training, and did some jungle training, and
- 17:30 I think I am a bit out of order there, I think we were taken to, we went to Darwin first. That's right, we had our leave, went back to Adelaide, and then went to Darwin where we stayed for twelve months doing various exercises and practicing for a Japanese invasion.
- 18:00 We came down on leave then. While we were at Mt Lofty I met me wife Wilma, and corresponded with her for the next twelve months and we got married the next time I came down on leave.
- 18:30 **Just to finish off the summary of your war service, after Darwin you were sent to New Guinea, when did that come about?**
- Well after that leave, where I got married, we were sent to the tablelands then, and did a bit of jungle training and what not and then went to New Guinea. We landed at Wewak and then
- 19:00 fought our way down the coast to, no what did I say, did I say we landed at Wewak, no we didn't, we landed at Aitape. Then we fought our way down the coast to Wewak and eventually took Wewak. My father had died in June of
- 19:30 that year which was 1945, and I had applied for compassionate leave, but as I was married me brother was given it and he come down about July I think, but anyhow they started to discharge us in August, and
- 20:00 I was one of the first to come down and eventually I was discharged in August 1945.
- Just before the war ended?**
- Aaah, just after. It ended on the 15th August I think. And I was discharged on the 30th.
- And what was the reason you were among the early discharges again?**
- Just because I was first in.
- 20:30 I was amongst the first to join up, so they started discharging. Maybe because I had that compassionate leave.
- What happened for you after the war, where did you go back to?**
- Actually I was quite keen on the bank life, especially in the bush. I went back to the bank
- 21:00 and I was unable to get back to the bush because of the housing problem at the time, so I went to Cremorne Junction first and then into town into 228 Pitt Street and. Where did I go from there?
- 21:30 I went to various other branches, but I went back to Cremorne Junction at one stage and then made Assistant Manager at Crows Nest and from there I got me first branch at Panania and after about three years there
- 22:00 I was put on the relief staff and I was one of the relieving managers throughout New South Wales for about three years and then in 1974 I think it
- 22:30 was. I finished about forty one years in the bank, that's right. 1974 I decided to retire and have a couple of years off and then with my brother, who also had retired from the bank, and son in law and eldest daughter and son in law we bought a newsagency at
- 23:00 St Leonards. And did about six or seven years there, then had another one at Northpoint at North Sydney, which was not so good because we were virtually working as agents for the Lottery Office, lotto and a huge of lottery trade, it wasn't really like a newsagency. I was going to
- 23:30 retire eventually from there, but my youngest daughter was a school teacher and she had become rather disenchanted with the life she was leading because the discipline was so poor. She was working for us at the newsagency and so she
- 24:00 wanted to carry on with it, so I bought another one at Terrey Hills, which we had for five or six years, and Wilma and I just worked part time and I did the books for them, and then another daughter who had got a bit tired of nursing, she was a

24:30 nurse, she came in with us, so the two of them virtually ran this newsagency at Terrey Hills.

**Three daughters is that right?**

Four daughters actually and one son, who came at the end.

**And any grandchildren, great grandchildren?**

Yeah, we've got I think it's about eleven grand children,

25:00 couple of adopted ones, and at the moment three great grandchildren.

**And you've been in this house in Newport since 1948?**

Yep.

**Okay. That brings us pretty much up to date. That's a good summary. What can you tell us about your early memories of moving around, Moss Vale and Yass, where do your earliest**

25:30 **memories come from?**

Aah, I just remember a little bit about all the towns I was in. Moss Vale, remember Dad had a horse and sulky, and he had been a

26:00 farm boy and so of course he was right at home with horses, he was a good horseman, and a very good handyman, which my main hobby has always been carpentry.

26:30 Me mother evidently must have had a pretty good temper, because I remember her throwing a silver teapot at me, and it went through the window at the early house in Moss Vale. And I remember building this house, he did a lot of it himself, he built a brick garage. And

27:00 I remember the long walk to school. I have been back there several times since, and it was only a few hundred yards, it seemed miles at that time.

**How old were you at that time?**

I was seven when I started school, so I would have been seven, eight or nine or something like that, but I think we were only there the seven years altogether, so it was probably

27:30 only just after I started school I suppose. But I can remember coming home from school one Wednesday afternoon and being told we had another young sister and she was evidently me younger sister was born there. And of course,

28:00 at the house I can remember the mother being ill there, and remember the school there.

**You were about seven as you say when you moved to Yass?**

Maybe eight I suppose.

**What was that move for, why did you have to move around so much?**

28:30 They were just normal for public servants in that job. Dad was in the Justice Department and he was apparently promoted every couple of years and he had been a school teacher in his youth, and my mother was a school teacher too. Just, I think what they called a pupil teacher

29:00 a primary school teacher. So both of them were teaching in the Wagga district and Tom Blamey was also a school teacher at the same time in the district. And then of course

29:30 Cowra, the main thing I remember about Cowra was the bridge. Lachlan is only a very small river, I don't know whether you know it at all. They have this bridge about sixty above it, it used to up when it was in flood. But, the main thing I

30:00 remember about the country towns is I enjoyed me life in all of them.

**What were your interests and things you enjoyed as a young boy?**

Mainly just playing with billy carts and that sort of thing, we used to play cricket in the streets of course, and I remember at Yass we played rugby league football

30:30 with two men a side sort of thing, on the way home from school, and we used to fish down the dam not far from our place, and there was a family up the road at Yass, who had a pony, so we learnt to ride

31:00 there and also started, things were always pretty tight financially, and I don't think we were allowed to take jobs like paper boys or that sort of thing because there were so many more needy people who needed them, so Dad wouldn't

31:30 let us do that. I used to go round on a paper run with the bloke from across the road with his bike. I learnt to swim in Yass in the Yass River which was a creek, just a creek or so. And also I learnt to swim

properly when we were living at Artarmon,

32:00 I don't know whether they are still there, I learnt in the Lavender Bay Baths, are they actually still there do you know? 'Round about near Milson's Point station is?

I don't think so, I am not sure.

**While we are talking about Yass, you mentioned it is part of the sheep country, what did the people of Yass do back in the '20s back when you first lived there?**

32:30 It was a very nice town in those days, it was predominantly sheep all round that area is very good sheep country. There were some quite famous studs there, some people named Merryman had some very fine Merinos, and it was

33:00 a very prosperous place.

**How could you tell it was a prosperous place? What did the town look like? What was going on?**

Well it always seemed to me to be a smart sort of a town, the towns people were always smartly dressed and all that sort of thing. Although what was it about?

33:30 About 1926, 1927 it would have been, and Cowra of course was small there were sheep around Cowra, but I think it was more of a wheat growing area. It was a

34:00 nice town.

**When did you first start to notice that times were getting tougher and the Depression was coming?**

I don't suppose really it impacted very much on us as kids really. I know the public servants in about

34:30 1929 but I think about a thirty percent cut in their pay. Which would have been hard to take I should say, but I think I suppose really we were relatively well off, we never were short of

35:00 food or anything like that, and I don't think there would have been the food shortages like it was for impoverished people today, because I think in those days it was completely different because the labour was so cheap

35:30 sort of thing, it seems to be a different set up now with wages are so high, and everything else seems to be high too, like food is a very expensive, everything you buy you know. I can remember potatoes something like fourteen pounds for six pence or something

36:00 like that, it's hard to imagine.

**What sort of food was on your table as a child?**

Aah we had the usual, we always had the meat, either lamb or beef and plenty of vegetables, there was always plenty of fruit. The usual things, eggs.

36:30 We were really never short of food.

**What about clothing? You said you got by alright?**

Yes, well that was probably the most thing that they used to try, me father

37:00 actually , amongst his gifts he was a pretty good tailor, something you would never think of doing these days, he turned a suit inside out, generally on the outside they fade and on the inside they are like new so he turned it round and had a new suit

37:30 out of it. And he could also make clothes for us, like our pants, short pants that sort of thing. We were lucky really, he was a very

38:00 capable man.

**What about the other kids around you? Did everybody get on as well as you or didn't you notice?**

I didn't really notice any difference, it's amazing what you don't notice when you are a child. I know that at Narrandera I am still friends with

38:30 Dad's assistants there, a chap named Masters, and his youngest child was born there, I remember when he was born and I still keep up with him, but he was telling me that while at Narrandera they didn't have enough blankets to keep warm, they used

39:00 to keep newspapers between the blankets to keep them warm. And he always said that Dad taught his mother to patch their pants, how to patch boys' pants. They were evidently

39:30 a bit worse of than we were because my eldest two older sisters were both working then and I think the Masters had about eight children, so I think they were feeling the pinch quite a bit, and of course he wouldn't have been getting as big a pay as Dad.

40:11 End of tape

## Tape 2

00:46 **You have been talking about people you knew who were doing it tough, what about some of the unemployed people or swagmen were they common sights?**

Yeah, there were

01:00 quite a lot of swagmen about in those days, I think everybody used to give them handouts. They seemed to be a recognised thing then, the old swagman.

**What would they do? I mean they don't really exist anymore, can you explain what they did?**

Well what they did was just travel the road camping

01:30 out at night sort of thing. I suppose they would be the same sort of people who these days are sleeping on park benches and that sort of thing. But of course there's one thing you learn in life but it's extremely difficult to get up when you are down. If you are down, you just gotta need a bit of

02:00 money to start with to get going. I actually got a good start really with the first newsagency I bought. Really lucky there too, I bought it when prices of them were very strictly controlled by the Newspaper Proprietors Association.

02:30 I was in that for eight years and when I sold it I sold it when it was more like the market price which is you are selling on whatever your nett profit it, so I sold it for far more than what I would have sold it for if it had still been controlled.

**That was your break in many ways?**

Yes. So that gave me a break so

03:00 I have been able to fund my own retirement, I get a disability pension for deafness from the DVA [Department of Veterans' Affairs], which is quite handy because it's tax free.

03:30 So often the greatest help I have got is my Gold Card.

**A lot of Veterans tell us the same thing. One big event in your growing up would have been the sickness and death of your mother, can you tell us a bit more about what happened?**

Well she wasn't very long from when she was first told she had the

04:00 cancer that we went to Sydney, we were living at Artarmon, and she went in to North Shore Hospital almost immediately and within a few months died there. Don't really remember a great deal about it.

**How did that shake things**

04:30 **up in your own family?**

Well, her sister who had actually brought her up, she was about twenty years older than she, she came to live with us and more or less looked after the family from then on, right up until the war. I think by about that stage she reached about seventy three or seventy four or something.

05:00 And she couldn't agree with freedom the children had by that time sort of thing, to go out at night and that sort of thing, and couldn't agree with Dad there, after all these years, from about 1928 to

05:30 1940 odd I suppose.

**What kind of a woman was she and what sort of an influence did she have on you?**

Oh because I think she more or less went on like a mother to us.

06:00 I am not too sure whether she had any particular influence on us really, I think we were really more influenced by our father.

**How did get on in the wake of your father's death?**

Well he never married again. He apparently managed

06:30 to get over it.

**When you say he was an influence on you, in what ways did he influence you?**

Well I think he influenced our morals, I think he had a big influence on our character, he was a big upright bloke and he I think

07:00 his principles generally were very good and he brought us up the same way, with honesty.

**What was the discipline like in your household?**

The what?

**The discipline, from your father, your mother, your aunt?**

It was

07:30 I think, the usual things in those days, "Wait till your father gets home", and so forth and he was a very soft bloke of course, but he used to chase us with a stick, but never caught us of course, we'd hop through a hole in the back fence and get away from him. We of course never knew that he didn't intend to catch us.

08:00 So we didn't suffer any physical harm.

**What did you get in trouble for as a boy?**

Well I think it would be mainly from teasing our sisters and that sort of thing, but hard to remember really.

08:30 I remember doing anything terrible really. Maybe I have wiped that from my memory.

**You must have been a bit of a larrikin in some ways to be chased around the yard with a stick?**

Well, I think it was probably mainly the

09:00 having rows with your sisters and that sort of thing. They older sisters of course would try to boss the younger ones about. I gave them a terrible time when they started getting boyfriends. Pinching letters and that sort of thing.

**How many sisters did you have? Can you tell us about your**

09:30 **siblings?**

Yeah, I had two older sisters, the eldest was about eight years older than I was, and my second, she actually

10:00 died quite young with multiple sclerosis in about 1954. I got on well with them in our adult years, got on well with all of them. Unfortunately the eldest one, now there's Geraldine, the eldest one, the one I wrote the letters

10:30 to, she is in a nursing home at Armidale, she is six years older, she must be ninety four, but unfortunately she's got dementia, so she doesn't really know you, she doesn't know me when I got to see her.

**Was she the eldest sister?**

No she's the second

11:00 eldest sister, she's six years older than I am. She was a pretty good legal secretary and she worked for Garfield Barwick actually, for some years, and then in her later years, she was Secretary to the

11:30 Bursar for Armidale University, New England University, but I still keep in touch with her, all her children and the eldest one is sixty, they are not children anymore.

**What about younger?**

Young ones I have,

12:00 Pam and Faith, and Faith I keep up with and have lunch with her and her husband at least once a month, sometimes more often. She lives at Allambie Heights and Pam, the other one, unfortunately got a brain tumour just after the war and she died in

12:30 1946.

**What was it like to be a young boy surrounded by girls?**

Aaah, I never really noticed any difference really, whether our boy, he's one and he's now got three daughters.

**Did it make you wiser about women in some ways?**

13:00 **Or are you just as clueless as other men?**

I think in some ways you are probably lot wiser about them, but others as I told you a while ago, with their logic.

**We won't go into that, we'll skip over that**

13:30 **subject perhaps. Who were your mates then growing up? You moved around a lot, did you have close friends?**

Yeah. Had a few close friends, I can't remember the ones from Narrandera, when I was about twelve or thirteen, I had a couple of very good mates, one of them was the son of a builder

14:00 there, and they used to do a lot of camping, and I always went with them. We used to camp on river and that sort of thing, and did a lot of fishing with them. And the other chap, his father was in charge of the

14:30 pumping station on the river, whether pumped the river or whether it was a power station or what it was, but I was very, very friendly with them. I needed some big friends actually, because I was very small right up until, I remember I had a picture of myself in 4th year at Hay, I must have been about

15:00 one inch shorter than the other kids, I didn't grown until about a year later, and then I only got to about five feet eight and a half inches.

**Was it rough? You say you needed big friends, why was that?**

Because the big blokes were always bullying you, so I had this

15:30 builder's son and the other bloke were quite big boys, and they would generally be walking behind me so anyone that pushed me into the pool or something like that, they would get dealt with quite quickly. So it was very good to have them.

**What sort of fights did you get into as a**

16:00 **young man?**

Oh, nothing much I don't think as I remember, can't really remember.

**About school, what did you enjoy and what did you not like so much?**

Well, in

16:30 country schools I always did pretty well. I was generally up near the top of the class in most subjects. I enjoyed maths I think more than anything else. There used to be a subject in science called

17:00 Mechanics, to do with friction and that sort of thing, not to do with motor mechanics. I was very keen on that but never did very well at it, which was rather strange. Generally when you liked a subject you it's fairly easy to learn. There's something you are not really interested in, it's

17:30 the devil's own job to learn.

**What was about this mechanics subject that inspired your imagination?**

I think the business, I have always been interested in levers and things like that. I don't know whether it's hydraulics in it, but I have always been fascinated

18:00 with hydraulics, these lifting apparatus on trucks and that sort of thing you know, and what can be done with the sort of small force.

**What else did you enjoy about**

18:30 **school?**

The sport, I was always pretty keen tennis player and cricket, tennis and cricket. I wasn't so keen on football, but I still played it. I remember about the last match I ever played in, I practically got knocked cold at the final whistle.

19:00 I was racing along, looking where I was passing the ball, and ran into one of the opposition and knocked myself out.

**Was that the end of your career?**

That was about the end of my school career, the last match of the season in the football.

**What about the cricket and the football? Did you follow**

19:30 **the Sydney competition or what were the local competitions?**

No, we used to follow the test teams and that sort of thing, but I don't think we followed any Sydney teams. Or even the local teams. But, the Hay High

20:00 School, had a very good cricket team I remember when I was there. I wasn't anywhere good enough to get in that. Strangely enough I had a friend that died about ten years ago, he was in the cricket team

20:30 at Hay, I knew him down here, he used to live at Collaroy.

**What did you not like so much about school?**

Well sometimes in those days I think some of the teachers tended to be rather cruel, they used to

21:00 cane you for getting the answer wrong in a bit arithmetic or that sort of thing. I used to enjoy in the early days, the spelling Bs because I had a gift for spelling. It's a strange thing that, because there is no rhyme or reason in the

21:30 English language really, and yet you seemed to be born with this gift to be able to spell any damned word that comes to you. Peculiar, one of me daughters has got it.

Baffles me.

**You were quite good at school, you were quite interested in sports, how would you describe yourself as a young man, studious, sporty?**

Well

22:00 after I left school I used to spend most of time playing tennis. Most of my free time I used to play in the afternoons after work. That was one of the great things about the bank after the war, we balanced the books every day, and as soon

22:30 as we were balanced we used to go. And not these days, when they are flat to the boards all the time, they make sure they get their full pound of flesh for what they paying you for. But it was a good life.

**Before you joined the bank, what sort of ambitions did you have or what dreams or hopes**

23:00 **did you have for your future?**

Actually because my father was in the law, I had always dreamed of being a solicitor. But Dad didn't think I should follow him, he reckoned the law

23:30 made you hard. It didn't make him hard. But of course he had a great belief that there is some good in the worst person. Sometimes I doubt it.

**What stopped you from going on to university to study law?**

I think just the

24:00 in those days you really had to get a scholarship to be able to go to university or reasonably wealthy parents to pay, most who did go who couldn't really afford it, worked or

24:30 had to pay their way through, which was pretty difficult to be able to devote enough your studies as well as working to keep yourself. But they did it. I think they deserved their degrees. But it's pretty hard to understand

25:00 these days you know when everyone manages to get to university, I think our youngest two have more or less done university and have more or less got university degrees. And

25:30 the youngest, she was always going to be a teacher, and it was a shame that she got sick of it so soon after she was in. I think she was in it for five years, she reckoned the discipline was so poor that all the joy had gone out of it.

**I want to talk a bit more about your values**

26:00 **and the kind of family background you came from. I am interested to know about the World War I, you were born during that war, what was your family links with that conflict?**

Well my father, had been knocked back from enlisting, I think all his brothers went, he had

26:30 a lot of brothers. He had three brothers who all went. I think he had four brothers went and he had two sisters, so they all went and he seemed to think that he had

27:00 sort of missed out on doing his duty or something like that and I think that would have probably influenced Ian and me to join up as early as we did, my brother joined up a couple of weeks before I did.

**Just before we get to you joining up, what legacy did that war have in Australian country towns?**

Well, everybody admired the

- 27:30 ANZACs [Australia and New Zealand army Corps], the World War I Diggers, and well right up until we enlisted, the idea of responding to
- 28:00 the sort of call to arms of your country was very strong. I doubt today whether they would manage to get a volunteer army to a war like those, especially when it was one on the other side of the world at the time.

**What sort of physical reminders were there of the World War I veterans?**

- 28:30 **What did you see of them growing up?**

Generally only the Anzac Day business, the Anzac Day Marches and that sort of thing. I don't remember the RSL [Returned Services League] or anything like that being particularly prominent. But it apparently affected us

- 29:00 in that way with most of us when the second world war broke out, there was no question of whether we would go or not, we just went.

**You said there was a desire to serve your country, what about your king? What sort of role did the British Empire play in your lives?**

Quite a lot,

- 29:30 I think everyone felt immensely proud of being in the British Empire. And, yes I think the sort of Royal Family was taken for granted, they could virtually do no wrong.

- 30:00 **You were a long way from England and that centre of the British world, what sort of news did you get in Australia of what was happening in the outside world especially in smaller towns?**

Well we had the usual radio news.

- 30:30 I think we've always had in this country, better news of other parts of the world than they had of us, for instance, if you go to England for a visit, it's very, very difficult to get any news of Australia at all. I should say, well it's pretty obvious

- 31:00 in the United States for instance, that they know absolutely nothing of our country, whereas we virtually know a hell of a lot about theirs. Through the films I suppose of course. We probably don't know as much as we should about their country people. People from smaller towns.

**You mentioned the radio, how important was the**

- 31:30 **radio in your family life?**

Not a great deal in ours, as a matter of fact, I am not too sure, we wouldn't even have had a radio or a gramophone until a few years before the last war. Probably got it around the 1930s or something like that.

- 32:00 But I think the radio news was quite important and we also used to listen to those comedy shows and things like that on the radio quite a lot.

- 32:30 Yeah, I would say it was quite important the radio.

**What about cinema and news reels?**

Yeah, we did quite a lot of film going, going to the pictures. I think it would have been quite unusual if you didn't go once a week to see a picture.

- 33:00 I don't know whether we were particularly interested in the news reels at the time.

**What were your favourite types of films?**

Musicals figured a lot in my favours.

- 33:30 Once the sound came in I suppose, before sound I was probably still more or less a child, and the cowboy pictures and things like that would have been our main interest. But I remember the

- 34:00 first talkies came in, one of the earliest ones I saw I thought was absolutely fantastic, was that Maurice Chevalier and I know the song in it was "Every little breeze I used to whisper Louise". With his French accent I always thought he was lovely.

- 34:30 **A bit later on who would you go to the pictures with? Would you take girls?**

Yes. That's another thing in country towns that we always looked forward to, during the winter we always had a big ball about once a month and you would take a girlfriend to that and

- 35:00 dance away all night. They were lovely, that sort of disappeared.

**What was lovely about them? Can you describe the scene at one of those balls?**

Everyone was sitting right round the outside of the room, sort of thing, and as soon as the music started you would

35:30 go and either choose your partner, the girls that are waiting round there and away you went. Generally you always had your last dance with your girlfriend. And I can't think of the name of the song,

36:00 it is still played today, and it was played then. Goodnight Sweetheart of course, that was a great favourite.

**When did you first have a serious girlfriend?**

About 1935 I think, yeah

36:30 I had got very serious with her, I would have married her if she hadn't dumped me.

**Who was she? Can you tell me that story?**

Yes, she was the daughter of a World War I digger too, he had a fruit farm a couple of miles out of Yenda,

37:00 and I got very smitten by this daughter, and I used to go out to see her, probably three times a week, I used to ride a bike, the road was too rough to ride on virtually and I used to ride on one of the distributor canals

37:30 that used to take the irrigation water out to the farms. And I used to ride along the bank of this farm up and down like this, and I remember most nights there was a school teacher who lived on the farm opposite,

38:00 where my girlfriend was, and he had a girl about two miles out the other side of the town, and we used to meet about midnight along the canal and smoke a cigarette there. He subsequently married that girl. He was a very good footballer, played in the local team. And in those days they

38:30 had all the local teams had one of the Sydney footballers, as soon as they got just over the hill, that's where they went, out to the bush. And we had one at Yenda. I used to follow the football there, and Cecil was one of these blokes. He played interstate

39:00 at the University Team, Sydney Uni Team about that time, but he was one of these blokes who was always on the spot and go over the line sort of thing, but never in the rough stuff.

**Kept himself looking pretty. He married his girl, what happened to your romance?**

Mine?

39:30 She was a stenographer and actually her expertise in Pittman's shorthand was all due to me, I used to bloody well give her hours and hours of practice. I remember the main material we used was the Hansard from the State Parliament, and I

40:00 remember the stuff I read at the time was an awful lot about transport and the transport minister was a bloke named Fred Stewart and he lived down here, and he must have been the Minister for Transport when number plates first came, when you first had to register cars. Prior to that I don't think there was any registration, and he was number 1.

40:30 You often used to see it, long after he died with his wife. Lady Stewart she was. But I used to read these bloody Hansards for hours and hours on end for my girlfriend and she eventually got a job in Griffith and moved away from town and she met a bloke up there

41:00 who I thought he was an old man at the time, he was in his thirties and he worked for the Water Conservation & Irrigation Commission. She eventually married him. I was heartbroken. But then I didn't have another girlfriend until I met Wilma.

41:41 End of tape

## Tape 3

00:41 **Just after you left school, mentioned you went to New Guinea, can you just share a little bit about how you got yourself to New Guinea, how that was all arranged?**

Ah well, they used to call for volunteers every now and then, and

01:00 I just volunteered and must have got it two or three years later. I think that's right they waited until you were twenty one, that's right they wouldn't send you before you were twenty one.

**Where were you sent exactly?**

Where? You used to go to Port Moresby, fly over the mountains to,

- 01:30 there was no flat land there, so the airstrip was sort of on a slope, not much of a slope but a bit of a slope, and of course it didn't matter which way the wind was blowing you had to land it the same way. And we used to do all our travelling
- 02:00 up there by plane, because we still worked Saturday mornings in the bank up there, we were the only ones that worked Saturday mornings. We all played in one team and I played in the cricket team and the tennis team, and there was
- 02:30 snooker, some of the others played in the snooker team. We used to play at Lae and Salamaua and I think we used to play at Bulolo too. And even though Bulolo was only a few miles away, they would still
- 03:00 fly there. They flew everywhere. The pilots were very highly paid compared to the rest of us. For instance even with an allowance of £125 a year I still only got about £250 a year when I was there, but we managed to save quite a bit of money. That was one of the attractions for going there.

03:30 **What was the Bank of New South Wales doing there?**

Mainly processing gold, as well as providing general banking facilities for the population round there. A beautiful place it had a maximum mean temperature of about eight in

- 04:00 Fahrenheit and a minimum mean of sixty. You waiver between sixty and eight right through the year. And I think it was a nine hole golf course we had there. So we spent a lot of time on the golf course. Playing tennis, it was a

- 04:30 great life.

**So it was a sort of adventure unto itself wasn't it?**

Yeah. Yeah, and actually when I went there a lot of the old hands were just leaving, because they reckoned it was getting too civilised. They

**Was it, getting civilised?**

As far as I was concerned it seemed to be pretty civilised to me. But, I think

- 05:00 the morals were a little bit loose up there with some of the married women up there. It wasn't a good place to take a wife, because they did nothing, they had servants for everything. I had a boy to do my ironing, washing and ironing
- 05:30 for me there and in the houses, people had their own houses sort of thing, well they had the cooking was all done for them, they didn't have to do any housework. Any ironing or anything. Too much at a loose end. So
- 06:00 a lot of marriage break ups.

**Just so we can understand the social context there, what are you saying they didn't have much to do? So there were affairs?**

Yes. I didn't have anything to do with any of them fortunately, and of course I wasn't there long.

**How long did you serve there?**

I think I

- 06:30 may have only been there about six months before I had to come home. They sent me home because of this scrub typhus. I was very ill, I think it's the worst I have been in my life, I had huge temperatures and this business of not being able to hold anything down at all.

07:00 **You mentioned earlier that not many people survived from it?**

No, they didn't in those days. But it used to be carried by a thing called a bush tick or a bush mock up and strangely it generally used to finish up embedding itself in a man's penis. And I think that anyone who got it there never lived, didn't survive it. Although

- 07:30 I think these days, they have it in North Queensland, Scrub Typhus, I don't think anyone dies of it now.

**So what treatment were you given?**

Really, nothing. I was kept alive with this ginger ale. You just either on the fourteenth

- 08:00 day you reached a crisis, and you either got over it or you or you died. So, very nasty. But I don't suppose it is as well known as malaria of course, it's a terrible killer all over the world.

**So back then was the bank issuing anything for malaria any**

08:30 **tablets or anything?**

No. And of course, the mosquitoes weren't too bad there either, although I think all the natives seemed to have malaria. But the kids used to get enlarged spleens, so you would get all the little kids when they were about this high going round with stomachs bulging out like that,

09:00 from enlarged spleens. But it's a terrible disease malaria. Wicked part about it you know, they virtually wiped it out with DDT [dichloro diphenyl trichloroethane] sometime since the war I think it was. But they found that DDT had disastrous side effects on people

09:30 especially with birth deformities, so they more or less outlawed DDT, and the mosquitoes came back and the malaria is just as bad now as it ever was.

**Now, the war is sort of beginning to brew in Europe, did you know much about what was happening overseas?**

Not really. We did hear a bit about Hitler I think.

10:00 I think people started to take notice when Chamberlain visited him and came back with his message of peace in our time. I was watching a thing last night on TV and Stalin made the same mistake, he trusted Hitler. So did Chamberlain.

**Just also coming back to your**

10:30 **family, your brother was in the bank as well, did he go to New Guinea?**

No. No.

**So you and your brother were doing the same sorts of things in the bank?**

Yeah. More or less. He

11:00 stayed, he retired the same year I did. So he had about two years less service than I did. But he's never married and so he is the family financier now.

11:30 **So when war was declared do you remember where you were when you heard the news?**

No. I don't. As far as most of us, just would have been excited at the prospect of a bit of adventure.

12:00 **Did you see the war coming at all?**

Not really, I may have but I don't remember thinking of it much.

**So who told you about the war?**

I think once war had been declared we would have been listening to the radio quite a bit.

12:30 But I suppose the average young bloke was pretty bored with his life too, and there was another incentive for them to have a change. Because you never

13:00 know what you are going into of course. Everyone originally wanted to get into the air force. So when they said they were only going to enlist twenty thousand in the army, we were all rushing to get in, before they

13:30 stopped the enlistment. And I think what eventually put it us off the air force they reckoned everyone was going for the air force so probably if you really

14:00 wanted to get into some service you were better to go down to the army. Which may have been just as well, casualties in the bomber command were horrific.

**So you yourself, did you apply for the air force originally?**

No, I didn't apply for it, didn't even apply for it. I just enlisted in the army.

14:30 **Did you go down with your brother to enlist?**

No, he was up round about Gloucester area I think, because did had moved in the meantime to Tamworth, he was Police Magistrate at Tamworth. And of course Ian had still been going to school,

15:00 and for a couple of years after I started work and then yeah, actually I was had been at Wagga for a couple of years I think. I am not

15:30 absolutely certain about that, it seemed to be a long time I was at Wagga because I remember playing in several tennis competitions.

**So did you enlist in Sydney?**

No at Wagga.

**With some mates?**

No. Just went down by

16:00 myself. I can't remember that there were any others in the bank there that enlisted. Mightn't have been too many my age. Probably a lot of them would have had to get their parents permission too.

**So you mentioned the word adventure earlier, was it**

16:30 **partly the adventure based on some of the stories your uncles had shared with you about World War I?**

No, not really I think that would have deterred you. I think all the old diggers of course knew what it would eventually have turned out to be probably would have issued words of warning, and I don't remember having any of that.

17:00 No actually as I say there was virtually no question as to whether we were going to join up or not. We were always going to join. Somehow or other it had been inculcated into our psyche sort of thing, that was

17:30 the right thing to do. So when the time came we just did it.

**To me the bank was a good job, were you bored with that job?**

No, not really, I always liked the work in the bank and in those days too, you had certain status in the community and in country

18:00 towns, a funny thing, I don't whether the local populus takes advantage of the floating population or not, but you find that the president of all the clubs is always a local, but the ones that do all the work are the bank clerks or school teachers. Somebody like that

18:30 is only there for two or three years and moves on sort of thing. I liked the life in the bank. I always looked forward to being a country bank manager but never was.

**So when you enlisted, when did you actually go into training?**

In a very short time.

19:00 I would have enlisted sometime in October and I was moved to Griffith in the meantime and then I was called. Actually I suppose we would have left Griffith on the 2nd November and we marched into Ingleburn camp on 3rd November, which was the day our unit was formed.

19:30 So that we were original members, and actually that's something, we were all originals and we were all very proud of that, we were all proud of numbers, a funny thing. We didn't really realise that you know, because in the beginning they reserved the first

20:00 thousand numbers in the state for officers. Then the other ranks numbers started from their, from a thousand. And towards the end when most of the numbers had actually were I think were something like one hundred and forty six thousand, they started to use up all the numbers that hadn't been used up down below. So it's a ridiculous thing to do in our view,

20:30 and so we had men coming into our battalion and their numbers were seventy hundred and eight two or something like that, which were lower numbers than any of us had because the first thousand were originally reserved for officers. So, we didn't like it.

**So when you enlisted was the war going to be over in six months?**

21:00 Well, I am not too sure whether that was very, that view was very prevalent in those days, because I think we somehow or other had got the idea that Britain wasn't very well prepared. So I think

21:30 most of us knew it was going to be pretty long. I think we were mostly prepared for a long stay in the army.

**So you had a bit of adventure because you have gone with the bank to**

22:00 **New Guinea, you've come back you have worked a bit more and you have joined the army of all things, and you find yourself at Ingleburn, what are some of the experiences there?**

It was quite a shock to the system I suppose, sleeping boards. We had straw palliasses

22:30 and we had bare boards and we were able to raise our beds, you know that much off the floor or something like that. And I think the main training in those days was the drill I suppose, the main thing in any army I think is to get

23:00 people to the stage that it is automatic to obey any order that's given. And, then we did a lot of root marching, you can never do enough of that, although it is one of the most boring parts of it because you gotta learn to carry those packs, and when you first put on a pack with a couple of blankets in it, you practically

23:30 fall over backwards, and it takes a while to get used to carrying the load. So, even your tin hat which, I think it weighed about three pounds, when you first put it on you wonder how you are going to be able to continue to wear

24:00 it. But after a while you get so used to it that. I remember one time I went off, got up and went without it. Funny thing. You also do a lot of crawling round, you see them these days crawling round this, on your

24:30 stomach. And learning to make use of any slight cover there might be available.

**Just a few questions on those things, the palliasses you put the straw in, how often did you change the straw?**

I don't remember changing it at all,

25:00 but we must have I think, because it would flatten out. Mind you I found if you were in action, I was so tired all the time, I could sleep anywhere,

25:30 I still can actually. I would sleep on rocks anything, it didn't matter how rough the ground was. Actually when you are on root marches, the cunningest blokes, you

26:00 always stopped ten minutes to the hour, have a ten minute break marching and they would get up marching again. There were blokes there that would go to sleep straight away, just flop on the ground and go to sleep for ten minutes. It all counts. You find in the end you need it.

**So you were one of those blokes?**

I don't think I was in those days, but

26:30 generally when we were in any sort of an action, I would have then anytime if I got the opportunity to sleep. By gee you need it.

**Were there any blokes in the early enlistment that decided that joining was a good idea, but when they got there**

27:00 **discovered it wasn't what they were expecting?**

Not really no, but I would imagine there could have been a few. But mostly in the early enlistments, probably virtually nearly all the same time that had felt it their

27:30 duty to do it. Very hard to pin down exactly what makes a bloke enlist, but I think the main thing was with those early ones. All the originals in our company were except for one or two, I don't know how they got in, were really good fine types of

28:00 men. And I would have I would say, would have considered it their duty to join up. And they did.

**Can you share with me about the couple of guys that didn't meet up to expectation?**

There were one or two, but I just think that always seemed to be in trouble.

28:30 Always going AWOL [absent without official leave], which you wouldn't have thought they would bothered to have joined up. There were only one or two out of one hundred and ten odd in our Company, that were like that.

**So Norm, just for these couple of fellas, were they fighting type men? Or were they**

29:00 **just didn't really want to be there?**

Yeah. I think possibly they really weren't suited to the army, they weren't suited to taking orders sort of thing, but I say I can only think of one or two of

29:30 them in the one hundred and ten odd blokes we had. But, in the main they were all very good blokes that you could depend on.

**In these early days at Ingleburn how was it making friends?**

30:00 Well I was in the Company HQ of course, I got very good friends with the OC [Officer Commanding] of the company and the 2IC [second in command], the company sergeant major who was

30:30 and a few others, we had as runners of course, we didn't have any wireless communication, and you communicated with your various platoons by runner, that had to be done physically, and I was very friendly with all those, but I think the men in the platoons

- 31:00 would have just struck up friendships within each Section. They would have gone on leave together and that sort of thing, and I knew most of them reasonably well because I knew the numbers of
- 31:30 one hundred and ten odd, without having to look every time. Even sometimes when I hear some blokes name I think of his number straight away, peculiar. But I lost touch with a lot of them I was moved
- 32:00 from the company to the B echelon of the battalion really. I became the Quartermaster's Clerk. I was there for the last three years of the war, so I wasn't really mixed up in the real fighting then, as I was in the first three years.

**So what was in the**

- 32:30 **sense your title in the first three years?**

First three years was Orderly Room Clerk. Company Orderly Room Clerk, and from that you virtually became a corporal. I think they used to make us corporals when we first got the job, and then we were all made lance sergeants. You are still a corporal but you had the privileges of the Sergeants'

- 33:00 Mess, which was about as far as I wanted to go.

**So were you selected for this position, or volunteered for it?**

No, just put there. I suppose, there was two of us, one was with the Commonwealth Bank at Leyton, and I had been in the wilds of Griffith and Wagga, and I suppose

- 33:30 as soon as they saw our occupations we sent in there. The other bloke, I am not too sure what we were made first was two inch mortarman. Which is attached to the Company HQ, but I don't think we saw a two inch mortar, we certainly weren't trained on them. And he eventually became a Battalion Orderly Room Sergeant.

- 34:00 And stayed there for the rest of his army career. He's in a nursing home up in Mull Village, poor old bugger he's blind or virtually blind, I think he can walk about, but he's blind. Sad. I have kept up with a lot of them since the war, the ones I knew well.

- 34:30 **So while you were at Ingleburn were you doing normal training as well as the Orderly Room stuff?**

Yes, yes, supposed to be. You were supposed to be able to carry on as an ordinary infantryman, and should be able to take command of a section or unit, be section leader so if you have got to do the same training.

- 35:00 **Given that most of the fellas that have joined up have been civilians six months ago, were there accidents that occurred where fellas were injured with weaponry?**

I don't remember any in the early stages, we wouldn't have had any live ammunition. At that stage. It's a long time before they start training with live ammunition.

- 35:30 I can't remember doing it at all really. We used to have regular rifle practice on the range, the rifle range, just to learn to shoot. But otherwise

- 36:00 I remember sometime later, even in a permanent camp you do guard duty every night. I remember one, I think he was either the Company Quartermaster or

- 36:30 a Company Orderly Room Sergeant, shot some bloke, he was on guard one night, trigger happy. But that was in one of the other companies. I don't remember anything like that happening in our company.

- 37:00 I can't think of any particular accidents in ours either.

**So after Ingleburn, where did you go from there?**

Went straight to the boat to go overseas.

**Do you remember the march out? Did you do a march through Sydney at all?**

- 37:30 I didn't, I had something wrong with me at the time, I don't know what it was, whether I had a dose of flu or what. But I was in camp when they did their march through Sydney. It's

- 38:00 quite a thrill that march through Sydney, apparently, even on Anzac Day, although I have got past it now because my walking strike is not long enough.

**So did any of the fellas share with you their thoughts or complaints about the march through Sydney?**

I can't remember whether any of them did, I don't think they did. But I wouldn't be surprised if they would have enjoyed it I think.

## Tape 4

00:38 **Norm, can you now just share with me the journey down to the boat the Strathaven and then going overseas, share some details of the boat and the voyage?**

I think we must have been transported to the boat in trucks,

01:00 because I don't remember marching. The Strathaven wasn't fitted out as a troop ship, it hadn't been, so I was more or less a bit of a luxury trip. The only thing I can remember that

01:30 was wrong with it, I think it was on the Strathaven, there was some bloke turned a heater on in our cabin, we were in the depths of the ship, and somebody had turned a heater on and we didn't know, so we roasted. I think somebody must have eventually figured out how to turn off the heat.

02:00 But we did quite a bit of training on it, various drill exercises. They kept us going. I seem to remember it as a very pleasant trip really. It was quite good.

**What sort of training did you do on board?**

02:30 Can't remember really. Probably would have been some drill. Would have been things like map reading and that sort of thing. Couldn't have been much else I don't think.

03:00 **Now the 4th Battalion had an impressive padre during World War I, Padre McKenzie, what were the padre's like for the 4th Battalion who were travelling with you?**

Don't really remember. I don't know whether he was the battalion padre or not, the only

03:30 one I remember much about was the Salvation Army chap, who was very well liked by the whole battalion, and he was with us for years. I seem to remember a Padre Keate, but I can't picture him, just remember the name, must have had at one stage. You might have guessed I am not a very religious

04:00 person. I probably would have gone to the church parades under protest.

**So why did the boys like the Salvation Army chap?**

I think they were more help in a practical way sort of thing, the paper was always very short and he always kept us in supply of paper to write letters on and that sort of thing.

04:30 But I don't know why he was so popular, but he always was, they still talk of him these days, I think he's still alive, this bloke from the Salvation Army.

05:00 I should be able to remember his name but I can't.

**On board were there recreational things like boxing matches, theatre?**

Yeah. Now that I come to think of it they did rung a couple of boxing championships, because we had a couple of pretty good boxers. We had one chap

05:30 by the name of Snow Walker, a good name for a boxer, he was very short, I don't know how he got into the damned army as a matter of fact, because he looked to me to be about five foot five inches. He was a very smart sort of little featherweight. We had another bloke who would have been probably a middle weight boxer who was very good. I have got an idea he

06:00 still comes to reunions. I went to the last reunion in Wagga, I thought I would go, I hadn't been to one for a while, but I thought I would go there because I enlisted there, do the full circle. And it was very enjoyable. Although a good part of our

06:30 reunions these days is made up of widows. They seem to come.

**Just coming back to the ship and the boxing, how did you fare?**

I wasn't a boxer by any means. I would have really got killed with these blokes. No I never did boxing.

**What about theatre or plays**

07:00 **put on by the blokes to entertain?**

I think on the Strathaven there probably would have been some entertainment like that, probably some films. But I can't remember it in detail really.

07:30 Yeah. I think we were generally mainly entertained with films and I remember when we got to Palestine too, I can't remember any live entertainment there, I think it was mainly films

08:00 a lot of films shown there. I remember I first saw "Gone With The Wind" in Tel Aviv with English subtitles.

**Why did "Gone With the Wind" have English subtitles?**

It was probably in some other language. I don't know, it should have been in Hebrew I suppose, but I don't know

08:30 who they would get to dub it. A funny thing about the subtitles, I remember in that particular film, your subtitles are not synchronised properly, you laugh at jokes at the wrong time and that

09:00 sort of thing.

**So back to the Strathaven, given that most of the boys this would have been the first time at sea for them, were many fellas seasick?**

No I don't think so, actually I am very prone to seasickness myself, but I was never actually sick, but I felt sick

09:30 and I was never able to go to meals in the dining salon. On my trip to New Guinea when I went before the war and my trip back, but those boats were only three thousand tonnes, the Midui [?] was the one on the way up and the Prelaylo[?] on the way back. But during the war I never even felt sick on any of the boats, but they were much bigger. On the liberty ship we travelled to New Guinea on

10:00 it was one thousand tonnes, it was three times bigger and probably by that time they had stabilisers on them. But the Strathaven, maybe we didn't strike any rough seas but I always start to feel sick, for instance I started to feel sick coming home when I stepped on to the lighter to go out to the ship. So it was peculiar.

10:30 But I travelled on two or three destroyers during the war and they were weaving about dodging bombs and I never felt sick on those. I don't remember anyone being sick on the Strathaven. It was a pretty big one, at least twenty thousand tonnes.

**11:00 Finally on board, given there are so many men in confined space, for such a long period of time, were there fights broke out between fellas and disagreements?**

Can't remember any. No I can't really remember. I think

11:30 there must have been enough to keep us occupied without any friction. Yeah. You never know it might be that I just don't remember.

**So where did you stop off on the way?**

Only one stop I think.

12:00 It would have been Colombo. Yeah. I don't think there was anywhere else you could stop.

**What were your impressions of Colombo?**

I don't remember much about it, but

12:30 they had some pretty good sporting fields, I remember seeing those. But we weren't there very long, a few hours I think. On the way home they took on some supplies there, and I didn't like the meat very much. So I didn't eat any meat between Colombo and

13:00 Fremantle. I saw it coming aboard.

**So from Colombo you went to Palestine I take it?**

Yeah, went up the Suez Canal. So yeah, that's where we got off I think, Kantara, and got on a train, and went to Palestine.

**13:30 What camp were you in at Palestine?**

Julis, it was called.

**What was your role there?**

The same. I was the Orderly Room Clerk for A Company for three years.

14:00 And I was quite happy I would have been happy to stay the whole six years there.

**I take it that you were, or your units were setting up the camp, it hadn't been set up beforehand?**

I think they had. I think they must have been some people that went there before

14:30 us to set up the camps, because there were several of them of course. At least three places had camps. We used to get leave from those to Tel Aviv and Jerusalem,

15:00 and later in the peace we had leave to Haifa too. It was my favourite place. Once we discovered it a couple of us always used to go there. Used to stay at a hotel up on the mountain.

**What did you like about Haifa so much?**

15:30 There were two parts of it, the walls and what not were down, below but the main business section was halfway up the mountain it was called Hadda Hakarmel I suppose it is Jewish for half way up the mountain or something. Then you used to go to the top to a hotel

16:00 there which was very nice, we used to get treated very well there. Buy us drinks and what not. So and it was a very clean city, probably shouldn't say it, but not many Arabs about there.

**So tell me about the Arabs?**

16:30 When we first got to Julis, that was the first thing they told us, to either keep your rifle with you or keep it chained up in the tent at night, because of the Arabs, they reckon they could sneak into a camp evade the guards and pinch your weapons. I don't know that anybody did lose

17:00 anything that way.

**So were you dealing with supplies yourself there the ordering?**

No, I wasn't doing that until the last three years. It was mainly, where the hell was I?

17:30 I think I was in Darwin before, when I was moved. And we must have been in Darwin for a year at least.

**So before we get to Darwin, what was your actual work then at Julis, what were you doing?**

You seem to do endless

18:00 nominal roles for a company for various things, the Parade States I think they call them, it's actually how many men you had to feed and that sort of thing. I have often thought of it since and I don't know how I was so busy, but I was. I seemed to be doing a hell of a lot of, that's how I learnt all the numbers

18:30 because these endless rolls I used to prepare.

**Was there any sort of black market going on at Julis at the time?**

Aaah, no because we were probably quite a few miles from the towns, we were quite near Gaza, but

19:00 we never actually went on leave to Gaza, we went to Tel Aviv, was quite a way. It was quite a nice clean city, with an ocean front. Actually, the Jews had made

19:30 a pretty good job of Palestine you know as far as the irrigation it is a very arid place, and you couldn't drink any water there, it had some microbe in it. But we

20:00 funny I wish I knew exactly what I did in that orderly room. I will tell you what I must have had quite a bit of time to spare once I met Wilma, because I used to write to her nearly every day.

**So did you notice tensions between the Palestinians and the Jews at that time?**

No, not really,

20:30 because they have got a lot to be angry about of course. I can't see that their method of trying to get their state to ever succeed, I mean every time they send suicide bombers over they know they are going to

21:00 get retaliation, pretty swift and awful too. Especially with the home that the suicide bomber lives in is going to be razed to the ground too.

**Just one of the important issues the Archives is interested in is sort of a social setting as well, the**

21:30 **brothels, I understand some of the Australians went there, what did you know about the brothels?**

Um, I don't know that I should put anything, like that down in written form. There were plenty there, I think they were supervised to a certain extent by the army, and

22:00 they gave the blokes sort of prophylactic kits went in there, because I suppose there would have been more frequenting the brothels than didn't. There were plenty of them about.

**Were the soldiers told not to go there?**

No.

- 22:30 Don't think so, they were just told to be careful. No. And of course there was a lot of disease picked up because they had special hospitals and that's what they were called the "So and So Special Hospital", which was purely for the treatment of sexual diseases. I don't know that I ever saw the inside of a brothel in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem. I think I
- 23:00 did have a look at one in Beirut. But well conducted places. I suppose it's the oldest trade in the world. As I say, I reckon there would have been more blokes in the army that visited them than didn't. The army
- 23:30 they used to issue them with prophylactic kits, I suppose they were French letters and that sort of thing in them to try and protect them.

**So, the issue of venereal disease, if someone got it, what was**

24:30 **the army's response to that?**

They were just sent to hospital and treated. Went to a special hospital for it. I suppose they would just report, that's another thing in the army, they have quite regular, what they call short arm parades, which you file past the unit doctor and

25:00 expose your penis and he sees if anything is wrong, he would pick it up there. If a bloke didn't report sick with something like that. I don't know what the symptoms are really, but they see, except that the discharge through the penis from some of them.

25:30 Probably from all of them. But the MO [medical officer] would pick that up when they file past in the short arm parade. And they would be then sent to these special hospitals for treatment. Must have had specialists in them.

26:00 **So while you were at Julis Camp, how were the men training? What was the army preparing them for?**

They trained, you do this bayonet charges and that sort of thing, you do one of the main things they have to learn is to be able to get a

26:30 machine gun going. Most machine guns are fairly prone to stoppages so much so they have got books on them and they call a certain stoppage, a number one stoppage, a number two stoppage, a number three stoppage and so on. What to do

27:00 with various stoppages because pretty important to get the thing going again once it stopped. But most of those blokes would be able to take the machine gun apart and put it together again, without much trouble. You have gotta be able to do that.

27:30 Then they are taught the field map reading and that sort of thing, although the map reading tends to be fairly specialised, probably the NCOs [non commissioned officers]. There is a certain amount of map reading taught to the troops, I think but they probably have special courses too, for anything like that.

28:00 **What was the weather like?**

It's pretty good over there, it's one of those places where if it ever rains in a season it's not supposed to rain, everybody writes to the papers about it.

28:30 It's pretty certain sort of weather, very little rain really. I don't remember it being terribly hot either. Although it could have been.

29:00 **You mentioned when you were in New Guinea with the bank, there was the tic and the mosquito, were there any particular bothersome animals?**

I don't know, I don't remember ever getting bitten by a mosquito at Wau, and we weren't near any low lying country either.

**But in Palestine were there any particular animals**

29:30 **or insects like the scorpion and stuff?**

I don't think so. I think I will have to go.

**I understand that when you went to Haifa you also used to go to some hotels for dances and stuff?**

Oh no that wasn't there. I'll tell you what we used to do, we

30:00 used to frequent a restaurant halfway down at Hadda Hakarmel, it was lovely really, didn't do any dancing, but they used to have a string quartet play all the afternoon, you could go there a sip a cocktail or whatever you like. And in the evening about five o'clock

30:30 they used to switch over, the players, just used to switch instruments and became a little dance band. That was very civilised. They would have a lot of talent in Palestine with the musicians and what not I am sure.

**Was the dance band, was there dancing?**

Local sort of dancing,

31:00 we didn't there. We were pretty restricted as far as female company was concerned. The officers, see the nurses were all officers, so the only

31:30 females who were Australians were all officers, which was out of bounds to the other ranks.

**So there was no incentive there to become an officer?**

Aah, I think if you really wanted to be one you could probably,

32:00 although until we went into action there was a bit of wastage. There weren't very many openings for new officers at the time. But a few of our other ranks graduated, mainly would have been promoted in the field. Probably supposed to do a course afterwards.

32:30 I was certainly encouraged to go but I didn't really want to. I didn't feel that I was really suitable for leading other men

33:00 because I was so bloody scared meself all the time, that I think I would have shown it in me face. I know that at one time in Derna when we had about four thousand Italians attacking us, and

33:30 we had pile of stones about that high we were lying behind with our rifles trying to firing madly trying to hold them off, and this young bloke one of the runners, who was lying beside me, he said he had never seen such a white face in his life. I can imagine he was right.

**34:00 So, can you share with me the story forward from Camp Julis, what happened?**

From Julis we went eventually we moved, this is after about twelve months of training there, we

34:30 went to this place in Egypt called Burj al 'Arab and continued our training there until we eventually took part in the Lybian Campaign, moved down the coast through Mersa Matruh and

35:00 onto the escarpment which is virtually the Western Desert. Actually, the Italians had done a few preparations to attack Egypt I think. But the British army had

35:30 the division there and also some tanks and I don't know why the Italians withdrew to their fortresses at Bardia and Tobruk, of course they were overwhelmingly superior in numbers to the British Army, that was opposing them,

36:00 and you would have thought if Mussolini had been serious about trying to take over Egypt he would have tried. He didn't he just, I always felt that the Italians didn't have their hearts in it. In doing any fighting, they weren't like we were, we were fighting for the existence of the British Empire and our own country,

36:30 whereas the Italians it was virtually trying to remake the old Roman Empire. That was Mussolini's dream. But they certainly, very few of them put up a great deal of resistance.

37:00 Funny, even their shells and their field artillery didn't seem to us to be really effective. You could almost have a shell land within a stride of you, but you could step into the shell hole next step and yet not get hurt. All you would probably suffer from was a bit of concussion from the

37:30 blast. The story was going round our ranks that the Italian man was expressly made for England. I don't suppose that's true but it was certainly an eye opener once we struck the German shelling.

38:00 But, I suppose it doesn't matter how ineffective it is, when you are getting shelled going through machine gun fire,

38:30 it's very, very scary business.

39:45 End of tape

## Tape 5

**00:38 What was the first news you got that the Battalion was going into action?**

When we were at Burj al 'Arab plenty of rumours about

01:00 when we were to go to the desert and what not. We weren't really sure until we actually got the movement orders.

**What were the rumours though?**

Just that we were going to attack the Italians.

**What is the feeling in a battalion that's been in training overseas?**

Well,

01:30 there are quite a few that really look forward to it, itching to get into action. Others like me are rather apprehensive about it. But there are quite a few who are very keen. I would say they are really good soldiers I would say.

**Or really foolish ones perhaps?**

02:00 I don't think so, not really. Generally most of them are pretty well versed in not exposing themselves unnecessarily or anything like that, but they probably like shooting at other people.

**It's a saying about military engagements that ten percent of the men do ninety percent of the**

02:30 **actual front line shooting and killing, what would you say to that?**

Well the infantry battalions and machine gun battalions, really the only ones that see any close action. And between them, and then it's probably

03:00 as far as the hand to hand fighting is concerned and that sort of thing it's only the infantry and the sections in an infantry company. I suppose that's why, it takes a tremendous number of backup people going right back to base to provide just a few men in the field.

**This is an interesting**

03:30 **topic for a lot of people might know this, but people in the Archive in the future might be interested to know how it was organised. Where did you sit within the battalion as the Orderly Room Clerk? Who were you attached to?**

I was attached to the Company HQ of the Rifle Company I was with and I virtually stayed with the company commander all the time,

04:00 during any action we had. And he is generally probably in the middle of the forward companies and probably a company in reserve in the rear. At least platoons, forward platoons. Because the company commanders were operating three platoons, each platoon has three sections.

04:30 And he is just telling them where to go and what to do. Mainly communicating with them by runner.

**What about in the opposite direction, who was the company commander receiving orders from?**

He gets it from Battalion HQ, is generally a bit to the rear, but in sight of what is going on. But the

05:00 battalion commander like he might want the company to move from one position to another sort of thing, and when you are actually in action, he would send those instructions out by runner too. So the runner's attached to the Battalion HQ and also runners in Company HQ to go to the platoons.

**It was obviously an important job, how dangerous was the**

05:30 **runner's job?**

Very dangerous actually. You are also in a confused situation, and the poor old runner has got a chance of getting lost. At the very beginning of our Greek action, the runners would have to go at

06:00 night and contact the platoons to tell them to withdraw, and if he didn't make it, which happened to us that night we lost the whole platoon, because we were overrun by the enemy, either before he got to them, or he didn't

06:30 get to them, maybe he got shot on the way.

**We'll come back to talk about that engagement when we come to Greece, but just while we are on Bardia and the first engagements you were involved in, how did your role change the Orderly Room Clerk once the battalion was put into action?**

Well,

07:00 I suppose, I was just with the company commander and maybe if we had to sort of participate in the actual fighting I would have me rifle, he only had a revolver

07:30 but we do whatever we had to do, and at times like if we didn't have a runner available, I would act as a runner to get messages out to the platoon.

**And you were most of the time acting as a secretary of sorts?**

Yes, that type of thing yeah.

08:00 I did all the paperwork, the administration of the company.

**Can you give us some kind of idea what sort of paperwork you need?**

I told Michael [interviewer] I often wondered what kept me so busy.

08:30 I suppose I would have been recording casualties and things like that. Of course you had to keep up your information about how many there were to feed and how many provide ammunition for and that sort of thing. The sergeant major of the company looks after the ammunition supply, and arranges for it to

09:00 be brought up and sent out to the various platoons and sections, and I can't think of what else I was doing.

**I imagine there is a fair amount of confusion when you are in action about**

09:30 **these details and keeping note of what is going on, what can you tell us about that atmosphere?**

Well, you are pretty anxious about what's going and that sort of thing and waiting for information to come from your platoons if you can't actually see them,

10:00 to see how they are getting on, but generally it was pretty ongoing all the time, because we were on the move all the time, we rarely stayed in one place for more than a few hours. I am not too sure,

10:30 I know I stayed close to the company commander all the time, in case he needed me for anything at all.

**Can you tell us a bit about this company commander, who was he?**

The one I had in all the actions I was in was a bloke named

11:00 John McCarty, one of those blokes who never went by his true name, we always called him Bob, that's how he went by, but he was a very good company commander and

11:30 and subsequently got his own battalion, 2/4 Pioneer Battalion. Pioneers operate mainly in infantry. But, we all had great

12:00 faith in him, he was a good officer. All our officers there had been in the militia, funny thing, when the time came for the enlistments, almost all the militia officers volunteered, but very few of the men, I think we only had one or two of them in our battalion, the

12:30 rest had never had any military training, until they came into the army.

**What made him a good commander? What was it about his style the way he did his job?**

I think you never had any doubt when he

13:00 gave an order that it was to be carried out sort of thing, and he gave that impression, that he knew what he was doing. It's hard to say what makes a really good leader, but whatever it is he had it. And of course our battalion commander

13:30 too was very well liked and he eventually got his own brigade.

**Working so closely with Bob, or the company commander, as you did, you must have got some insight as to how difficult his job was, especially under action, what did he have to do?**

He just had to

14:00 direct the platoons, their objective. He would have a written operation order from the battalion commander and damned if I know how they did it, he would have had that at the beginning anyhow, I don't know how brought it up to date as things changed.

14:30 But they were given their objectives and he just directed his three platoons, to wherever he wanted to achieve the objective. Probably take a certain position then if they did take it in a certain time sort of thing, to move on to something else.

15:00 But it wasn't such a difficult job to do I don't think up until that desert campaign when we were attacking and chasing the enemy before us sort of thing, but when the boot was on the other foot in Greece I think it would have been much more difficult.

15:30 You are trying to keep your company intact.

**What were the early objectives? What sort of things would have been in those operation orders around Bardia?**

Bardia for instance had a whole lot of strong points, the Italians had concrete

16:00 sort of bunkers or what, from where they could fire their machine guns sort of thing,

**Pill Box.**

Yeah, yeah, that type of thing. You would probably have three or four of those to deal with or something like that. At Bardia, I

16:30 don't think we struck one that was putting up a fight. It was quite a lot different to Tobruk, because we were the forward company in the attack. We got a lot of machine gun fire as we were advancing there.

**When you went in**

17:00 **for the first time, how did you react when you first went into action?**

Well I was rather apprehensive at first, but we had a very good rum issue in the morning, so I actually felt I could take the place on me own without help, which was good. Not supposed to be for that you know,

17:30 I didn't find out for a long time, the rum issue is combat the cold, which was very good for it too. It was overproof rum. We had a lot of teetotallers in our company, which was a very good thing too, I don't know how they got on the poor devils, but it certainly gave me a lot of Dutch courage.

**What did you have to do**

18:00 **on that first action?**

We just had to advance alongside Bob McCarty and we had a barrage from our own guns which was kept to about a hundred yards ahead of us, and it was kept on being lifted and what not, and if there was anybody

18:30 left we had to deal with them. But mostly there weren't, we had in Tobruk, one machine gun that was firing down a road which we had to cross, and he kept on going for a long time, but they eventually silenced him. But when I crossed the road, I

19:00 I wasn't too keen on that line of machine gun fire, which was sort of whistling all round me, and at one stage I looked at Bob McCarty, and he was bent over, and I thought he was going to ground and of course I hit the ground straight away, and looked up and he was still going, so I had to get up in the middle of it. Anyhow

19:30 in that campaign, the Italians surrendered faster than we could catch up with them mostly.

**You were on the move for most of that campaign, how does a Company HQ move?**

Well, the OC of the company has got a

20:00 small pick up truck I suppose you would call it, a small utility type thing with a couple of seats. You can carry a couple of men in the back, and I was fortunate enough to have been transported out mainly on that with him. And of course you are walking during action

20:30 of course. They must leave their vehicles in what they call a beschalon, behind the lines, somebody must have to look after them, I can't remember what happened. But

21:00 **What other equipment do you need to operate the Company HQ?**

Actually I used to have a small typewriter, I don't know where I got it from, but that was very handy, and I had that right up until about halfway through the

21:30 Greek campaign when I had to leave it behind, when we had to get out of a spot in a hurry and without transport. I don't think we were able to get our transport up. But I had all the various roles of company, mostly we would have had

22:00 you know the particulars I suppose of all the blokes in the company, on paper. But I lost the whole lot of that in Greece.

**What were the casualties like in those first encounters?**

Very, very few, we had

22:30 in our company, we only had two wounded, going into Tobruk, it was remarkable really. Another bloke killed at Derna Wadi, actually we had

23:00 one bloke killed, I don't know whether it was at Tobruk or Bardia, no it must have been Tobruk. On night patrol, he went out on night patrol and didn't get back, and it was remarkably few really. At Derna Wadi, there may have been a couple wounded too,

23:30 but there were remarkably few casualties in that campaign, it was extraordinary.

**What happened to either your casualties? Yours or the Italians?**

I don't know about the Italians, but we had stretcher bearers which would take them back to the Battalion HQ and they would probably be picked up

24:00 by vehicles from there. Taken to CCS, Casualty Clearing Station, which was run by the army medical corps. If necessary, they were sent back to a hospital behind there too.

**What about Italian prisoners how did you deal with those?**

They

24:30 were all sent to the rear, there were so many of them in that campaign. They were actually sent too the rear and they had one

25:00 man to guard something like twenty or thirty thousand, they were very willing prisoners. Of course, I don't think we had any trouble about a prisoner until Greece really. We had to get rid of one ourselves.

**What dealings did you have with those Italians, if any?**

Didn't have any. I don't remember,

25:30 we might have after Tobruk might have had a bit of dealings with a few of them, because we had a few days when we were fortunate enough to be in the old Hotel Tobruk, and they had a whole lot of or at least

26:00 half a dozen Italian prisoners doing the cooking and waiting and what not. So I probably I don't remember it very much. But as far as the prisoners in the field went, all we saw was this straight line from one horizon to the next sort of thing, on their way back. Mostly guarded every mile or so by

26:30 one bloke in a truck with a rifle. It was ridiculous.

**How did this complete success affect the morale of the battalion, I mean you were just rolling over them at this stage?**

Yes. Well I don't know see, there must have been a few of them that were badly affected by it, but I think most of them were pleased to be out of it.

**27:00 What were your conditions like during this advance, did you get much time to rest?**

No well actually we did a lot of very long marches. Mainly absolutely tired out the whole time, never got enough sleep and the nights were

27:30 freezing, absolutely freezing, and we used to wear our clothing accordingly and we were far too hot in the daytime. Most of us in a very short time wore out our boots, and couldn't get any new ones, couldn't get fresh boots. And at the end of that Italian campaign, most of us were wearing Italian clothes. We picked up

28:00 the various HQ we captured and what not. So we were very poorly equipped.

**How were your lines of supply?**

Well, they would have been alright, but I think stuff coming, like clothing, we seemed to get plenty of food which was alright. And they did remarkably well with a

28:30 hot meal at night, whenever they could get it up, which was pretty remarkable. But there was never enough supplies coming from Australia for our clothing and that sort of thing.

**You mentioned before that Derna Wadi was one of the worst moments in that for you, can you tell us a bit more about that?**

Yes, well we got there in the dark,

29:00 and apparently there were some Italians holding it, stationed there, but they never thought anyone would go there, so they heard us and we didn't even know they were there, we didn't know until the next day. But we had to,

29:30 I think we put a platoon on the other side of the Wadi, and we had to communicate with them on and off and I must have crossed the Wadi two or three times and it took me two hours to cross it. I was absolutely bloody exhausted aft this. I think after the 2nd time, I got back to our H

30:00 **and the CSM [Company Sergeant Major] wanted me to take another message over and no sooner had I got back and I just couldn't I was absolutely bugged, poor old Jack, I have felt bad about that ever since. I said I just can't do it, Jack.**

30:30 **So I think he took it over there himself. We finished up we had to go over there in another hour or two, and if I had known I would have made myself do it I think. I have got pictures of it, but it doesn't show it up as it was, it was a thousand feet deep**

31:00 **and very rough. The only good thing about it, it had a lovely spring. We were able to get plenty of fresh water. That's when eventually the next morning we found this force of about four thousand Italians**

31:30 **actually making a stand. And firing on us and we were supposed to stop them with a couple of platoons. We had a platoon of British machine gunners with us which I think if we hadn't had those they probably would have overrun us, but they were**

32:00 **very, very good. The old British soldiers were very, very bloody good I reckon.**

**Where were you in that engagement?**

I was with Bob McCarty and when he decided to stand and fight them,

32:30 I thought we were finished, because see at one stage these Northumberland Fusiliers, the British machine gunners only had one belt per gun, well they go through a belt in no time. And, but apparently eventually the Italians gave up, and I don't know whether something had happened further in towards the town or not,

33:00 we were past the town, but they withdrew from the town, withdrew from where they had been attacking us and took to their heels.

**How did the Italians give up? I mean you see pictures of waving white flags, what happened when they needed to surrender?**

Yes. I actually

33:30 I don't think I ever saw them there. I saw these long lines of prisoners, I didn't actually see any of them surrendering.

**What did you see of the front line then what you described before of the fusiliers with their machine guns?**

Well there was that time at Derna Wadi and going in to Tobruk and

34:00 attacking Tobruk and after that we were the lead company. So not much really.

**Just talk about Tobruk a bit more, you mentioned it was frightening when you had to cross this road under machine gun fire, can you just set that scene up what was happening at Tobruk? And what was the objectives and what were you doing?**

34:30 Well that was more or less the same as Bardia there, they had these pill boxes but they were giving them up pretty easily, as soon as our blokes got near them, they would surrender apparently. To our forward platoons and we eventually kept on going past them, and stumbled on this

35:00 Battalion HQ for Tobruk. Captured the HQ and captured the general commander of the whole operation.

**When you say stumbled across it?**

It was all underground and it didn't seem to be defended and our company happened to be the one that marched into it,

35:30 and they all gave up of course, they weren't combat troops anyway.

**What did the command centre look like?**

Well it had a whole lot of various rooms and offices and what have you, all under ground, you know tunnelled out,

36:00 and I suppose they had various sleeping quarters and what not.

**What happened to these high ranking prisoners?**

Well they were just handed back to Battalion HQ and would have eventually gone to a POW [prisoner of war] camp, probably out here. Eventually I think they were all sent. Australian prisoners, at least the

36:30 prisoners of the Australians.

36:41 End of tape

## Tape 6

00:40 **Thanks again for this Norm, the interview. We are up to Tobruk and you have taken the command centre, can you just share what you actually found inside?**

Well there were lots of

01:00 Beretta pistols so that we finished up with one for each man in the company, and lots and lots of wine, Cognac, and lots and lots of chocolate, which I made myself sick on. I wasn't even looking for the gun, blokes that got a gun sold them for about

01:30 thirty eight pounds each when we got back to Alexandria, because there were a hell of a lot of base wallahs as they were called there who wanted things like that so they could say they were there, anyhow. We passed on the captured general to Battalion HQ and the next day

02:00 we started off again towards Derna. And

**Just before you go on towards Derna, I understand you had problem shoes, from reading one of your letters?**

With shoes yes, I got a pair of boots from the general's quarters in there, and they were a little large for me, but I thought that as they were general's

02:30 boots I ought to keep them. So I wore them out eventually.

**So what was wrong with your boots?**

Oh they were completely worn out. We had no replacements, I am not too sure when we got replacements, but I think Mr Menzies, he was at our division at Benghazi, and they managed to

03:00 re-outfit us, so that we were all back in Australian uniform. The Italians had some very nice equipment so their gun tractors were magnificent things, they had very high wheels about six feet high and a

03:30 separate drive to each wheel, so it could turn on sixpence. It was a terrific thing. The blokes were all running round the desert in these things until the war office representatives got on to them I think, because I found they all had big chalk marks on them WOP [war office property] on them, which we all thought was the American slang

04:00 for Italian, but it wasn't it was war office property. But nobody took any notice of it, but eventually that was where they went.

**Since the troops had got Italian equipment, was there a danger of being shot by allies?**

I doubt, it they had our hats on. Which would have made the difference and -

04:30 I never even thought of that. I don't think there was really any danger of it. I suppose they still look Australian anyway, very hard not to.

**The Italian general's boots, were they more comfortable than the Australian boots?**

05:00 That particular pair would have been if they fitted me. But they were rather large, he was a big man, I think he was over six feet, a magnificent looking bloke, I can't think of his name. I don't think he minded getting out of it, he was getting a bit old.

**So you took the boots off**

05:30 **him that he was wearing?**

No, no they were in his quarters. They might have been a new pair.

**So was there anything else you managed to claim?**

No not really. I might have got a pair of binoculars or something like that, there was all sorts of stuff there, and all I could think of was chocolate. It's funny when you see something you haven't had for a long time

06:00 and you tend to go for that sort of thing I think. I don't remember any of the other things, it was mainly these revolvers. They were automatics Beretta automatics, but I think they were fairly highly prized.

06:30 I suppose these blokes knew they were going to get a lot of money for them when they got them back to Alex.

**You didn't want to keep one yourself?**

No, no I am not really a gun type. If it had been me grandson he would have loved them.

**So what you are telling me, I take it there was a pretty big black market back in Egypt?**

Well, I don't think you would call it black market

07:00 it was just the blokes, in the end. A very large proportion of the troops were pretty keen gamblers too. That was one of the things that they all entrusted me with. When they were paid once a fortnight, they used to put

07:30 aside enough to pay for the tobacco for the fortnight, and the rest they would go and play two up with, and at the time in the Adelaide River camp, there was a lot of roadwork going on up there and they had this Civil Construction Corps, who were getting an enormous amount of money wages at the time, and of course our blokes were still on five bob a day

08:00 and it didn't take them long to lose all their money. And being gamblers, I don't know whether you have ever run into any gamblers, they are a strange breed, they would do anything to get more money to gamble, and they would come back and get down on their knees begging me to give them their tobacco money. I wouldn't give it to them. I had half the

08:30 company pay which I looked after for them until they came back from the two up game. I ladled it out for their tobacco.

**So what you are saying the Australians were gamblers but they weren't great gamblers?**

Oh, they were, I have known them, there was a lot of big money in the two up games. It was nothing to be spinning

09:00 for eight or nine hundred pounds, which was enough to buy a house in those days. You wouldn't think of gambling that away, but they do. Because one of the blokes on one of the shows, a week or so back, he lost two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, he had no chance of seeing that sort of money in his lifetime you know, yet

09:30 he sacrificed, that millionaire show, he got thirty two thousand dollars. He guessed an answer which he wasn't sure of and it wasn't the right one.

**Just coming back to Tobruk, your wife has some derogatory comments about the Australian uniform that it didn't look too good, but what they were like in the desert were**

10:00 **they good uniforms to have?**

Yes, they didn't worry us at all, they were very ill fitting things, but they had a certain number of sizes and if you didn't fit exactly in to the size, it would be a bit like my shirt. Yeah.

**Was there anything**

10:30 **particularly uncomfortable about the uniform?**

No not really, I think they served their purpose well enough. Like the American uniform it was pretty well a dress uniform, it was very smartly tailored and everything and most beautiful material, they used to

11:00 all their stuff was very nice. We prized their shirts very highly. Of course when we arrived at Bower (Sp?) we were near a big American dump of clothing and all sorts of gear like that, and one of our blokes got in with one of the guards and

11:30 sold us all shirts and wind jackets and God knows what. In the end he got a big wholesaler and he was selling them in bulk lots for somebody else to distribute them. No doubt about a lot of opportunists in the army.

**You mentioned also there was Cognac in**

12:00 **the command, what happened to all the Cognac?**

Well they wouldn't have taken long to get rid of that. They would have grabbed it all. Yes we had a lot of good drinkers, they wouldn't have stored any of it you can bet that.

**When you took both Bardia and Tobruk, was there was there a decent amount of order amongst the troops?**

12:30 Oh yes, there wasn't any, that was a fair bit of looting, but that was only say what wouldn't have taken more than an hour in there before we moved on. I never really

13:00 saw any wholesale looting anywhere we went, even Benghazi, because the shopkeepers were still there. And I think any sort of situation like that they abided by the rules.

**How did the locals treat you once you had captured Bardia and Tobruk?**

I don't think

13:30 us Australian troops were terribly popular with them. I didn't encounter any hostility at all, but there were really only few of Mussolini's soldiers that showed any inclination to fight at all. As I say, he was trying to build an empire,

14:00 they didn't want to have any part of it I don't think. When we got to Tobruk, to Derna after Tobruk. I think I have

14:30 said all that, about the two or three trips I did up and down the Derna Wadi, which knocked me out and we did a bit of fighting up the other side of the Waddie. And they were through once again and we continued after them for a while, I think we went on foot until the next

15:00 place. It had an aerodrome with a whole lot of Italian planes that had been destroyed by the RAF [Royal Air Force]. And, from then on we followed them in trucks because they had withdrawn, apparently they had withdrawn by motor vehicle and

15:30 we couldn't catch up to them, so

**So what was the general feeling amongst the troops, I mean war would have seemed a pretty simple and exciting things, the enemy is surrendering in their thousands, what was the feeling amongst you?**

Everyone was elated about it, which made Greece all the worse.

16:00 **Did you think this was easy and it is going to get harder, or did you think this was normal war?**

Ah well, no we always thought that they hadn't really put up a fight, we knew we were going to strike a lot worse than that, especially with the Germans. But we didn't know then that we were going to go to Greece.

16:30 We didn't know what effect our victory was going to have. The first victory on the allied side actually. And of course Rommel upset that virtually immediately. He came up the desert.

**You wrote in one of your letters I read that**

17:00 **the British thought that you were ill disciplined in normal life but good fighters?**

Yes, this is what some of these Northumberland Fusiliers reckoned.

**Where did you hear those comments?**

After the 16th Brigade had taken Bardia, but I think they

17:30 generally got a reputation of being a bit uncontrollable on leave. It's the same everywhere when there's too much drink. They are inclined to let themselves go. You generally find on leave that one bloke in the party will stay sober to shepherd the other blokes home. The rest

18:00 of them have no inhibitions at all about getting drunk. I suppose you are really suffering the effects of scarred stiff for so long periods of time. A think which and I think they take the opportunity

18:30 of alcohol to sort of relieve the pain. Because looking back on it, I don't think there's any doubt we should have all received counselling after the war. I was quite a nerve case for about two years after the war, I couldn't go into a shop to buy anything sort of thing.

19:00 Peculiar effect.

**That was from your experience here?**

Just I think from being scared all the time. It must have an effect on your nerves over time.

19:30 Of course they had no idea of counselling in those days. I don't think it was even accepted as a war cause, disability sort of thing, because

20:00 we still had to pay for our own doctors and all the rest of it. There was no good old Gold Card like there is now.

**During the actions I guess at Bardia and Tobruk and even trips up the Derna and back, did you actually see men die, get killed?**

No I didn't

20:30 actually see anyone killed, I saw them brought back on the stretcher, dead, which is very nasty. Otherwise I would have probably only seen them from a distance, like the ones that were killed on the way back to Alexandria from Crete. The

- 21:00 Stukas. It's quite a terrifying experience really being bombed. I don't know how the poor people of London put up with what they did. Or any of the others that got
- 21:30 bombed for so long, the Europeans, the Germans for instance, I think they might not have been as long a period as the Londoners, but they had some shocking bombings, with the fire storms they used to raze through the whole city.

**So after your time I guess at Tobruk and Derna and you trips up there and back,**

22:00 **you went to Benghazi?**

Yeah, we went to Benghazi, I think we were only there about a week. I wrote the first letter I wrote home on the Libyan about the campaign, outside, we were camped just outside Benghazi. I still had me typewriter then.

**So this particular typewriter did you bring it yourself from home?**

I

- 22:30 am a bit hazy where I got it from actually. It wasn't issued. It was a little Remington portable. I also lost in Greece another typewriter, I never seen one the same before or since, I am not too sure where I got it. Probably got it in Palestine. I may have bought it. But it was an Underwood with
- 23:00 a sort of triple shift. So instead of just the one letter and a capital per key, it had three letters per key, so you pressed an intermediate one for certain letters, very small. Shame I lost it. I don't know whether I could have brought it home anyway,

23:30 there was a limit to what you could carry.

**The Italians had no typewriters?**

No. Pity they didn't. I never saw one. There would have been plenty of big ones in that H

**Just in respect to the typewriters and your letters home, were they censored when they were sent home or?**

Oh yes. Well you see

- 24:00 the ones on Greece and Crete, were written pretty well after the event and the one on Libya was all over. There was really nothing to censor in it. As long as you don't mention unit names I think you have got your address at the top and that's the only unit name you mention. So you don't really mention any names of units involved.
- 24:30 And I made sure I didn't mention anything that should have been censored, because they never censored any of the officers, company officers used to censor them.

**Can you share with me now the journey from Benghazi sort of back to**

25:00 **Egypt and back up to Greece the events that happened there?**

I am not too sure, we might have stopped at Tobruk for a while on the way back, because there is one time there when I had some leave approved to Cairo, seven days leave to

- 25:30 Cairo. Two of us were approved, another bloke from the company. Before we were due to go he picked up one of the fountain bombs that the Italians were very fond of dropping, little booby traps, and it exploded in his face and he finished up with one eye gone and the other eye practically gone too,
- 26:00 and was sent back home. And then they decided we had to go to Greece and had to cancel the leave, so I never actually saw Cairo. Didn't see the pyramids, even though we were only a few miles from them. The only city I saw in Egypt was Alexandria.

**Can you just share with me I haven't heard of these fountain pen bombs, what they look like**

26:30 **and what they did?**

Oh they were just like an ordinary fountain pen. And they dropped them from their planes and it was just bad luck if you picked one up, you had to be told about them first. I think make sure you didn't pick them up. There were plenty of other booby trap type things

- 27:00 they had, I am not too sure what they actually looked like, but that was one of them. This bloke was unlucky enough to pick one up, probably before they realised they were dropping them.

**Do you know what else they were dropping in the way of booby traps?**

No. But I think there were other types of things. It's like the business you have got to be

- 27:30 careful, if you go into a place in Tobruk after the enemy has been there, you have got to be careful about straightening pictures up, you have heard of that haven't you? That's another favourite place for

booby traps. See a picture on the wall and lots of people can't resist straightening a picture and you have just got to move it and off goes the booby trap. I think

- 28:00 they struck a lot of those in Europe. Anyhow we left Tobruk, I think before the 9th Division had got there, they had gone down to Benghazi and they were sort of driven straight back. And, they stayed there for the siege of
- 28:30 Tobruk. But we went on to Alexandria and embarked straight away. And I think we waited in the harbour for a day, and then had an uneventful trip over there and landed I think at Porosis, I think called the Port of Athens,
- 29:00 and went to a camp just outside Athens, and half the company went on leave the day we got there, and I was in the other half to go the next day, but they moved us straight up to the top of Greece and I never even saw Athens. Isn't it amazing? So we went in railway trucks,
- 29:30 right up to the border, I think we were near the Yugoslavian border and Albanian. You could see Mt Olympus from where we were and it was snowing,
- 30:00 so when we got there, so we had to take up a position on a ridge. I think we were there a couple of days maybe a day or two days or something like that, and we had our first experience there of the Germans infiltrating our lines dressed as Greeks.
- 30:30 We weren't looking for it, and a couple of our blokes got shot. Probably challenged them twice instead of once, but we had to look out for that the next night. Snowed, I think we were there one or two nights,
- 31:00 and you used to wake up in the morning with the snow, put your ground sheet so it covered your head or your hat or something, and the snow would gather on that. That's quite an experience sleeping in snow. It wasn't long before the Germans had come down through
- 31:30 Yugoslavia with god knows how many divisions. Attacked us and our forward companies engaged, but it wasn't long before the Greeks on our left, they broke through them and we were
- 32:00 outflanked and had to retire. That's where I first got shelled by the German artillery. Which was a lot nastier than the Italians. A sort of a daisy cutter effect, so if you were anywhere in the vicinity, you would certainly get wounded from one of their shells, if not
- 32:30 killed. But there was a lot of confusion there, because we sent out the order to retire and one of our platoons didn't get it. I am not too sure whether the runner got there or he couldn't get there, I am not too sure. But we pulled out and
- 33:00 the next day, I think our CO [commanding officer] had to site our position in the dark and we were in a very nasty position on a forward slope, on one side of the river and the Germans came up the other side, and we didn't know it, but they were driving our platoon in
- 33:30 front of them. And so we were shooting at our own blokes. Yeah, it was nasty. And it wasn't long before, I don't know whether we were outflanked or not but we had to retire from that. And we had to retire up this slope under
- 34:00 fire. We left, I think there was one section left to slow them up a bit and they had one man killed, and another wounded and another of the boys went back to see what happened, eventually they didn't get there order to withdraw either
- 34:30 and one of the boys went back to find everybody had gone, so he came back to the section and got wounded on the way back, and another of them stayed with the Corporal who was wounded, they came from the same town and they got taken
- 35:00 prisoner, as well as the chap that was wounded, coming back, so we managed to get over the ridge and into trucks and back a few miles. Where we climbed up a damned mountain and no sooner we get to where we were supposed to take up our position and they found that the Greeks that were on our
- 35:30 left had given way.

**Can I just hold you there so we can come back. You were across the river and you said the Germans were driving a platoon of yours?**

Ahead of them.

**They were holding them at gunpoint is that what they were doing?**

I suppose so yeah. I never ever got the full story of that, although I have seen a few of the blokes since.

- 36:00 **Who were being held up?**

Mmm.

**A few of the blokes who were being held up?**

Yeah. You the know the ones who were prisoners.

**Was that a common tactic of the Germans?**

I don't know, we didn't even think of it although we should have woken up to it I think. But I don't think it's the sort of thing that we'd do.

36:30 As far as I know.

**Can I just enter into your mind and the mind of fellow soldiers there when that's happening you did mention that some of your blokes actually did get hit in the cross fire, but what do you aim for and where do you shoot in that situation?**

There was somebody, one of our blokes it turned out, was waving a white flag but we

37:00 he was probably doing it for his own purposes you know. But it was a trick of the Germans and we just continued to fire at them. But eventually of course I don't know how long they kept it up because I don't think

37:30 it would happen again because I don't think we made a stand anywhere except we did make a stand, two or three of us, we used to take up a position and virtually have to pull out before they got to us, and we eventually got back to this Brallos Pass

38:00 and we were on a forward slope of that. Trouble is we only had twenty four pounder guns our artillery and they had long range guns with them, so that they were able to just wipe ours out whenever they could see them. Or ours weren't able

38:30 to reach them.

**Just before you talk about Brallos Pass, just going back, the German strength in their attack was it artillery or was it also air power?**

Both, they had long range guns, they had overwhelming superiority in the air, we didn't have any planes by that time.

**You also talked**

39:00 **about the time where you held the position and retreated up a hill under fire, was that small arms fire or was that artillery?**

That was at the first place where you know they Amendeon [?] I think it was, that was our first

39:30 taste of them, and it wasn't for long. And we had to get out we were virtually on the run from them until we got to Brallos and we stayed there we were virtually being out gunned in the artillery, no planes, and what not, it was a lost cause really right from the start.

40:00 **Just in respect to the terrain, when we come to New Guinea we have the jungle terrain where the Australians use the jungle warfare of making you stand retreating, what was the terrain like in Greece? Could you do a similar thing there?**

Well there was nowhere near the cover there,

40:30 even on our last days the cover was very sparse, we were under trees, I suppose as long as you didn't move which we didn't, you could avoid being machine gunned from the air. Before we got to Brallos

41:00 there was a long plane leading to it from a large town, I think it was called Larisa , and it had been bombed out of existence and we came past it and all our transport was line up along this straight road from Romia to Brallos Pass

41:30 sitting ducks for these Stukas, and the I know I sort of strained a tendon in my heel and when I was virtually could limp, but I used to jump out of these damned trucks and run like a bloody hare.

41:59 End of tape

## Tape 7

00:37 **When we finished before you started to tell us a story, maybe we could just step back a bit and start again. You were on the flat on the way into Brallos Pass with the transport?**

Yes, there was a long line of our trucks just crawling

01:00 we got dive bombed the whole way along. They used to dive down drop their bombs and finish up

machine gunning along the sides of the roads. So when we saw one coming down we always had a bloke standing on the tail board, and as soon as he said there was a Stuka coming towards us,

01:30 we would virtually leap out of the truck almost as one man and go a couple of hundred yards off the side of the road so we wouldn't get caught in the machine gunning. So as I say I had this strained tendon at the time, and I used to completely forget it to get away from them, and then limp slowly back to the

02:00 truck and resume our journey, until the next one come. They used to come over in groups of six generally, and they would almost do a vertical dive, remarkable damned thing. The plane, they have got some sort of screaming device on the plane and also the bombs have a screaming device on them, so they

02:30 they really get the most out of them. They were a lot of people killed in that. Whenever they got a direct hit on a truck of course, if the blokes hadn't got out of it. They would kill the lot.

**Could you just take us through one of these roads on this transport from your own, as though you were there, so you are on the truck,**

03:00 **what's the first thing you hear or see or warning, what happens?**

It's just a warning from your cockatoo, there's a plane coming over, so we just to virtually leap out of the truck as one man, run for our lives either side of the road.

**What would you see of the planes coming in?**

You could watch them coming

03:30 down and see them in this beautiful vertical dive. I don't know how many feet they were when they dropped their bombs, but they were pretty low. Aah, must have been able to withstand pretty G [gravity] forces when they pulled out of their dive, they were

04:00 were a relatively slow plane when they were in ordinary flight. The Stuka would have been much slower than most of the other planes both the Germans and we had if we had any of them there.

**What sort of defences did you have on these transports against attack?**

Nothing, we didn't have anything. I suppose if we wanted to stayed on the truck we could have fired our rifles on them, but that's about

04:30 it.

**Can you describe the kind of damage they did, what did you see when you got out?**

If a bomb hit it just flew the truck to smithereens, there would be nothing left of it or anyone in it at the time. I don't know whether our driver used to go off the road with us, they never hit our truck.

05:00 Fortunately. But they couldn't miss really, if they kept straight in line with the road they had to hit something, because we were almost touching nose to tail all the way along that stretch of road. Probably would have been a couple of miles at least of straight road.

**What happens to the**

05:30 **trucks that were hit?**

They would have been just manhandled out of the way, off the road.

**What kind of casualties were taken during those raids?**

Well I don't know for sure, but there was one hit near us and somebody told us that there were three captains that were on the truck were killed.

06:00 But I don't really know of other casualties.

**Those siren devices you spoke of, I have heard people talk of them before as inspiring complete fear to people on the ground, can you tell us about that sound?**

Yeah, yeah. It is a very frightening sound alright, it

06:30 I tell you it made me run pretty fast.

**How would you describe it to somebody who has never heard it before?**

Well, it's a bit like sustained police siren or one of those sort of things. You know, I am not too sure of ambulance, I would say it's a

07:00 a bit higher pitched than a police siren. It's a bloody nasty sound.

**Would it increase in volume?**

- Well, yes, the noise the plane did increase as it came closer to you, so you are probably think it's
- 07:30 going to hit you, so you weren't too keen to stand and look up and see where it was. So I suppose once they are committed to hitting the truck they bombing be able to veer from their path. So you are relatively safe, although I did get one time, I
- 08:00 actually went to ground in an old fowl yard, which was rather nasty, and the bomb hit somewhere within cooeee of that because I got covered in bloody fowl shit. But I didn't get hit I was very, very, very fortunate in that.
- You spoke before about how the war affected your nerves, what do the**
- 08:30 **men feel like after that constant fear of this attack?**
- Well some of them actually really did succumb to it because they had was it a nervous break down. It was called
- 09:00 in the army, their official designation was acute anxiety state and actually one or two blokes in our company got it even before we went down to the desert. Before we started. Must have played on his mind what he thought he was going into or something like that. Don't suppose the poor devils can
- 09:30 help it, and I don't know how one person keeps going and another can't. Just one of those things. But it was certainly, you really couldn't blame anyone for being affected like that.
- 10:00 **What happened to these blokes?**
- Well, I don't remember any of them coming back, so I think they probably would get a discharge eventually of unfit for service, or something like that. Probably didn't get any further treatment either.
- How close did you come to having acute anxiety?**
- I don't feel that I was ever
- 10:30 likely to go like that, I was certainly very frightened for a long periods of time and lots of times. But I never actually felt that I would be so bad that I would have to give up.
- During that retreat, you mentioned retreating obviously is**
- 11:00 **more difficult than advancing who were you surrounded by during that retreat were you still with the same HQ?**
- Yes. Same Company.
- And what was happening within that HQ?**
- We, at one stage we lost contact with our battalion, but picked them up again further back along the road, but it was a lot of
- 11:30 confusion of course, so there were times that you didn't reckon you were going to make it. For instance at one stage there when they had blown a bridge across a river before we got there, and two of
- 12:00 our officers found a boat and managed to ferry the whole hundred odd of us across the river, about ten at a time or so. By the time they got across the river, which was only narrow but very fast flowing, and by the time they got across maybe a hundred yards or so down stream, they would have to drag the boat
- 12:30 back to about a hundred yards or something and then have another go, take another load over and so on. We eventually all got across.
- What's the Company Commander's job at this time, he's obviously not deploying Platoons like he was before?**
- No I suppose he's just trying to keep his men together,
- 13:00 And he's got to be prepared to make a stand sometime if he has to I suppose.
- There was a stand at Brallos Pass, or?**
- Yes. Well I think before the Germans actually got within sort of close encounter distance
- 13:30 from us, these twenty five pounder battery that had set up in full view of the Germans they eventually killed the lot of those, I don't think anyone survived. Blew the guns out of existence and by the time that happened they decided we would have
- 14:00 to be evacuated and things were on the move for that to happen, we were to get out, and make our way to these evacuation points and it we spent
- 14:30 a day, might have been more, not far from Athens, in this. We had the trees, we were under cover of the

trees near this evacuation spot, and they didn't really know whether they would be able to take us or not,

15:00 whether there was room or whatever, because one of the ships which was a troop ship, had been sunk on the way over, which reduced the numbers they expected to get out and I don't even know if they originally intended us to go to Crete or not, but

15:30 that was a lot nearer than going to Alexandria, so that was where we went.

**Just before we get on to the details about the evacuation, just a few more questions about the retreat. How well organised was it, we have talked a bit about the company commander trying to keep people organised. What was Battalion HQ doing and what orders were you getting from them?**

Well, as I say at that river, we virtually lost

16:00 contact with them, and it was sometime before we caught up them. But then they more or less did the same as usual, same as the battalion commander be trying to keep his battalion together and under control so that for instance the orders for evacuation and that sort of thing would come through him and he would pass the orders on to the

16:30 companies.

**What problems did you experience with keeping your men under control in that time of confusion and retreat?**

Well, I don't think we had any problems really, up to that stage we were almost all originals, there had been about one small

17:00 reinforcement had reached us, but mostly they were still the original blokes in the battalion and they had had pretty good training and were not really

17:30 difficult to keep under control. There was no panic, which was remarkable for the whole of that withdrawal from Greece.

**Is that you are talking from what you experienced in the 2/4th?**

I don't know about anyone else. I would say the rest of our division would have been the same. Because they were all virtually at the same

18:00 stage and virtually all enlisted at the same time as we had.

**Were there times when you found your battalion was let down by others, other nationalities, the Italians?**

Well, it's hard to say I don't think we ever felt anything like that, it was only the Greeks really, and

18:30 I don't suppose you could blame them, they had been fighting for some years, they had driven the Italians out of Greece, they had tried to capture Greece before we got there. They were probably pretty tired, and as I say, the Germans with their tanks were a very, very nasty proposition. Without

19:00 tanks and a good air force, you wouldn't stand a chance against them.

**What about the New Zealand artillery, did you have anything to do with them?**

I know we managed to pick up a New Zealander who had lost his unit, driving a truck, which we travelled in.

19:30 I think he stayed with us after he found the Battalion again and until we were evacuated and we travelled with him down to this evacuation point.

**Can you describe this evacuation point, was it a muddle of different units as you say?**

Well, there

20:00 were our units were all virtually organised they were all sticking together sort of thing. We were just exhausted and we just did as we were told, stayed under the trees, didn't move, or let the planes see where we were. Because they were looking for us all the time.

20:30 So there wasn't panic and they just prepared to wait to be evacuated, which we all hoped we would be, we weren't sure.

**This would have been around Anzac Day, what did you do? Was there any mention of it? You were involved in a retreat?**

No. I don't think so but

21:00 it was Anzac Day, we got off Greece, I think. 25th April 1941. I will tell you how quick it was, it was the

13th April that we were in that fight that the Germans drove our platoon up against them, it was a Sunday, 13th April 1941 and a black Friday if ever there was

21:30 one. So the rest of our sojourn in Greece was only twelve days. There was a lot happened.

**I am sure they would be twelve days you won't forget.**

Up and down mountains and over rivers.

**What was the worst moment during that campaign?**

22:00 Well, I think it was sort of the night we had to pull out of our first position, believe me it was rather confusing, and we really hadn't seen or at Company HQ we really hadn't seen the bloody Germans really.

22:30 And we were starting out as twelve from a place, we really felt rather badly about having to withdraw from Greece because we got such a terrific welcome when we landed there, and it was the only place we had been at that stage where we were really welcomed. Most of the places you go to during the war, they would really

23:00 rather you weren't there. Like I don't think the Jews were keen to see us in Palestine. They were virtually all refugees anyway. They had taken up residence in Palestine. But the Greeks gave us a very warm greeting, and it was sad to have to leave them to the Germans.

23:30 **What did you feel you were doing in that moment of evacuation, running away?**

I think we realised that we had been put there, they promised the

24:00 Greek Prime Minister to send another division, but I don't think that would have been enough anyway, but what was needed was air force. You needed to be able to take them on, like they did in Britain. But actually I suppose, when was the Battle of Britain?

24:30 But I don't think they were game to leave the air force in England short of planes or anything, they just couldn't provide the air force that was needed in Greece.

**There is an argument subsequently historians have said that the whole Greek campaign was designed as more of a diversion, it was doomed from the very**

25:00 **beginning, what do you say about that?**

Yes. I believe it.

**Did the troops at the time think that? Was there animosity towards the officers?**

Well, we always reckoned that it was just a whim of Churchill's that he wanted us to go there, and that was it. He was a very

25:30 tough bloke to go against and our politicians they eventually did, they insisted on us coming back to Australia, he didn't want us to, he wanted to send us to somewhere in the, I think the Burma campaign, I think he would have liked us to go there. I don't think there's much doubt that

26:00 Churchill was a great leader, but not a military leader, he should never have dabbled in military affairs, but he did all his life of course. He was responsible for Gallipoli, that was all his idea, bloody shocking.

**What were the private thoughts then about the higher command at the level you were at?**

26:30 **Not just Churchill, but as far as the Australian generals as well?**

As far as our own generals were concerned, we never really, I think as a general rule thought they always did well. We always had a high opinion of our own actually, and I think we also

27:00 I think we thought Auchinleck was alright and Wavell too, good soldiers and I think Churchill interfered with their command too, where I don't think he should have. He had to make someone a scapegoat and I think that was what he was planning to do, sack one of the generals.

27:30 But as far as Montgomery was concerned, I think that Wavell or Auchinleck could have done just as well if they had what he had. Montgomery never made a move until he had overwhelming bloody superiority in everything. Men, arms, tanks everything.

28:00 **Just to turn that same question around, what did you think of the Germans? Was there a respect? How would you describe your attitude towards them?**

We had a lot of respect for the Germans. Yeah, far more than we had for the Japanese.

**We'll make a bit more of a comparison later on when we get to the Japanese, but we had better get on with the**

28:30 **story though because we have got limited time. But what happened on the evacuation on the**

**boat to Crete can you tell us that?**

Well when we first got on the lighters to go out to the boats, we had about three hundred where we should have had one hundred and you weren't suppose to breath out of step, because the boat go like that you think it's

29:00 going to go one way and gradually it would right itself. We didn't think we were going to make it to the war ships we were going to travel on. But we eventually did and the British Navy was really terrific, they, they always had plenty of hot cocoa and hot tea for us whenever we

29:30 travelled with them, because it was a great revive because as I say we were all totally exhausted. Hadn't recovered from that twelve days of running. When we landed at Suda Bay in Crete, they marched us I think, they told us we

30:00 had about a mile and a half to our camp. We must have marched about five or six miles and we just dropped and went to sleep, and before we had time to settle down, they marched us back again from where we came from and we

30:30 had to get on the destroyer again and go to Iraklion further on down the coast which is where we spent the rest of our time on Crete.

**What did you find when you arrived at Iraklion?**

We were supposed to be defending an aerodrome which we were deployed on,

31:00 I think we were at one end of it. There were some British units there too. The battalion of the Black Watch, and we were also not far from the town of Iraklion and we had quite a pleasant time there, I am just trying to think how long it was before we were evacuated,

31:30 I think we were there two or three weeks, because they told us fairly early in the peace they were expecting an invasion by parachutists. Although I am not too sure whether we believed it or not, our morale was always fairly high because

32:00 the possibility that we might lose the war never entered our head. And the Crete affair at our end we had dug slit trenches, we had enough slit trenches for everyone.

32:30 Our Company HQ was in an olive grove and it was quite a pleasant stay, we spent all our spare minutes waiting for the parachutists and playing bridge. But one bloke was a very keen bridge player and he taught the rest, although I had played before the war,

33:00 I had started with Culbertson, who invented contract bridge and I started playing in the 1930s under his rules and this bloke had also started and he taught a couple of others and we always had a four to play bridge and we virtually that's about what we

33:30 did until the parachutists arrived.

**Might be in a moment you can tell us what those parachutists did. Were there any other characters in Company HQ that stood out. One that was mentioned in your letters was Captain Rangey (Sp?), who was he?**

Yes. He was a really good friend of mine. He was another bank clerk from the Commonwealth Bank of Junee when he enlisted. He had been in the militia and

34:00 he was pretty keen. I can't remember actually how or when Bob McCarty left the company, but I am pretty sure that Max Rangey was OC of the company all the time we were in Crete. Yeah.

34:30 And then we had two or three different OCs after we got back to Australia. There was Max Rangey, who else was there? I did a lot with him there.

**There's no need to name every one, but is there anyone in particular that stands out as a particular personality or was a mate of yours?**

I was just trying to think of the blokes I played bridge with there. I can't think of their names anymore. Terrible. But I remember

35:30 we started to get blitzed quite often in the week or so before the parachutists came and Max Rangey was being called to Battalion HQ quite often, and getting caught in the open, dodging

36:00 mainly fighter bombers that came over and the first thing you would know they were there, you would look up and you could see one coming straight at you with the guns blinking, and we used to dive into these slit trenches. Never lost a man from that bombing. The battalion lost one or

36:30 two who were buried under a bank by a bomb, suffocated and they were Battalion HQ and um, I remember the day that the parachutists did land we got about two hours of bombing and machine gunning us, but I don't think they

- 37:00 actually knew exactly where we were, but of course wherever they saw anyone moving, they would come down and machine gun us and the Bofors gunners had instructions not to give away their whereabouts. Either we had a couple of troops of Bofors, ack-ack [anti aircraft fire] guns they were two pounder ack-ack guns, and
- 37:30 we used to let these planes fly round an round recognisance planes looking for our position sort of thing more or less inviting somebody to have a shot at them, and I remember there was one bloke on the Bofors one day apparently couldn't stand it any longer and there was one lone
- 38:00 shot and this recognisance plane had brought him down. And you could hear this cheering right round the whole perimeter of the aerodrome. Lifted our morale terrifically. But the day the parachutists landed, I was sitting at a table making up pay
- 38:30 books for a company pay, because we used to pay, they had to be paid to get their tobacco and what not, and the other delicacy we had on Crete we bought from the locals were eggs. You either had raw eggs or eggs that were cooked. And hard boiled eggs and a few things they could buy in town.
- 39:00 So as I was half way through this job I heard somebody cry, "Parachutists", and there they were, you could see the whole of the horizon was black with planes. And it was quite a big plane at that time,
- 39:30 it was a Jacker's Transport plane, it was exactly the same plane they were using at Wau when I was there. And I think they carried fifteen or twenty parachutists. They seemed to come in low over the coast and then go up a little bit and drop their parachutists and then off.
- 40:00 So we settled down, they were probably two hundred or three hundred yards from where our Company HQ was. And so we did our best to shoot them down, but I don't know whether we actually got any.
- 40:30 Not too many that dropped to the ground were in our area, it seemed to be a bit of a senseless thing to do to drop them on top of people in prepared positions well armed just waiting for them. And there were a few of them
- 41:00 in some tall grass near the aerodrome left and a few we did manage to get rid of the first day, and then they dropped supplies to them, eventually reinforced them and there was one
- 41:30 group that was bothering us, used to fire three inch mortars at us and they were a rather unnerving sort of thing too because you would hear it just go pop, pop like that and about ten or fifteen seconds later the mortar bomb would land. That was rather unnerving waiting for it.
- 42:00 End of tape

## Tape 8

- 00:42 **Again with the back where the tape just ran out. The parachutists had landed reinforced what could you do then?**
- We thought we would go out and
- 01:00 attack them. But we never did. Apparently, from what came out later after the war, they really decided we weren't going to try and hold the island anyway. And so they were just avoiding more casualties. It went on for, I am not too sure how long, we were
- 01:30 wondering all the time because they were getting men and materials dropped to them more and more, and getting stronger and stronger all the time we were. It was very hard to understand why they didn't go out and attack them. We would have had the men. I think at our end of the island was the only one that was under control and the Germans had
- 02:00 broken through the other two spots where they had landed, Maleme and Suda Bay I think, might have been, I think. They virtually had to get out there and so it was not much good staying at our end. So they arranged the evacuation and suddenly out of the blue we found
- 02:30 that we had to be down at the wharf at a certain hour and anyone who missed the boats back to Alex were to make for a spot they told us, on the south coast. And we were just about to pull out
- 03:00 to go the boats and we were told that the times had all been put forward an hour. I thought to myself that the British Navy was always on time, they would hardly wait for us we were already late to get there. But Max Rangey said, "We'll have a go, we'll try to make it". So we made some very fast time and fortunately they were waiting for us.
- 03:30 And we got on the destroyer which fortunately we were lucky enough to stay on for the whole trip. We managed to dodge all the Stukas. The Stukas bombed us for eight hours. We lost one

- 04:00 boat, had to turn back to Crete almost as soon as we started, I am not too sure what was wrong with it. And another destroyer had its steering put out of action and they took the men off that and they sank the boat themselves. We had one bloke on there, we had some men
- 04:30 on their and one of them was a chap named Webb, Ken Webb, he was one of those blokes I told you about who could sleep anywhere. When he got on the destroyer he went into a corner and went into a nice sleep, and he woke up just as they were torpedoing the boat. I thought right up until
- 05:00 a couple of years after the war when I ran into him that he'd gone down with the boat, and he said that he and one British sailor both on it, and when they fired the first torpedo they jumped into the sea and swam back to Crete. Eventually he was taken POW. I got the shock of my life when I ran into him a couple of years after the war.
- 05:30 Then we had a lot of men were on one of the cruisers, there were two cruisers, the Ajax and the Dido. And they both had a thousand bombs dropped on their forward gun turrets and one of them had two
- 06:00 attacks, and both bombs hit the same place virtually, the forward gun turret. Started a fire which they were able to put out, they eventually got back to Alexandria. The captain of our destroyer managed to dodge the bombs and we got back safely.
- 06:30 **What was the story? The destroyer was obviously not designed for troop transport, how were you all accommodated this ship?**
- Oh we were everywhere, I know I had a nice warm spot right near the funnel. I was up on deck, but quite a few of them would have been down below. Anyhow they'd have made themselves scarce wherever they could. They were able to carry quite a few. Mostly on deck. When the
- 07:00 Stukas were coming down, it's wonder they didn't hit more, there's quite a few of them that were hit. I don't know who got them, but our blokes were all firing their Brens, put up their tripods on the deck and were firing the Brens at the planes when they came in.
- What was the closest call your ship came to?**
- Our bloke,
- 07:30 I think he had one or two that were within yards you know, he lifted the boat out of the water, but you would sworn you got hit. But he was able to zig zag, and apparently once the plane was committed to a certain spot, it was just
- 08:00 a matter of getting away from that spot I think. But he was pretty good.
- Again, I would just like to take you back to on that ship, I mean you mentioned that one of the destroyers was sunk, there was chaos all around, Stukas attacking, what could you see of what was going on around you?**
- You could see all the ships being
- 08:30 attacked. And you could see that the cruisers when they got hit, you could see it all. You could see when they were aiming for our boat. It was not a
- 09:00 pleasant experience on those boats. Of course you would wonder how the planes were going to miss. I suppose they would have to drop their bombs just before they pulled out of their dive and they would have to pull out of the dive a fair distance up or they would have gone into the sea anyway. So
- 09:30 it was between when they dropped them and when they hit the water that the destroyer commander had to dodge them.
- Where did things start to get a bit easier?**
- Aaah, the closer we got to Egypt the better it was, the fewer the attacks we had. I am not too sure where the bombers came from
- 10:00 but by the time we got to, you know near Egypt, it was out of their range. I don't know where they coming from whether it was one of the islands in the Mediterranean that had an aerodrome, I don't know
- 10:30 **What was the first thing you did when you arrived in Alexandria?**
- Oh, be bound to have a cold, probably fed tea, we were always fed tea whenever you arrived anywhere. And I just can't remember
- 11:00 whether we immediately got on trucks and went to one of the camps, or what, we went into Lebanon very soon after we arrived there, so we may not have even gone to another camp, we might have gone straight to this camp in Lebanon.
- 11:30 Our first camp there it was extremely hot, must have been well over a hundred in the old scale, and

when we eventually got to where they, we were supposed to stop the Germans coming down that way, it was snowing, in the snow again. But it was

12:00 more like a permanent camp we were there in Nissen Huts.

**I want to go back over one thing, you were writing letters to your sister. Your letters were subsequently put into a book. Can you just explain a bit more about how you managed to take notes, or what you did about recording what was going on?**

12:30 I can't really remember that myself. But I have still got copies of the notes, there weren't terribly many pages of it really, I think I have only got about half a dozen pages of notes, a bit of abbreviated sort of reporting what happened each

13:00 day. And she had suggested that I should jot me feelings down as I thought of it, because you never remember them later which is pretty right, and she actually arranged to get them published at the

13:30 time. Angus and Robertson agreed to publish them, and Angus & Robertson must have roneoed [early copying process using wax sheets] quite a few copies, because since then other people, you would wonder where they got them. Another publisher, only about probably ten to twenty years ago, someone came and saw me and wanted to publish them. I would have been quite happy for them to do

14:00 it, but she wanted me to write up the next three years of the war, well I was the Quartermaster's Clerk by then, had been since Darwin, so I didn't particularly have any experiences that was worth reporting. Not being in touch with the Rifle Company.

14:30 Others that I worked closely with would have, the Quartermaster himself and the Regimental Quartermaster, both used to take supplies up to the forward troops every day, so they would have had plenty to write about.

15:00 **What do you think, apart from your sister's suggestion that you job these feelings down, I mean it's quite unusual and that's why I ask the question for a soldier in active position to be thinking about recording, it was actually against the rules?**

It would have been, I doubt if anyone, I could show you copies of the notes, I have got some

15:30 photocopies of them. But the actual original letter on Libya that was typed, that's been lost, I don't know who got that. When I was looking for the other letters the original copies of the original Greece and Crete letters, turned up I had given them to me son. Didn't have a slightest memory of it. He fortunately turned up with them.

16:00 But these, the notes I made, I doubt whether anyone else would make much of them.

**It shows a real awareness of being involved in something historic and making history?**

I can't remember feeling that strangely enough. Peculiar isn't it?

16:30 Although it was remarkable that I eventually got round, you see the Libyan letter I more or less struck while the iron was hot, a few days after we finished the campaign. These Greece and Crete I don't think I wrote those for several months, it's a wonder I ever got going on them.

**Just because we have talked about this but we haven't explained it for the**

17:00 **Archives, could you explain what these letters are?**

They are virtually a day to day diary of my experiences in the three years that I was in the Rifle Company and close to the action. We weren't supposed to keep diaries, so it wasn't really a diary, the

17:30 Libyan one, I didn't have any notes for that, but it was close enough to the actual time that the events took place for me to remember them. But I wouldn't have been able to do the Greece and Crete stuff without notes.

**What about less elaborate letters, who were you keeping in contact with at this time?**

Not very many I was a

18:00 pretty poor letter writer. I wrote to my father reasonably often, and an occasional letter to my oldest sister. But Geraldine was the one who wrote most often to me. I think even when I didn't write, so that's how I came to

18:30 address the letters to her.

**How important was receiving mail while you were away?**

Very important. It was very sad when the mail came in and you didn't get one. Considering that I didn't write too many, I suppose I shouldn't have expected some. But you always expected

19:00 some letters in the mail. They were important to everyone really.

**What else was received, apart from just written correspondence?**

Food parcels were quite common, mainly fruit cake and that sort of thing, and what else did we get.

19:30 Chocolate of course, sort of thing. I don't know how it carried over there, but it was pretty good actually, they used to carry things in tins, which they kept fairly well. We also got most of our socks were supplied from our family, you know, family and friends used to knit a lot of socks and send them over.

20:00 Because you used to wear out socks in a very short time.

**Moving on, your arrival in Syria, you mentioned it was hot, what sort of uniform equipment provisions were made for the change in weather up there?**

We only had two sets of uniform, the field service one and

20:30 some of wool and serge I think, and the khaki shorts and shirt and I am not too sure what sort of socks they supplied us. But as I was going to say most of the socks I and most of the others wore came from home.

21:00 They were always woollen socks even in the summer.

**The heat didn't last though, in Syria you moved into the mountains?**

We were on the plain below these mountains where we eventually moved to, but as soon as we got up into the mountains it was below freezing. So we would have been in our shorts and shirts sort of thing and

21:30 had to get our kit bags out, of course the kit bags were always kept somewhere behind us, and so I suppose they would have known if we needed them, when we went up there. I used to do a few patrols up into the mountains.

**22:00 Can you explain a bit more about the patrols, what were you doing in Syria? It's not a campaign people know a lot about.**

It was not really a campaign, we were just sent there to defend the place against the Germans who were expected to come down that way to try and get a foothold in the Middle East. They didn't

22:30 know then that Rommel was going to be so close. Within a few weeks actually of when we went there. They had no need of coming down that way because I don't know what held, I don't suppose Rommel was able to get supplies and reinforcements as we would have liked to do a full scale attack on Egypt,

23:00 because he more or less petered out, I think it was just because his lines of communication were not too long. That's probably why they tried so hard to take Tobruk, because that was a reasonable sort of port and they could have brought their stuff in their. The only

23:30 thing was, it was a bit more complicated because the British Navy had full control of the Mediterranean except for the air unfortunately. They didn't seem to have aircraft carriers there during that time either. So I think that they both had problems and

24:00 Britain was still able to get supplies to Egypt I think. See they had control of Gibraltar still, and they could get through and having control of the Mediterranean they were able to get their supplies to Egypt. I think Rommel was

24:30 probably still bringing him by way of Benghazi.

**So you didn't meet much German resistance in Syria, what about the Vichy French, were they still there then?**

No that campaign was over, my brother was in that one. That's the one where Cutler got his VC [Victoria Cross]. That was

25:00 finished by the time we got there.

**So what did you need to patrol for and what happened on the patrols?**

Apparently, I am not certain of the geography of that area, but I think it must also be close to

25:30 I am not too sure what it is, whether it is near Turkey or not. I think it might be, I think it was just that they thought that Germans could come down that way, and we must have gone there before Rommel made his push right up the desert and he was

26:00 more or less pretty well up to for getting pretty close to Alexandria by the time he finished.

**What incidents stand out from that sort of time in limbo in Syria for you?**

There's only one, we were quite near a place at the foot of the mountains called Baalbek

26:30 have you heard of that? It's an ancient place of Roman ruins, and it's one place that I should have visited and didn't, another one, and a thing that happened there that was rather horrifying, a couple of our blokes were in a truck, must have been getting supplies from somewhere or

27:00 other, and it broke down, and they froze to death, went to sleep in the warm truck and never woke up, which I never knew to that point that that could happen. Very nasty.

**Did you get any leave around this time or after that time?**

We didn't get

27:30 any, no I don't think. We eventually moved back to Palestine and we got leave there, in Palestine, we were more or less in one of those permanent camps, although I can't actually think which one it was. But it wasn't long after that we

28:00 started back home.

**What were the circumstances in which year did you battalion got called back home?**

Well, must have been to do with the, with the Japs and probably Singapore falling, and the

28:30 government reckoned Australia was in danger of being invaded and they wanted some troops home to counter it. And I suppose that's why we were sent home and he had a hell of a job to get Churchill to agree to let us go.

**When**

29:00 **word came through that you would be embarking for Australia was the feeling around the camp?**

I think we all felt pretty good about that, we had been away all three years, and I think most people looked forward to getting home, even if it was under threat.

**Was there an urgency now that Australia might be under**

29:30 **threat itself?**

We didn't have a great deal of news about the Japs campaign in Malaya or Singapore, really. So I don't think we had any reason to be anxious about our country.

30:00 **Any memories of that trip back to Australia, was that a memorable one?**

I was on a rather a smallish ship called the Dula, I don't remember very much about it except that I think it was the first time we slept in hammocks, which was an

30:30 experience. It would actually be good for sea sickness because you don't feel the motion of the ship in them. But don't remember much about it really, there wouldn't be room for much sport or anything like that. So I think the time would have been taken up probably playing I wouldn't have been it, but most of the boys would have been playing two up. I am not a gambler myself. But, they generally played two up whenever they could.

31:00 **To jump forward to arriving back home, what was that arrival like and where were you?**

Well that particular arrival was

31:30 long before the war had ended, the war still had three years to run.

**Yeah, but it was the first time you had seen Australia for a while?**

Well yes, that was wonderful really. The time at Mt Lofty was good too, we thoroughly ourselves there.

**Were you able to leave South Australia and go on leave to see your family at some stage?**

We did get back

32:00 it wasn't until we had been there a few weeks I don't think that we got back home. Transport was exceedingly difficult anywhere in Australia really, and unless it was on a troop, I remember when, even twelve months later when I came down from

32:30 Darwin on leave, and I got married. Wilma's family was in the process of moving from Adelaide to Melbourne. She went with the family and I went on a troop train and managed to get back alright. But it was fairly difficult to get from there

33:00 to Sydney to see me family. I don't know whether I did at that particular time, although I had already seen them the year before. But I think I must have been able to see them then too after we were married.

**How was your time in Mt Lofty spent?**

They did a bit of weapons training and that sort of

33:30 thing with the boys, and a bit of foot marching, but mainly I think they rested. We had a fair bit of rest there. It was a lovely spot actually, I don't know whether you know those Mt Lofty Ranges. Some very nice towns out the back of those mountains. Plenty of wine and that stuff

34:00 about. It was quite a nice period.

**Was it about this time you met Wilma?**

I met her, yeah, a couple of our blokes were walking down the road, probably going to the pub at Sterling, I think is the name of the town there,

34:30 and Wilma had met one of our officers before the war. And she knew the colour patch and she recognised their colour patch, and asked about this Alan Boley, and then invited them, the two boys to make up a four and come down and play tennis, so I turned out to be one of the four. And that's

35:00 how we met.

**What sort of a romance was that? Was it love at first sight?**

Yeah. Extraordinary. It was chemistry alright, because we both felt it. And yet, I wrote home to my father and said I have met the girl I am going to marry without ever telling her about it.

35:30 And also she was only nineteen. Probably eighteen at that time, she was nineteen when we were married. No she wasn't, she was twenty that's right. And I didn't even bother to write to her, she started writing and she wrote to a couple of the other boys that had

36:00 been down to play tennis and she thought she had better include me so I wouldn't think she was playing favourites. So I started writing to her then.

**For a man who has had a book of his letters published, you are quite a slack letter writer?**

Yeah. And we finished up writing every day, after a very few weeks.

**How long did that courtship by mail last?**

36:30 That lasted a year, and we got married at the end of it, at the end of the year. And then we wrote, altogether we have written something like seven hundred and fifty letters each, to each other, she has written a few more than I have, because I wasn't able to tell her most of the time when I was coming down on leave. So she was still writing letters to me when I was

37:00 on my way down.

**Where were you in this twelve months you weren't in Mt Lofty the whole time?**

No, I was in Darwin.

**And you went up to Darwin. What was going on in Darwin?**

Well they thought the Japs were going to land there. I think might have been somewhere about February

37:30 1942 that they bombed Darwin, and we probably went up there just after that, because they thought the Japs were going to land along the coast somewhere. So we spent all our time on exercises marching out from our camp to various spots along the coast practicing what we were going to do if the Japs landed.

**How realistic was that as a line of defence do you think? When you look at it now?**

The way they were supplying us then it would be very typical to keep any sort of an army in the field up there. It's a funny thing you know, we were virtually

38:30 always short of ammunition. Didn't matter where we were and certainly always short of it to practice and it's a bloody wonder we had enough to engage in a battle really.

**What were the living conditions like up there, where you stationed?**

Not too bad. I had

39:00 a hut of some sort I was in, and the sections were in tents, and they had permanent buildings for the QM's [Quartermaster's] office and Battalion HQ and that sort of thing.

**How had your job changed by this stage, still**

39:30 **Orderly Room Clerk?**

39:39 **End of tape**

## Tape 9

00:49 **While you were in Darwin was the bombing still continuing?**

No I don't think, I am not dead sure, but

01:00 I don't think there was any bombing while we were there. Actually, it was while we were in Darwin that I think our RSM [regimental sergeant major] of the battalion, apparently he was sent to an officer training school to

01:30 become a lieutenant and the QM's Clerk was moved to the RSM, it was very strange, he was another bank clerk, and I thought he was really totally unsuited for it, but he managed to get through it all and also get a commission. And I took his place in the QM Store.

02:00 Well, filled the next three years of the war making out requisitions for clothing and what have you in everything we used in the battalion. I think I made those requisitions out in quadruplicate. You wouldn't believe the bloody army.

02:30 And the RQMS [regimental quartermaster sergeant?], he had been a shopkeeper in Scone, and I still keep in touch with him, he's up on the Gold Coast, and some bloke in A Company, had christened him Sniper

03:00 Clark because they had what they called "controlled stores", amongst which were sights for sniper's rifles and they were control stores and they had lost, and Craig was terribly worried about

03:30 these damned things, and he was itching for us to get into action so he could report them lost in action. Why anybody would use a sniper's sight in the jungle I don't know. No sooner did we fire our first shot when we lost the sniper's sights. But

04:00 I don't remember, I didn't do much, because I never went up to the companies to delivery any supplies or anything like that. And when we were at Aitape,

04:30 we were in a coconut plantation, without any tops on the trees, the Americans had shot them all, machine gunned them all off and hit, it wasn't too bad up there except I bloody well got haemorrhoids badly and had to have a

05:00 a haemorrhoidectomy in the casualty clearing station. A very nasty time, you don't want to have haemorrhoids if you can avoid it, after the operation it's shockingly bloody painful, the surgeon that did it in the

05:30 hospital had me on paraffin oil. And I was quite happy, very regular every day, but the RMO [regimental medical officer] in the battalion, eventually said, "You can't stay on paraffin oil all your life because it stops you from absorbing any vitamins", so I had to stop it.

06:00 Geez I suffered, I got so bad that eventually I went back to the CCS [casualty clearing station] and saw me surgeon again, and he put me back on the paraffin, he said, "If you can't bloody well shit you are not going to absorb any vitamins anyway". Funny man. I remember that bloke

06:30 while I was convalescing the hospital, he used to give sex lectures, which were very interesting. He was a very popular bloke.

**Can you tell me about some of the sex lectures that he'd share?**

No. Well he used to describe in great detail the

07:00 female sex organs which were very interesting to most of us. I had very nice convalescence in the hospital except for the pain. I was on morphine, even in those days they were very scared about

07:30 causing addiction to heroin you see, so they never ever gave me enough. I was on about an eighth of a grain I think it was and by the time I would get the injection I would be in such bloody pain it wouldn't have the slightest effect. I read a lot of quite good books, somebody must have had a good library

08:00 there. Read some nice books there. But, that was interesting there. Then of course we started on our way down, fighting a few stray Japs and I think that was a shocking waste of men, we

08:30 lost about one man killed every day. You can imagine, they never really came to the proper terms of the jungle, I mean I think doing night patrols in the jungle is really for the birds, you know, you are just going to run into somebody

09:00 just waiting for you, and you get killed. I mean he doesn't shoot you until you are in point blank range.

So I think it was a ridiculous and they are still doing that. I don't think it should have happened. The same as I read about I think it was Sanananda when they were doing frontal attacks on Japanese bunkers,

09:30 and having horrific casualties. One of the sergeants out of one of the battalions that was engaged there, actually went and saw the brigadier who actually was our old CO, Dougherty, and fortunately he listened to him, but he was having

10:00 a lot of pressure put on him, initially from McArthur, to take the place and in a certain time and this sort of thing, supposed to be hurrying to get it done, and that's why they were doing these frontal attacks, but I think he took notice of the sergeant, and used some other methods. They eventually took it anyway.

10:30 But there were a lot of nasty battles up there, and a lot of men killed. Never should have been killed because, I think at that stage they weren't being supplied, the Japs, and any Japs that are left there were going to wither on the vine anyway, because I don't think they were popular with the natives. And

11:00 I think eventually the natives would have killed those that were left.

**Two questions, firstly, when did you receive orders to leave Darwin to go actually to New Guinea?**

We'd already come down from Darwin and I probably had a leave and then we went up to the Tablelands and spent quite a bit of time up there, doing jungle training.

11:30 We went to New Guinea from Cairns.

**In respect to the jungle training in the Tablelands, was it effective for what you were about to face in New Guinea?**

Quite effective, I think you would have been done without it. You know to most people, it made you able to take the jungle, whereas

12:00 before that I think most people would have been very scared just to go in to a jungle. I think that our NCOs and officers, all got training at Canungra, I don't think it's far from Brisbane, it's a very jungly place and I think that's where they did all the main training and they placed it on to the troops

12:30 when we were in the Tablelands.

**In respect to New Guinea, had that changed much from when you were there with the bank?**

I had never been in that type of country in New Guinea, I was up in the mountains, and we were on the coast. We were virtually in that same place that got that shocking tidal wave, killed two thousand people. I think that was 'round about

13:00 Aitape. But we eventually got down to Wewak and they smoked the Japs, well they killed them in their caves I think, they were all dug in down there, and rather a nasty business

13:30 really. But they captured Wewak and our battalion had a part in that and that was 1945, and Dad had died in June 1945, and I tried to get down on leave but was knocked back and

14:00 my brother was allowed to come down, he must have come down in July I think. And then in August after the war was over, they started discharging them, first in first out sort of basis. And I was in the first lot that came down from New Guinea. Funny thing I went to say goodbye to the CO when I left,

14:30 bloke named Geoff Cox, I don't know whether you have ever heard of him, he was subsequently a member for East Sydney area, Rose Bay and that sort of thing, member of parliament, and he eventually committed suicide. Shot himself. But when I went to say goodbye, he said, "You'll be coming back of course won't

15:00 you?" I said, "You're joking aren't you?". But that's what he was like, he was a born soldier, no fear, yet why did he shoot himself. Couldn't face something. Anyhow, I got to Sydney I got

15:30 several bouts of malaria. I was discharged on the 30th August 1945. And, no sooner than I stopped the Atebrin that I started to get malaria and I started to get some very, very bad attacks of malaria with hallucinations and whatnot. But I eventually got a course of some new

16:00 tablet that they had on the market at the time, and as far as I know haven't had it since.

**Could I just ask you during your time in New Guinea with the supply side of things, you mentioned earlier with Chris [interviewer] that wherever you were there wasn't much ammunition, but in regards to supply were there ever things that you were overstocked**

16:30 **with?**

Not really, I mean you used to put in for what you wanted, they would know how much really you wanted for a certain number of men. And they always had that information, that was always being sent

in all the time. And I don't think we ever got

17:00 more than we needed. You couldn't handle it anyway, you didn't have storage facilities to handle large stocks. We had two storemen there on the staff on the QM staff, but the QM we had at the end there, George Martin,

17:30 he used to work himself like a slave. It was a job and half getting stuff up to the forward companies. They used to have a native line that they used to carry the stores up with and George and Craig used to have to handle them. Fortunately they never asked me to do

18:00 it. I wouldn't have been too keen. But it's a shocking thing that malaria, I think there have been wars lost because of it.

**You mentioned earlier about fighting the Germans**

18:30 **and fighting the Japanese, could you contrast the difference between the two?**

Well, be pretty hard to actually because the Japs were jungle and the Germans were only open warfare and they were actual masters of it, the Blitzkrieg business and the tanks, they were

19:00 masters at handling the tanks and I don't think you could compare them. The Japs are very good soldiers, there's no doubt about them. This business of never surrendering, bloody hard to beat them. And they lived on the smell of an oil rag. They were terribly badly supplied in the Owen Stanleys. They

19:30 were virtually starving there. And as I say their powers that be had virtually given them away, they weren't giving them anymore supplies. And so we were really fighting stragglers, I don't know where they got their ammunition

20:00 from because they weren't getting any fresh supplies. And yet when we were at Aitape, they were up in the mountains, inland from us, and they had artillery up there, and used to fire the occasional shell down on us.

**What did you think of McArthur and the**

20:30 **Americans?**

Well, I didn't run into any of them. We heard a few stories about them, that weren't very complementary of them some of the things they used to do, like at Salamaua they'd lose a whole lot of men, taking a hilltop sort of thing that the Japs were on, and then they'd retire to the flat for the

21:00 night and the Japs would go back up the hill again. Had to be done all over again, that sort of thing. Although I don't know if they were true really. And, McArthur, I don't think I could really offer an opinion at the time, but I have read an awful lot about him since,

21:30 which would cloud my judgment. Have you read a book that came out, only about a year or so, might have been a couple of years back called "The Odd Couple". It's supposed to be about Blamey and McArthur, but it's mainly about McArthur, and his shortcomings. He was a ghastly type

22:00 according to this bloke. He's an Australian writer.

**Let me ask, part of the Archives actually, I have sort of shared a bit of a social setting of this time and songs of the time, are quite important to know what the boys were singing and the tunes?**

Well actually the songs our blokes sang I can't remember them singing anything except the old World War I songs.

**Which one's that?**

The things

22:30 like, "Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag", and those things. That came from the first war, "Take me back to Blighty", sort of songs like that. Some of the popular songs of the day were sort of individuals, but I don't remember them very much singing, strangely enough.

23:00 **Can you give me a sing-a-long of one of the World War I songs?**

I couldn't sing anything.

**Just for the tune, not for the social performance, just for the tune?**

That's my trouble I am tone deaf, I wish I could. I got stopped in me tracks when I was about fourteen at school.

**Surely you can give me an idea**

23:30 **about how it goes?**

No I can't really, I just cannot carry a note. Terrible. I hope I haven't passed it on to me children.

24:00 **Norm, could you just share with me getting married while the war was still on, just the story there and how that fits into the events?**

Well, I don't know, Wilma didn't want to get married while the war was still on, so I had a

24:30 fair bit of persuading to do by mail, but some stage or other it got into the stories that I proposed to her one hundred and seventy six times, but I don't think it was anything like that really, but we were very much in love by that stage, and

25:00 we were both very keen to get married by the time we did. But it was shockingly painful business parting each time I left to go away. And, I suppose with any long separation whether it's a wartime one or not, you wonder if you are going to see each other again.

25:30 We had a couple of separations like that which were pretty dreadful. I suppose the joy of being reunited probably makes it all worth while,

26:00 because without that parting you don't have that.

**So what changed her mind with respect to getting married besides the one hundred and thirty proposals?**

I think I better not say this, she knew she was on to a good thing. She'd kill

26:30 me. Despite the differences in sex, we've had a very happy marriage really. A lot of the time we think a lot alike, we have the same ideas. And fortunately we had the same ideas about bringing up children. Because that can be very difficult.

27:00 I'll tell you for your information what's a really good idea, Michael, is you don't get into a situation where a child when one knocks them back she knows that the other's going to agree sort of thing. You must speak with one voice. I think

28:00 that's very important. I felt that we have been pretty successful with our children. They're all very nice people.

**Can I ask you just on that subject, you have got children, you've got grandchildren I take it you have also got great grandchildren, what would you like to say to each generation or those generations about war in general?**

Well I think it should be avoided at all costs. Shocking thing. You know when I think of those parachutists, German parachutists at Iraklion,

28:30 getting sent over there, dropped on top of well armed troops and slaughtered. It's wrong, isn't it. They were the same as we were only younger, I think most of them looked to be about twenty, and when it's all said and done you all

29:00 realise that the Russians you know, we were virtually brought up to realise that they were terrible people and all that sort of thing, they are exactly the same as we are. They just got a different language and culture. I would say that as far as this last was concerned, I still

29:30 think that our Prime Minister was wrong. I mean it's nice I suppose we need the Yanks on our side, we need them for protection, we wouldn't get far on our own, but I still think the whole principle of going into Iraq

30:00 was wrong, you are creating a precedent of hopping into another country and changing the government, they should be allowed to change their own, no matter how long it takes.

**Can I ask you then just on this subject,**

30:30 **was World War II worth fighting?**

Well, I think it might have been one war that we really had to fight, I don't think we could've got out of it. I mean not

31:00 only you know, succumbing to a ruler of a bloke like Hitler, but this business of racial business, the thousands of people he killed.

**You experienced a bit of trauma I guess after World War II,**

31:30 **in hindsight now do you regret enlisting?**

No, I never have. I think at the time we had to go to war there. But I think in this recent business if you have got a choice you don't want to go to war.

32:00 I don't think we had a choice. Oh no, I met a lot of wonderful people. In all the ranks really, there were

some very, very good blokes.

32:30 **As we come to end of the interview is there anything else you would like to add in respect to your experience and service?**

I think I have told you everything Michael, I don't think there's anything I could add.

**Well Chris and I would just like to thank you for sharing so much.**

33:00 **Just one last question, could you share with us a bit about the trauma that you experienced and why you experienced it?**

What after I came back? No I think that's a direct result of being scared for long periods of time. It was peculiar, I didn't really know what it was at the time. Made life very difficult.

33:30 I still had it when we had children, and I just wasn't meself at all you know I think we went for a holiday up into the mountains and rented a cottage up there, some woman had rented one alongside us, Wilma had a nervous breakdown.

34:00 She reckoned there was something wrong with me, which there was. The effect it had on me nerves.

**What signs?**

I was terribly short with the children, shouted and raved at them for things I should have just taken in me stride, I would have taken in me stride

34:30 at any other time, I think. Yeah. I think these days they are more likely to get treatment before it gets too far, which would have been nice at the time.

**Given that you didn't have the treatment that these days we have, how did you learn to cope?**

35:00 It just wore off really, that's all that happened, I got over it. Took a long time. Yeah.

**Did you have any recurring nightmares?**

No. That's one thing that stood by me all my life being such a good

35:30 sleeper. Wilma is rather jealous, she's an insomniac. She's got to lie there night after night, if I am not snoring. She can't believe I can be asleep and sleep for so long.

**Norm, thank**

36:00 **so much for today, we appreciate it.**

Okay Michael, do you think it has been worth while?

36:06 **INTERVIEW ENDS**