# Australians at War Film Archive

## Donald Stephenson (Don) - Transcript of interview

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## Tape 1

00:30 **So, as I was just saying before, if we could start at the start and get the basics. Where abouts were you born?**

Northcote, Separation Street. My father worked in a brick works, and they had four or five cottages down on the, coming down the hill in Separation Street on the opposite side to the brick works, and he had one of them.

01:00 **Had your father been in the war, in the Great War?**

Yes, in the First World War, yes

**And where did you go to school?**

Well, we went to Surrey Hills, Surrey Hills State School and then Swinburne Tech [Technical College].

**And how old were you when you left?**

13, no probably 14 I was, yes. Yeah, I would have been 14 then.

**Did you go straight into a job?**

Yes, went all round the place to get a job,

01:30 because they weren't easy in those days. I worked at Edward Jenkins, they made stoves in Abbotsford. I used to ride my bike from Surrey Hills down to Abbotsford to go to work, for the princely sum of 10 bob a week.

**And what were you doing there?**

One dollar. A week. What was I doing – working in the foundry, and they also had a plating shop to do the electroplating,

02:00 a bit between the two. And then my mother died, and I got a job with my uncle, as a plumber, well, well not, I shouldn't say it, because he'd never have benefited. And I worked for him for two years, bit over two years, and we finished up having an argument, so I didn't work for him any longer. And

02:30 then I worked for another plumber out in Coburg, Phil Moss, he was a First World War veteran, and I was with him for about two or three months, and he went into the Apprenticeship Commission to get the papers changed over, he thought I'd been an apprentice. Of course, they told him he'd, I'd never been an apprentice, so then they took my uncle to court, the Apprenticeship Commission. I had to go to Prahran court and

03:00 give evidence against him, it cost him a hundred pound fine. So as far as my family were concerned, I was the worst in the world.

**Did that affect your relations with your mum or dad? Was it**

Oh, my mother was dead. No, my father, he'd taken off, he was in Sydney, and I was living with my mother's sister in Richmond. And one thing that happened while I was there, I was home with the flu, I couldn't go to work,

03:30 and the foreman, we had a foreman, a red-headed fellow, Pete Dell, he was still working out at Coburg after the war, and he bought me pay over and gave it to me aunty, and she opened it, and she said "You haven't been telling me the truth, you've got 10 shillings more than what you told me what you earned." I said "Well, no, I've never had that much." so she rang the boss up to see, and he said "Yeah, he was a good worker, so we've given him a rise." Up until that time, I was,

04:00 you know. So that fixed that up, but I still lost my job. So I worked wherever I could get a job then. I

made handbags, metal polisher, and then just before the war, we went, two of us went up to Shepparton, fruit picking. And we stopped there until, it would have been February, February in 1940

04:30 and we run out of fruit and everything, and we were picking sauce tomatoes. You know what, the old fruit boxes, the wooden ones? Four pence a case. For a case of sauce tomatoes, little wee sauce tomatoes. That's what you earned, four pence a case. Eight pence for a day's work, so that was enough for us.

**Hard work too.**

Yes. Break your back.

**Do you remember where you were when you heard that war had broken out?**

Yes, I was still in Richmond, yeah.

05:00 I remember that a while.

**Do you remember that day?**

Yes. I don't think anybody, was around that time would forget it.

**What did you think straight away?**

"War, another war." that was all. And then when they started recruiting, well, we were a bit young, but anyway. When we were coming home from

05:30 Shepparton, we arrived on a Rattler. Do you know, I suppose you know what that is?

**It's a, not a passenger train, is it?**

No, it's a goods train. Jumped a goods train, (UNCLEAR) that and a signalman must have spotted us, because when we pulled into Seymour, the truck we were in stopped right beside two police, two coppers, standing on the platform, "Come on." and they're marching us out of the

06:00 station, and there was about 5 blokes that were in the artillery, in uniform, on the station. And they said to these coppers "What are you doing with them? They're only kids, they're not doing any harm." Anyway, they talked them out, they were taking us off, and they talked them out of it, they said "Well, make sure you get out of town, we don't want to see you." and these blokes said "What are you doing?" We told them, and they said "Well, why don't you join the army? You get 35 bob a week and your keep, you can't earn that outside at your age, you

06:30 can't get that much money." So we went back to town and joined the army. That's how we come to go in the army.

**So for a job, the reason you enlisted was for....**

Well, bit of adventure, and you were getting your pay. Whereas outside, you had to, battling to get a job. I suppose it got better after that, but at that time, it still wasn't easy. Anyway,

07:00 that's how we joined the army.

**And you weren't 18 yet, were you?**

No. No, yeah, well, we went in, in March, and the fellow I joined with was Alan Erskine, he joined up under a different name, Jay Faulkner his name was. And we went to the showgrounds, and the first day that, we were there that night, and the next morning, we've got to do a medical test. So they've, all you had before was

07:30 cough and bend over and have a look to see you haven't got piles that was all they did when we first went in at the drill hall. And then the next day you got your eyesight and hearing and all that, and Alan was practically blind in the right eye, so he'd seen a fellow that we knew from Richmond, we got him to do his eye test, but he was, I'm, he was the next number to me, so you

08:00 go by, you're called up by your numbers, so I did mine, and we got him to do that, but the only trouble was he was five foot eleven and he had tattoos on his shoulders and they checked that. So when we went into Puckapunyal, and he went into a different company to me, we were still in the same battalion, but a different company, and I'd done my second medical test and he had to do his the next day, so we had to go and find this fellow, and

08:30 we copied his tattoo onto my shoulder, so I did his second medical test. And then when they took his photo, because he was five foot six, and the fellow that did his medical the first time and they measured him was five foot eleven, so the photographer threw him a box to stand on. Now he went right though the war, you wouldn't believe that, would you.

**You can see where people could slip through the cracks.**

Yeah.

09:00 Just shows you what can happen.

**And what story did you give to get in?**

Beg pardon?

**Did you just, how old did you say you were?**

21. 21. I thought I told them 22, but my son got the thing from the DVA [Department of Veterans' Affairs] off the Internet and they had me down as born in 1918. Well, I wasn't born until 1922. And they also had my father down as next of kin, which he wasn't,

09:30 because I left my sister as next of kin, my elder sister, because he'd gone off to Sydney and left us. And he claimed me when I was, when he found out I'd gone overseas, he claimed me see, which they could. And that's what he showed on the DVA records, that he was the next of kin. But as far as I was concerned, he wasn't.

**And tell us a bit about training. Was it Puckapunyal?**

First of all we were at the Williamstown

10:00 Racecourse, oh, training, just a bit of drill, didn't have rifles anything like that. And marching, march around and everything, to get a bit fit. And we were only there for about a week or two. We went to Puckapunyal. We were there for about two or three days, and we got a fortnight's leave, embarkation leave. I was only in the army one month and one day and we were on the boat. We joined on the 13th of March, and we were on the boat on the 14th

10:30 of April.

**So did you get any arms training or anything like that?**

Yeah, we got drill, a bit of drill with that, no firing or anything but, most of us had 22s [.22 calibre rifle] in those days or we'd used them. Used to go rabbiting and that, but, it was no trouble.

**And so where did you leave from?**

We left from Port Melbourne. Yeah,

11:00 yeah, you, big military secret, the day we were supposed to leave, all the way down from Puckapunyal to Port Melbourne, every station, packed, packed with people, you know. And then, Port Phillip Bay, all around the station pier, there was every kind of boat you could see full of relatives and things, you know, all trying to see their sons or whatever else.

11:30 We were on the old, an old tram steamer the Naraylya [?], an old coal burner, we were always at the back end of the convoy all the way. And we got to Perth, and that would be the roughest, everybody reckoned on the boat, that it was the roughest trip they ever had going across the [Great Australian] Bight. We hadn't set outside the heads, and I'll guarantee 90% of the people

12:00 on the boat were sick. Never seen anything like it, by the time we got there, oh my God. Like, there was seawater coming down the hatch, gangway, stairs, whatever you call them, you know, and we were on the bottom deck, and they were bringing food down, trays of sausages and everything, and they were slipping and the sausages floating in the water, and the water is about that deep on the deck and we're sleeping over it,

12:30 and there's sausages and vomit and everything, oh, terrible.

**Was it a pretty crowded ship as well?**

Yeah, we had, yeah we had, well our battalion, there was provos [military police], there was nurses, there was all sorts on it. I don't know exactly how many, but there was quite a lot.

**And did you know where you were going?**

Oh, we knew we were going to the Middle East, yeah. Going to Palestine, we knew that, but the 16th Brigade from New South was already there, they left in February,

13:00 they went in February. And we knew we were going there, but the next lot after us, was the rest of our Division, that was the 9th and the 10th and the 12th Battalions, they were going to the Middle East too, and they all had their heads shaved and everything ready for the hot weather and they went to England. They weren't too happy about that, having their heads shaved and

13:30 everything, and arrived in England a lot of them.

**Did you both have your heads shaved?**

Yeah, we did that, we were going over, everybody took the mowers over there, it was great because. And we pulled in at Colombo on the way, had two days there but I was in the isolation ward in the, on the boat, because I had the measles, German measles. I got let out

14:00 for the second day, which was the day of the races. And we went to the races, and there was a jockey from Melbourne, George West, was a lightweight jockey from, used to ride at Mentone, at the old Mentone racecourse. He was riding over there, well, he just said “Oh well, back this horse, it’s got a good show.” Four winners he gave us, so, all got back on the boat with a shirt full of rupees.

14:30 Had quite a good day that day.

**Did you take any souvenirs from Colombo?**

Beg pardon?

**Did you take any souvenirs from that day?**

No. And two of our fellows were brought onto the boat just before it sailed by a naval [UNCLEAR] and they had a note to say, to forgive them, to say that it was his fault. And do you know who it was?

15:00 Prince Phillip. Prince Phillip. He’d been drinking with them, and took them back on the boat, with a note that it was his fault, that he’d kept them drinking. Which was quite a big thing, we thought, anyway.

**How long did the boat trip last**

15:30 **altogether?**

Over there, six weeks, before we got to, in the Suez Canal yes. Got off at El Kantara, and they were marched off the boat braying like sheep, every one of them.

**What was discipline like back then, was it all right before you?**

Oh yes, oh, discipline was pretty good. I mean, not like the

16:00 English army, but, oh, no, if you had decent officers that you respected, well, you did the right thing. You had some you didn’t respect too much, they put up with a hell of a lot. Like when we were going over, we were on picket duty on the boat, now the officer’s had, I don’t know if you’ve ever seen it, in those days, it was Fosters Blue Label, Export Lager, is that right. Well that was the officer’s beer, what we had was Black Bass,

16:30 the English beer, which was rubbish, we thought anyway. So we were on picket duty on where the stores, where the beer is. And half a dozen fellows come up to us this night and said “We’re going to break into the canteen, are you going to stop us?” “Of course we are, like hell.” So we got the blame for that, because they’d all thrown all the empty bottles overboard, some of the admins [administrative staff] put a bag

17:00 under our mess table, so we got the blame for that on our mess table. And then we were spud bathers for the rest of the voyage after that.

**What does that mean?**

Peeling potatoes. All day everyday.

**Oh spud bather.**

Spud Bathers.

**I’ve never heard that phrase, that’s a beauty.**

Oh, haven’t you?

**So where were you first posted?**

We were at Beit Jirja in Palestine. That’s where we started our training. We still had

17:30 nothing though, we had rifles, but the mortar, two inch mortar was a bit of two inch pipe, gal [galvanised] pipe on a wooden cross on a bit of an angle. Now this was, we did a three day bivouac, right, and we’re marching back and a fellow named Noel De Yougard, now he worked for the DVA after the war, or repatriations department then, and when, he was a corporal, and when we were marching back,

18:00 he’s got this thing held up like this, singing “Onward Christian Soldiers.” And all the boys joined in, you know, so quite funny really. So we trained there for, must have been about four months,

18:30 four or five months, and then we went to Egypt. I don’t know whether it was true, they all reckoned they, the Egyptian government wouldn’t let us in there to start with. Because of the way the First World War blokes behaved. Whether it was true or not, I wouldn’t know.

**Did you have a bit of a reputation?**

They did have a bit of a reputation, yes.

**Did you feel like you were following in their footsteps a bit?**

Yeah, I'd say so, yeah. Yes.

19:00 **And in Egypt, what were you doing there?**

Training again, we went to Helwan, which was, quite, that was the best camp we ever had over there. It was 14 miles from Cairo. We had half a mile to walk, and then there was an electric train from Helwan into Cairo, and as long as we were back at 11:59, or 23:59 in those days, every night, you were all right. And so,

19:30 whenever you wanted to go into Cairo, just hop on a train, after you'd finished for the day, and you were all right. And, I don't know, have you ever heard of Joe Gullet? He was a member of parliament, he's dead now, he died a couple of years ago, his father was Sir Henry Gullet, and he got killed in a plane crash, with White, was Minister for the Army, I think in those days. They got killed in a plane crash and Joe, he joined as a

20:00 private, he was a sergeant at the time, and he got, they gave him compassionate leave to go home for the funeral. And we'd been, there was five of us, and we'd been into Cairo, and we were going back to camp. And we got on the station waiting for the train, and along comes Joe Gullet, and he said "Where are you going boys?' and we said "We're going back to camp." and he said "Come and have a drink." we said "No, we're broke, we've spent our money, we're going back out." "Come on, I've got money." Took us into an officers'

20:30 only pub. That was the discipline. He got badly wounded in Bardia, the first action we had. And he finished up a major and he was sent to Europe, sent to England as an observer for the D Day, and he said, "If I'm going to be there, I don't want to be an observer." so they gave him a battalion of the Green Howards, that English unit,

21:00 you know. And got badly wounded again, he got badly wounded at Bardia, got wounded in New Guinea and copped it again over there. So he had a very interesting life, he did.

**Must be pretty tough.**

He was a tough little bugger, good bloke, though. Real tough.

**I want to come back to all these things, but if we can just move on. So Egypt for four months, you said?**

Well, we were there, well we were, I think it was September

21:30 or, about September or October, we were there. Then we moved up to Ikingi Mariut outside of Alexandria, and that was, we were there till, oh, November, early December. And then I had, I got crook, and I went to hospital,

22:00 and they moved up into, the rest of the battalion moved up to, well, attack Bardia, they were outside Bardia for Christmas Day. And Snowy Carvell, he was in the same section as me, he was a lance corporal at the time, he got killed on the 28th of December outside Bardia on a patrol, he would have, probably, been the first one in the Australian Army to get killed in action.

22:30 And then they attacked it on the 3rd of January, and between my company, I wasn't there, luckily, Three and Don Company, they lost about 50 blokes that day. In those two or three days. So that was the first action they had.

**And you re-joined them?**

I re-joined them right after that.

23:00 And went up to, of course went to an English hospital, but to get back to your unit, you had to go back to Palestine, to the infantry training battalion, where the reinforcements came, it was our old sergeant major, who was in charge of training there. And you had to go back there, and get sent back to your unit. So by the time I got back there, Bardia was over. I wasn't the only one, there was three, four or five of us, you know. And then we

23:30 joined them there, and went up to Tobruk. And they'd take Tobruk, I can still see our old colonel there, Colonel Godfrey. He was sitting on his rowe stick, you know those old rowe they had, you know that open out and you sit on them? Sitting on that about a hundred yards outside the wire, and they've got a gap in the wire, and we're going through there, and of course, the Italians are shelling that gap, and he's sitting there "Come on boys, just keep moving, keep going, don't stop, just

24:00 charge through." I can still see him there, and he was left behind at Tobruk, he was left in charge of Tobruk, made a brigadier, and then he took over a brigade in the 9th Division. And he got killed at Alamein. He came from up near Birregurra, up near Colac. He was a good old, he was a First World War

24:30 fellow, you know, but he was pretty well respected by our battalion. Yeah, there's not many brigadiers get killed leading their troops, is there. So then we went to Dirda [?], and then we went inland, our battalion, we went inland. And to Barce, which was a

25:00 farming place, was the end of the train line inland from Benghazi. And it rained for three days, never stopped, day and night, for three days, and we were saturated. We marched 80 miles, and I was in agony, I could tell you, because when we were at Tobruk, I got an officer's suitcase and it was full of monogrammed silk underwear, so I thought "These are better than the old

25:30 army issue." Worst mistake I've ever made, because they rode up into the crutch, and they chaffed the blazes from my army, you know, the seams on my pants. Oh, waddling along like a duck.

**For 80 miles?**

80 miles, yes. When we got to Barce, we took over the railway station and our section were in there, big fireplace, we got a big fire going, and we got all our clothes off, drying our clothes and everything, and our

26:00 boots and everything's drying out, because they were saturated. And we were playing cards, and the bloke said "What's that smell?" have a look it's my boots burning, the toes of the boots burning, smouldering, it's mine, happened to be mine. Somebody had pushed them in closer, but you know.

**Did they have holes in them or did they....?**

Oh, I had to get them repaired. Had to pay to get them repaired, that was your fault, you had to pay for that. I wanted

26:30 a new pair of boots, but they wouldn't give them to me, had to get them repaired. So we were at Barce for a while, and the rest of the battalion went up to Benghazi, and past Benghazi, and we were left there, our company, we were sort of garrisons for the town. We had, our section, we had 150 Italians been wounded, they were convalescing. And if they wanted a working party somewhere, we had to, give them so many

27:00 men, get on the truck and away you'd go. And they wanted so many this day, and this, I didn't, we didn't know anything about the Geneva Conventions or anything like that. And this sergeant major, Italian sergeant major, they wanted 30 men, they only had 29, and he wasn't going to get on the truck, I said "You get on the truck." he said "No, no, no, Geneve, Geneve." and "What the hell is Geneve?" "They want 30, you get on the truck." He got on the truck all right.

27:30 Anyway, we went down to the stores and we got a big barrel of wine, red wine. And they had these El Duce cigarettes they were a metre cubed in a box, a metre cubed. So got these, loaded them onto a ute [utility truck], carted them back and got, this sergeant major, we said "Now you've got to share all these cigarettes equally with all your men, and the wine." well, worst mistake we ever made, they all pulled out banjos and accordions

28:00 and then they sang and played music all night. Never stopped. So we treated them pretty well.

**And so, you were at the railway station?**

Yeah, we were only, well, yeah, we stayed there for a while, but then we had to move out to, where we had these prisoners, it was only a barracks, there was no wire or anything around them, nothing at all. And then

28:30 the 9th Division took over from us. And we were staged back to Egypt again, well, we staged back to Tobruk first. And we were looking after the hospital. That had no wire around it either. And all these Italians used to come into us of a night for protection. "What do you want?" They had black shirts there, and they were dead scared of them, the ordinary Italians were dead scared of the black shirts, the Fascists,

29:00 oh, they reckoned they were going to kill them. Anyway, this, we had to, all we had to do, if they wanted supplies, one of us had to ride in the truck with them. We had no idea where to go, they did, they knew where everything was. We had to go and get water, we had to take them down to the water point so they could get water, or go and get their food, and we got a big tin of apricots. And of course, we all had our own batman; one of the Italians would say "I'll

29:30 clean your boots and look after you." and everything, cut your hair and all the rest of it. And the cook used to cook for us, an, one Italian cook and he said "Apricots, I make you a big pie." he made us this apricot pie. And a major from the Salvation Army called in to give some writing paper and a few cigarettes and everything to write home. And he's sitting there, talking to us, just as the cook walks

30:00 in with this big apricot pie. Of course, his eyes nearly popped out of his head, he said "What's that?" we said, "An apricot pie, would you like some?" would he ever, he just about ate half of it. Because he wouldn't get anything like it. He was a good cook, he was, a good cook. So then we got back to Alexandria, El Amiriya, another camp near Ikingi Mariut, and

30:30 we never got any leave, they gave us no leave at all, so, of course, everybody took off. All our signallers, they hopped on a train and went to Cairo and sent a cable back to their officer, "Having a great time in Cairo, why don't you join us?" So they missed out going to Greece, because they all finished up in jail. They got 28 days, or 14 days detention, so they missed that. And we were off, oh, we were away

31:00 about 5 days, yeah. A fellow in the navy had told us that if we wanted to stay in Alexandria, the place on

the waterfront was run by a Greek woman, and it was very clean and everything, and they, you got looked after. You didn't, a lot of places you'd wake up with nothing, you know. And anyway, that one only cost us the equivalent of four shillings a night. And you'd wake up in the morning, uniform would be cleaned, boots polished, hat brushed

31:30 and everything. Everything sat there, and all your money sitting on top of it, and, it was a good place. We stayed there for about five nights. We used to have breakfast in a Greek café. We went to this Greek café this morning, and the Greek said to us "You must go back to camp today." we said "Why?" he said "You go to Greece today." What a (UNCLEAR), he knew who was going and who wasn't. We went back to camp, got our gear and we were on the boat that afternoon.

32:00 **But you weren't AWL [Absent Without Leave] just then?**

Oh, we were AWL, yeah, but we had to, we got confined to barracks, what on a boat? And the bosun we were supposed to report to, he had all these sailors to do all the work, we were supposed to be doing, so we'd just go and sit there and have a cup of coffee with him. It only lasted, it was only a two day trip anyway.

**And where did you arrive in Greece?**

32:30 At Byres [?] which we had to go up in small boats because they'd bombed it, and they'd blown an ammunition ship up, and they hit that and it blew, oh, they couldn't use the wharves or anything. They'd blow it straight to hell. But it was nice to see friendly people. That was the first time, you know, after the desert and everything. All you'd see was sand and Arabs, and they didn't particularly like

33:00 you in any case, you know. And, yeah, Greece was a totally different thing, a few trees, and people waving at you, instead of, you know, just staring at you.

**They were pretty grateful you turned up?**

Yeah, they were, oh yeah. And we were only there, we went to Daphne. We were there about one, only there one night and one day, and then we were on a train up to the north.

33:30 And we didn't get as far as we were supposed to, because they weren't going to, the Greeks wouldn't drive the train any further. They hopped off. They knew that the Germans had already broken through from Yugoslav, so they weren't going to drive the train any further. At any rate, our colonel at that time said "Well, I've got to have a train." So one of our blokes went and got the train and bought it back again.

34:00 He reckoned he could drive a train, he worked for the railways, so he went and got the train, brought it back. And then we had to go back. We had to go back to a mountain pass where we could try and hold them. And they sat us there that afternoon, or the next afternoon, we were to take up position on this pass, and we've got our rifles and

34:30 the best we had was three inch mortars with us. The artillery weren't there at that time, and they hadn't, and we had 50 rounds each and they said "Well, they'll be through here at five o'clock in the morning." The bloke who was on guard duty during the night must have been very worried, because I woke up with the sun streaming down on me in the morning, I'd done my shift early, you know, two hours, you had two hours on. And somebody must have, somebody went to sleep, he must have been, couldn't have been too worried could he.

35:00 And nobody turned, there was nobody there, it was days before they saw them. The funny thing there, though, everything was quiet on the 8th Battalion and the 19th Brigade, which was the 4th, 8th and 11th Battalions they come through here, where we were, and they were saying "Go on, you might as well hop on with us, you're never going to stop them." Of course, we just

35:30 said "This is the 6th Battalion, mate, not the 8th." You know, and of course, we didn't know what they'd been through at that time. But then everything was quiet, and they said "Well, the next things you see moving will be Germans." And these truck tearing down, and right in front of us was a big long flat plain, and you could see for miles up the road, and these trucks come tearing down the road,

36:00 and they've come up to the, before the curve, and of course, the engineers have blown the road by then, and they come round the corner and our artillery had caught up with us by that time, the 2/2nd artillery, truck comes round the corner, stops, bang, up it goes. And next one come round the corner, boom, they've got him too, up it goes and of course, all these blokes are running up the road yelling "Don't shoot Aussies, don't shoot." They're English blokes, tank recovery mob. They had been stuck out

36:30 and didn't know that everybody had gone. And they'd called in a Barita, was where the canteen was, the NAAFI [Navy, Army, Air Force Institute], like the English canteen and they'd loaded up with cigarettes and chocolates and everything they could have. We didn't have any cigarettes, and the artillery's gone and blown them up. So we weren't very happy about that, but still, and one of our officers was telling their mortars, the mortar, he was in charge

37:00 of the mortars, he's telling the mortars to fire on them, and all the blokes said "But they're English." "Fire." So they just turned them around away from them. Fired them, they followed orders, but, didn't go within a hundred yards of them.

**Why did they get their orders to fire?**

Oh, don't ask me why. Nobody could impersonate a Pom [Englishman], not the broad ones, nobody can. You've got the

37:30 Geordies and that, you can't, nobody can imitate them, you'd have to be one of them to manage it.

**I might just stop you there, I think we're about a minute, yes, we are very close to the end of the tape.**

Is it?

# Tape 2

00:30 **So if we could pick up from when you saw the English?**

Yeah, so then, they came along, we were supposed to pull out at one o'clock in the morning, supposed to get trucks up to get us out, right. So one o'clock in the morning goes past, and there's no trucks, about half past two, they came up and said, "Well we, dump all your gear, just take your weapons, your

01:00 emergency food, your pack, haversack, dump your pack and everything else, the bridges have been blown behind us, we can't get the trucks up." So we've got a forced march to get down, because we've got to get over the river, into a bit of cover before daylight or otherwise you've got, you're dead, you know, because they come over machine gunning, and dive bombing and machine gunning all day long. Day and night. Not night. But all day, as long as it was daylight, you're getting machine gunned and bombed.

01:30 Anyway, so we got a forced march and there, the big anti-tank rifle, the boys' gun, it fired a, it had a slug about that big, and it fired a, it was an inch. Twenty-five millimetre, you know, and it weighed a ton, so that disappeared, the only thing that could go was a Bren gun and the rifles, that's all we finished up with. And we, we got there, and we got, just got into cover as they came

02:00 over. And we got in this, in amongst these trees, and I'm propped up against a tree, and I must have gone to sleep straight away, and I woke up and there's bullets flying everywhere and I'm looking around, and I can't see anybody around, you know. Anyway, when he'd gone, it was the bombers they'd been bombing over further behind us, and they'd just machine gunned you on the way back, you know, just for something to do. And I looked around,

02:30 and once it stopped, there were heads popping up from everywhere, I thought they'd taken off. So then, you know, we had to take up a new position there at Brallos. And then our officer, we'd win one position, and they said "Well, we've got to move positions." So we spent all day, up and down mountains. Because they're like that, you know, up little goat tracks, you know, up and down these mountains and we come across this mountain stream, so off come

03:00 the boots, because we hadn't had our boots off since we'd been there. So all washing our feet and everything in this mountain stream, icy cold water. And there's the officers going crook at us "Come on, we've got to get moving." there were about 200 of us, we said "We're not moving until we've washed our feet and changed our socks." And when we get to our new position, we are no more that 200 yards from where we started. That bloke got an MC [Military Cross],

03:30 we reckon he got it for that. Yeah.

**Had there been some sort of mistake with….?**

I'd say, they'd made a mistake, yes. Oh, that was the whole battalion, you know, that was the talk of course, about him. And anyway, we were up at Brallos, and we were there for a few days and of course, most of them had

04:00 gone back. Our battalion was the rear guard for the division and our company was the rear guard for our battalion, and our Section was the rear guard for our company. Well, it finished up, there was, it was our platoon, but there was about 20, there was a few older fellows, and some had bad feet from what they'd been doing, so we told them to go with the others, and it was about 20 of us. So we were supposed to be pulled out a certain time in the morning.

04:30 And we're standing there, we were getting a bit edgy, I don't mind telling you, because they'd tried, they'd come up the mountain that day, up the goat track, tried to get in behind us and another company on the left of us and they'd spotted them and they'd fixed them up. But you could see them, they came down the night before, or two or three nights before, drove down the road with headlights blazing and everything, but we didn't have any planes or anything, just out of range or our artillery. And they were building bridges,

05:00 you know, the army bridges, to get the tanks and that across. And our artillery would wait until they'd built a bridge and then blow it up, until they brought their mortars down, the big mortars that you, and

we were in front of these two artillery guns behind us. And I'm not kidding you, about four of these, four shots from these mortars. One in front of us, one behind and the next minute, boom,

05:30 one's gone, another one, the other gun's gone. One man out of two gun crews, that's all that was left. Wiped them all out. Never had a hope, they were just too good. And anyway, we were still waiting to go, waiting for the trucks to turn up, to take us, and we, Ronny Phillips, he's dead now, poor Ronny, we used to call him Gugga because he stuttered badly. Got over it after the war,

06:00 but he did, he was a, come from the bush, he was a wheat lumper, and he started off in our section, he was a sergeant then. And you could hear him come, "Gug gug gug, are you there boys, gug gug gug, are you there boys?" He's running down the track for us, when they, the rest of them, had got back further and they'd regrouped, and he went round to find out where we were because he was one of our old section mates. And of course, the officer, our officer, said, he said to him

06:30 "Where's the rest of the boys "Oh," he said "I forgot all about them." So we got another mate from Warrnambool that used to be in our section too, with a truck to come and pick us up. Otherwise we would have been left down there. Some of our officers were not too good. Most of them were good, but he made it, he was a bit lax that fellow. Anyway, we got out of that, and we finished up further back, and then we finished up at

07:00 Kalamata, right down the south, and we were under, I'll never forget walking into the town. We hadn't had a feed for, all day. We hadn't had a feed and hadn't had a cup of tea, or anything like that. We were walking through the town, and these old Greek women are coming out of their doors with a bit of chicken for you, you know. And we've got to nick off and leave

07:30 them. And that day, we were under the olive trees and this Messerschmitt 110, came swooping over the olive trees, saw us there, come back for a swoop, he's got a canopy open and I'm going, couldn't be more than 20 feet above the olive trees and threw out a toilet roll.

08:00 That's fair dinkum. Just, as if to say, well there you are, you're packing them, you may as well use it. Anyway, we got off on destroyers that night. The destroyers come into the wharf there, and I'll never forget Ronny Phillips there, because we're on the boat, and

08:30 Ronny tries to get on, and this sailor's saying "No, there's no more." And he's saying "But I've got to get on, they're my mates, I've got to get on." "All right," he said, "You can get on, but none of the others." And we got put on, off the destroyers onto the Costa Rica. You know, passenger boat, Dutch passenger boat. Well, from daylight, that was it, Stukas and everything over us all the time. And of course, they had

09:00 every Bren gun on the boat was up on the top deck and anti- tank rifles, the Vickers guns everything, tied up on ropes or whatever they could have, and they used them as anti-aircraft. And you've never heard such a din in all your life, of the shells hitting the decks, God. What a din. Anyway, the navy credited us with getting five planes and, anyway, it was, in the afternoon, we had it all morning and we were past Crete.

09:30 And the navy had told us we were out of range now, and there was no, there'd be no more attacks, air attacks, we were going straight to Alexandria. The next thing, there's a high level bomber, it wasn't a Stuka, a stick of bombs landed right along side the boat. Never hit it. Landed right along side. We were, got water all over us, and it blew the plates in on the engine room.

10:00 And, of course, the first thing we know, is the crew, the Dutch crew, they're in their boats, rowing for their lives. They expected the thing to blow up, because the water on the boilers, they expected the boilers to blow up. Anyway, they took us all up on destroyers, and took us back to Crete, dumped us on Crete. But they reckon they never lost a man on, out of that, they got everybody off that boat. And she was going down, I know the first boat, first destroyer came in,

10:30 came in of this side, and they took all, they immediately put guards over every deck, so they got the lower deck of first, all right. No panic, hardly any, no panic really. A few of them tried to get down on ropes, get down, tried to get a couple of decks lower, you know. But one bloke, he's hanging on this rope, and of course, there's a big swell. One minute, the destroyer's there, the next it's another ten feet further down

11:00 and up it comes again, and this bloke's hanging on the rope, and he's saying, yelling out to his mate "What do I do, what do I do?' And one of his mates said "Pull your finger out and scuttle yourself, you nit wit." Of course, he lands on the deck and breaks his leg. And others fell in between the destroyer and the boat, and then, this is, as true as I'm sitting here now, this Pommy sailor with a big boat hook, long boat hook

11:30 fishing a bloke out of the water, and he looks up at us and yells out to us "Good fishing today, boys." And anyway, they get them all off, and as I said, we pull into Crete, and there's eight of us out of our section together, and walk down the jetty at Suda Bay, and the first bloke I see as I walk down the jetty is my brother, he was in the 5th battalion.

12:00 And I knew he was in the army, I didn't know he was there, but he wasn't in the army when I left, because he was older than me, but, yeah, so, anyway we, before I got off the Costa Rica, I've picked up

an overcoat, because we were last off, we just stepped onto, stepped off the destroyer on the top deck. And in this overcoat was a four ounce tin of tobacco, and a big tin of sausages.

12:30 English stuff, you know, it was navy, captain navy cut, English tobacco. But my brother, he had a blanket and I had the overcoat, and nine of us slept under them that night on the side of the road. Because they, nobody knew where we were to go, we didn't have any weapons or anything. Anyway, we've, told us they were making a composite battalion, because there was only 150 of our

13:00 battalion on that boat, the rest were on another boat. And some of the 5th, and some of the 8th Battalion, the 7th Battalion was a complete battalion, the 11th Battalion was a complete battalion, and the 4th Battalion was, but the rest were all bits and pieces, so they made a composite battalion. And what we got was a scabbard and a bayonet. You tied it round your waist with a bit of twine, and a

13:30 old rifle. You touched everything, and it rattled like hell. I reckoned they were used for ceremonial, you know, because they sound good, you know. And got, bandolier of 50 rounds of ammo, and that was it. That was what we got. So we were pretty well armed. And so we were down near a creek, just out of Suda Bay,

14:00 round towards Loretamar [?], and then we sort of took up positions there, because they knew that they were going to land paratroops, their intelligence knew that, and they knew that they were going to invade by sea, try and invade by sea as well. So this composite battalion, was, we were going to guard the entrance to Suda Bay, and that, we were, that was our job.

14:30 But when the paratroops landed, there was a big, I don't know, you wouldn't have seen Suda Bay, or seen the pictures of it or anything?

**Not Suda Bay, no.**

Well, it's an entrance into a harbour, and overlooking that harbour is a big, oh, big, massive, what looks like a mountain, but it's got a flat top. And the heavy artillery, the heavy ack-ack was up there, English, heavy

15:00 ack, was like, protecting the harbour from the bombers. So they, then they decided they'd send us up there, a platoon of us, to guard the ack-ack people in case the paratroopers landed there. Which they could. That's what they'd done at Maleme, they'd landed on top of the ack ackers, they had no protection, so it was grabbed straight away. And they used the Bofors against Bren carriers and things like that.

15:30 So anyway, that's where we finished up, up there. And saw a few ships get sunk. One of the greatest things I ever saw there was, one of the patrol boats that used to patrol the submarine net at the entrance of Suda Bay. This Heinkel came after us, machine gunning the hell out of it, and attacking it, three or four runs over it, of course, this poor little boat suffered something shocking,

16:00 and he's trying to beach it, he's trying to run onto the beach, and this thing's chasing it again, coming after it again, and he came round for another go at him. Come down, and he was that low, machine gunning the hell out of him, and he was that low, that his wing tip hit the mast, spun the plane round like that, straight in. I'll guarantee one of the greatest things I've ever seen. And another thing there, they had the English RAF [Royal Air Force],

16:30 they're flying, Bristol, what are they, oh, 1932 bi-planes up against Messerschmitts, that was like, you know, might as well shoot myself before I go, because they never had a hope. Gladiators, Gladiators was the name of the plane, Gladiators. It was like,

17:00 bi-planes and the Messerschmitts, oh, didn't have a hope. I saw one chasing a Dornier, right, he finished up getting shot down by the tail gunner from the Dornier, the Dornier was getting away from him, he was going faster than the Gladiator, poor bugger. And if they come over from Tobruk with the Hurricanes, they had 20 minutes flying time over Crete and they had to go back again, otherwise they'd run out of petrol. So they didn't have a hope

17:30 there. So then, we were up there, and the, this morning, we wake up and these ack-ack [anti aircraft] gunners have gone. They've all taken off. "Where the hell have they gone?" So anyway, and we see a heap of people walking along the road,

18:00 that goes down bottom away, at the back of us, not, we were looking over the towards the front over the [(UNCLEAR)] there, but at the back of us there, and they're all army and, you know, and so we said, "One of us, somebody had better go down there and find out what's going on?" When we got down there, everybody's taken off, they've all retreated. We didn't know a damn thing. So off we went. We scrambled over the roads and everything back to Sfakia,

18:30 I've got a photo of Sfakia here. It was a, and there, they could take a hundred at a time. The cove there was, they could get two barges, 50 men into each barge. And an officer, you had to be in a group of 50 with an officer, otherwise you couldn't get near the beach. We were there for, I think the third night, we got our 50, and we get up so that we're going on the boat,

19:00 getting on the, we'd get down onto the beach, the barges come in and they had commandos on the goat track, it was only goat track down to the beach, it was only, not much wider, it wouldn't be any wider

than this block of land, where you could get the two barges in. And the commandos' guarding that, keeping them back, went down to go on, where the barges come in, they drop the thing, start to go

19:30 on, next minute, woof, mob's broken through the commandos, straight into the back of us, my mate got shoved onto the barge. I'm next to him, I'm up in the water, and everybody on the left of me is in the water. Of course, the barge is full, my mate's saying, "Come on, I'll drag you on." "No, I'll wait for the next barge." None ever, no more barges, that was the last one. Now, I always reckoned that he was lucky.

20:00 I went to see his grave at [(UNCLEAR)], cemetery, he got killed in 43, so I was the lucky one. Not, I didn't think so at the time, oh, no, but that's what happened.

20:30 **Perhaps we'll take a photo of that tomorrow?**

Yeah.

Did you ever hear Barry from the Bush on 3AW? In The Sun, four or five

21:00 years ago, he had a piece in The Sun about it, near Anzac Day, and it was a piece about it, and he had a photo of this, there is a park up there, and they've named it the E.J. Wilkins Memorial Park. That was him. So, that's where we got grabbed there.

**How many**

21:30 **of you where there, on the….?**

Well, of our crowd, there was only 150 there and not, some of them had gone off before. Because the, they'd picked specialists, they reckon. The transport sergeant, he'd been taken off, and others had been taken off, and they were, they all finished up as officers, they took them off, and that's what they were taking them off for. And he went to the, Eddie went to the 7th Battalion, because there were 600 of the 7th Battalion

22:00 left on Crete. So when our, the 7th Battalion, then had got 600 reinforcements, so they wanted some experienced blokes to go in there as NCO's [Non-Commissioned Officers]. Quite a few of our blokes went there, to the 7th Battalion. That's how he went there. And those sort of things happened all the time, you know. Anyway, the, actually, the colonel of the 7th Battalion, Colonel

22:30 Walker. We, everybody called him Myrtle, and he was a good bloke, he got off. He was on the ship and he got off to stay with his men. He sort of said "600 of them are staying there. I'm staying with them." Not many men would do that. So then he got off, and he just said "Well, I've got orders to capitulate the island" and that was it. So the paratroopers come along and the alpine troops and marched us back.

23:00 We went into a camp at a place called, well we called it Ski-insters, [(UNCLEAR)] called it Skinners. On the way back, I tell you it made us mad, all these paratroopers are smoking Craven A cigarettes, and we haven't got a cigarette. Because they're smoking our cigarettes. And we couldn't get any before either, so I don't know where they got them from. And,

23:30 because they reckoned there was none on the island, you know, "No, there's no cigarettes." They must have been in the stores somewhere. And on the way back, we passed, we were going into this camp, Skinners, and the Italians were coming out. They were going out to Suda Bay, to go back to Italy. The Greeks had had them there. The prisoners the Greeks took in Albania. Did you know

24:00 that the Italians were fighting the Greeks beforehand in Albania?

**I had heard something about that.**

The Italians owned, had Albania at that time. And they were trying to come in through Albania to Greece, and Greece, all horse drawn the stuff. All antiquated equipment and everything, and they were belting the hell out of the Italians. They were, they had heaps of prisoners, and that's where they kept them, on Crete.

24:30 Well, as I'm going on this Italian's going the other way, and he handed me a bag of sugar. A bag of sugar. Just handed it to me. I couldn't get over it, you know, anyway. So, generally, we were our burial party and everything in there. Burying the dead. And

25:00 they tried to make us take the boots off our blokes, they wanted the boots. And, from Tassie Basil Blitz, it sounds like a German name, doesn't it, Basil Blitz, and he said "No, we always bury our dead with the boots on." So he used to take them off, so they didn't bother us, they let us do it. But while we were there, an Austrian paratrooper,

25:30 was only 21, university student, spoke good English. He said to me "You'll be going to Germany." And he said "I'll tell my mother that you are going there. I'll write and tell her about you, and I'll give you…." gave me her address, and he said "You go and see my mother. I'll write and tell her, she'll look after you." My God, he didn't know what the hell was going on in his own country.

26:00 That's the truth. That's the truth. And they were pretty good blokes, and most of the paratroopers spoke

English. They were nearly all university students. They were either Austrians or Bavarians, from the south of Germany, and then there were the Alpine troops which were others that came in, they come in on the gliders. And then we went to Salonika. That

26:30 was the worst place ever. It was an old barracks that the Turks had had. Everywhere you went, where the Italians had been was lousy. You weren't in there ten minutes, and you got lice and fleas and everything else. Couldn't avoid it. We were there, we were at Skeens [?] full of lice and fleas. The only water you had was, there was an aqueduct out in front along the

27:00 road, and you were let out in batches to have a wash. Of course, you all went up the head otherwise you were getting dirty water. So, and you couldn't get rid of lice. If there was a patch of grass, and there'd be somebody there with a shirt off, trying to burn all the eggs out of them, you know, or matches or cigarette lighter or anything, trying to burn the eggs. But it didn't make any difference, they'd come again. Then in Salonika,

27:30 that was an old, the Turks had had that, and then the Greeks of course, it was originally Greek, though, and then the Turks. They only got rid of the Turks out of there, in 1913, and that, they'd had the Italians in there too, and that was the same. Lousy. And they had bed bugs as well, because they had wooden bunks, and we, I refused to sleep on them, I slept on cobblestones, blue stone pitches, where they used to run the horse drawn, the wagons in

28:00 the four or five of us slept there. But that didn't do any good, you still got them, and at Salonika, all you got was lentil soup and a little bit of bread like that for the day. And then you got B class troops, they weren't fit for front line duty, you know, and they were bloody shocking. They were.

28:30 And it was a bit of a shock after these paratroopers and that, you know, but one night they, we were in the barracks, where the dorm, where we slept in was here, you walked out there and just to the right was a toilet block. And there's an open doorway at that end, and an open doorway at this end, and the wire was about 20 feet behind it.

29:00 And this night, a Kiwi went, a lot of them had dysentery and everything, so of course, he goes out, this Kiwi sergeant, he was he went out to the toilet, and bang, and there's a bloke got his rifle resting on the wire lined up on the two doorways. Soon as he walked in the door, he's right in his sights. Bang, down he went. Of course, he screamed and of course, his mate rushed out, bang, got nine in one night before they stopped him.

29:30 **Who was shooting at them?**

Germans, one of these B grade German blokes. I suppose he thought "I'm not going to kill one fighting, so I'll get one here." He didn't kill them all, but he hit nine of them that night before they stopped him. So of course, after that, not many people wanted to go out to the toilet of a night, I could tell you. Yeah, he was, there were Cypriots there too in there, and

30:00 these Cypriots were selling eggs, cooked eggs. So I thought "I'm going to watch these blokes, where they're getting the eggs from" and they used to lift up this grate, and go down the storm water drain, and they're selling eggs the next morning. So I thought, "Well I'll get onto this, I've got to get out of here." so I, one of the fellows from the 2/2nd Battalion, we, I told him

30:30 about it, I told him, he said "Right, tonight we're going to go." Some mug started a two up game over this grate, you know, heads are right, that's another one down the drain. Finished up, 140 down the drain. And one bloke got stuck, he's got a pack on his back, and he's stuck in the drain and they can't move, and of course, with all the commotion,

31:00 the Germans wake up and rush in the guards, bang, they put a Tommy gun, and from the other end, they woke up where it went, it used to go into a dry creek bed, right, and took us, down the other end, there's shooting up there. And so they were dragging them out, and those that weren't wounded were getting clobbered as well, getting belted up because it's down there. Ruined it for everybody.

31:30 No sense. No sense. It could have gone on for ages. You know, you could get a dozen or so out a night, without any trouble. No, they were, had to rush in and spoil it. So that was the end of that.

**Were many people killed that night?**

I don't know exactly, never heard exactly how many were killed. I know one of our blokes was down there, he finished up in hospital for a fair while. He used to live in, just across the road up there, in May Street,

32:00 which is nearly opposite, this, the other side of Tuckem Road [?]. And his brother-in-law, I finished up, I was in partnership with his brother-in-law, before I knew who he was. That he was in our mob. And then they said they wanted a thousand to go to Germany. so I said "Well, I'm going to be in that, because I'll die in this joint." you know, in Salonika, I reckon I would have died there.

32:30 So we, they get us, when we got, when we went to Salonika, right, we went by Italian ships to the harbour, and then they marched us through the town to this barracks. Now the Greeks all lined the streets and they're giving us cigarettes and food. And the guards are belting them with their rifle butts, but they're still trying to give it to you, even after that.

33:00 So anybody out of the 6th Battalion, or the 6th Division who was in Greece and Crete has got a lot of time for the Greeks, always. So, then, they give us a loaf of bread like that, and a tin of meat. That's food for three days, you're going to be on the train for three days. So, and there's 50 in a cattle truck,

33:30 and you've got a, you know the old square kerosene tins? Probably four gallons they were. One of them full of water, that was your water, and the other one was your toilet. For 50 of us. And some of the blokes ate everything as soon as they got it. Never worried about the three days. Well, in three days time, we got to Belgrade. We've been shunted in to sidings everywhere, because there were troop trains going everywhere,

34:00 and we're shunted out of the way every time. Three days. So, we got more water there, no food. So those that made it last for three days were lucky. We were there for another seven days. So we got to Hammelburg in Germany, and they tried to get us out of the truck, well we stood up and promptly fell down again, because we couldn't even stand up, so they brought down an army field

34:30 kitchen and cooked like, a big thick soup. We all had a feed and rested for about half an hour, and it gets about, or maybe an hour, and they start marching us to this camp, and we had to go up over the river and up this hill. So we're going up this hill, and then it started. Everybody got diarrhoea; they're all dropping their trunks on the side of the road. It would have been funny in a different circumstance, with a thousand blokes marching up here all of a sudden, oh God.

35:00 And that was what the conditions were, and we got down and they, de-loused us, and gave us a shower and pinched all our clothes, and gave us old French and Belgian uniforms. Meant for putties you know, but they finished up here. And did you see Schindler's List? You know the footwear they wore? That's what we had, and a bit of rag

35:30 round your toes to keep, for your feet. And a shirt, and old shirt, and the jacket, nothing else. And that winter was the coldest winter they'd had for 25 years. Some people said it was the coldest for 75, but the Bavarians where we were told us it was the coldest for 25 years, you can imagine what it was like. We bloody froze. And you got nothing. We were building a road, the first job we got, first

36:00 working party we were sent on, we're building a road. So you dug the rock, the boulders out of the quarry with a crowbar pick and that, and you loaded it into a, into a thing to get it up to the crusher, and you lifted onto the deck, and another bloke had to lift it in the crusher, went in by hand. And you got three spuds and two slices of bread and a cup of

36:30 (UNCLEAR) tea. I don't know what sort of herbs they used to brew it, it was hot and warm, that's all you could say. That was it, that was your day's food, and you were to do with that. See, and then they cut it down, they cut it down to one slice of bread, and this, I got up, and you had to go, and they gave me three spuds and one slice of bread. This guard's standing there, and I said "You bloody have it." You know.

37:00 So he, whack, with the rifle butt. Next day, we're going out to work, and I'm down the back, shuffling along, and he come up tapped me, and gave me a cigarette. He tried to tell me, he tried to explain to me that he was shell shocked. And because I sort of threw it at him, and told him to have it, he just went bang, reaction, you know. He turned out all right, but I woke up in a big, a bit careful of him.

37:30 **We're just near the end of the tape, and I was just wondering how long you were there for at that place?**

That place, I was there for a few months.

**At Hammelburg was it?**

Oh, at Hammelburg, in the camp. We weren't there too long, and we were shoved out to the working party. The working party was a place called Ebelsbach. Yeah, Ebelsbach or Elmsbach [probably was Ebelsbach]. There was two, one was a hospital, I was in that too, that's how I get them mixed up.

38:00 Could have been Elmsbach, where we were in there, 50 of us there, and we were in a synagogue.

**That was where the rock crushing working party was?**

Yes, we were in a synagogue, in a town, a small town and all it was, was a double decker bunks, just a platform right round two walls, double decker, straw on them.

38:30 And the toilet was two 44 gallon drums, down the head of the stairs. The stairs were, it was a big wide stairway, it had double doors on it, and it was, were two 44 gallon drums, and that was your toilet for the night. And that would be overflowing, both would be overflowing in the morning. And that's besides the one that was coming down on you, if you were on the bottom. Wasn't very nice place, but I mean,

39:00 that, there, and it was that cold, and malnutrition and that and urinating 14, or 16 times an hour, unbelievable.

# Tape 3

00:30 **So, just to re-iterate, you were there until the beginning of the winter?**

Yes, just about the beginning, it would have been the first month when it wasn't too bad, you know. While we were there, another fellow from Box Hill, Archie MacAlpine, he was in the 7th Battalion, and he had bleeding ulcers.

01:00 And we were going away there this day, and this Frenchman came along, French POW, they had just walked along, half of them worked in factories or anything, you know, but he was smoking, I wanted a cigarette off him, for Archie, he was laying down, he had bleeding ulcers, he was in agony. So I thought "I'll get him a smoke." so I got it off him, lit it up, and I had a draw and I gave it to him. And this guard

01:30 came up, and he said, told Archie to get up and get to work. And I said "He's crook, he's sick." and he said "Go to work." Anyway, he fixed his bayonet, and he went to stab him and I jumped in front of this bloke, and I went like that, and you know, he backed off. And I tell you what, Archie, he married a girl in Scotland after the war, and he had a butcher shop in Box Hill, Box Hill South, in Canterbury

02:00 Lane. And she developed cancer, and she was dying and they reckoned they couldn't, nothing, so he was taking her home. This is well after the war, you know, years later, and he rang me up and he said "I want you to come over, I'm having a do in the hall in Watt Street, Box Hill for all the old mates and everything because I'm taking my wife back to Scotland, so I want you to come over." So "All right." Anyway, I got there a bit late, and it was about

02:30 70 people there, you know, 70 blokes, all from the RSL [Returned and Services League] at Box Hill and that. Of course, when I come up, he got me up on the stage, and he said "Everybody, I'd like you to meet Don Stephenson, this is the bloke that saved my life." I reckoned it was all bull [exaggeration], I didn't think that at all, you know, it's just what you do, you look after your mates. But he thought it was a big

03:00 deal. Sort of embarrassed me a bit. Anyway, I've never seen him since, he tore home [went home quickly], I don't think he even come back. And he didn't come over to the farm, he stopped at Ellsbach, or Elmsbach, I think it was Ellsbach. Elmsbach was the hospital I'm pretty sure, and he worked as a butcher in the place. So he had a

03:30 probably comfortable job, he'd get himself a feed. He wouldn't go hungry, would he, working with a butcher. Anyway, I don't, from what I know, he never even moved from that place, which, if you wanted to, I suppose you could. Anyway, this day, they packed us up, 18 of us, our section, 18 sorted us out, "18, right." They marched us over to this village, its name

04:00 was Oberwaldverungen [?]. Oberwald means over the forest. I don't know what the verungen meant. Anyway, we go to the village square, 18, and they've got all these people there. What, to get a person working for them on the farm, they had to have a son or a husband in the army, or in the, in the military. So,

04:30 they're all there, you see, and they've got the 18, and they're all picking out the big blokes, feeling their muscles, it's no bull, feeling their, it was like a slave market, "Come here." You know. So there's three of us about my size, we would have been the smallest. At any rate, I go with this woman, and go back to the farmhouse, like, their farms in the villages like that in Bavaria, they're not like a farm here.

05:00 Like you've got, how could I tell you, like say Bentley, the shopping centre, that would be the village. Now all around that, they'd have a piece of land up here, have a piece down here along the creek, where they'd grow the feed, winter feed, and they'd have big plots of land scattered all around the village. They'd all have different blocks, and they'd only stones separating them, so fences or anything like that,

05:30 and I never saw them ever have any arguments over them. So they must have got on pretty well, and that was a Catholic village. Now from my experience, you got treated better in a Catholic village, than what you did in a Protestant village. Because the Protestant village was more into Hitler. Anyway, they took me back to the farmhouse, there's a loaf of bread, a pound of butter and a big jug like that

06:00 of Moost like, it's a, Moost, what, like cider. So, every ten minutes she'd be poking her head around to have a look, and I'm still attacking the bread and butter. And any rate, I think I ate about half a loaf of bread before I'd had enough. So then, that must have been about four o'clock in the afternoon by that time.

06:30 Nine o'clock at night, we're still going, getting beets out of the, picking up, carting all the beets into the cellar and loading them into the cellar for the winter. They were, about nine o'clock at night. Then I've got to feed the cows, change the straw and everything, put in there for the cows and everything, and that's at ten o'clock at night. So when the, when the

07:00 winter came, it wasn't too bad. What they did with their potatoes, right, they'd scrape out a big pit, put all the potatoes in there, cover it with straw, and put all the dirt back on top of it. So, when the ground froze, it wouldn't freeze the potatoes. They had nowhere to store them; they didn't have enough room to store them. As soon as it thawed out, they'd pull out their spuds and, they had plenty of, it wasn't

07:30 too bad on the farm, because you got, you ate the same as they did. And you should have seen them killing a pig, though. They had to notify the state that they were going to kill a pig, the inspector come along, and he weighed it. They had to have half, so he knew exactly how much meat he was going to get, they had to have it weighed. The state got half the pig; the farmers had the other half.

08:00 So he came along the morning that they're killing the pig, and that's when he does it all, and off he goes. Well, the pig's tied to a post, hit between the eyes with the blunt end of an axe, knife into the jugular vein straight away, and that's all into the pot, stirring it up, that's for their bloodwurst, you know. And he's in, boiling in a wooden trestle

08:30 sort of thing, trough, full of boiling water, and he's in there, hairs are off, and they're eating it within half an hour, it's cut up in no time and they cut into bits for the bloodwurst, that's got to be done straight away. All the time they're doing that, that's got to be stirred the blood, and there's, that's it. And they lived on that all of winter, that pig. And cabbage, pickled cabbage, sauerkraut, and it's not bad. If it's done properly, pork and sauerkraut is very nice.

09:00 I got to liking it anyway, and the funny part about it was though, he stamped the pig, the inspector, so they got that for him, right. As soon as he's gone, and they've killed that one, there's another pig trotted out and he's knocked on the head too. They got two for the price of one. He doesn't get half of that, though. So that's making sure they got enough to eat.

**Did they treat you well**

09:30 **there?**

Oh, yeah, not too bad. Not too bad at all. It would have last him the winter, and this big fellow from Coalcan, Alan Yantz, and his hands would cover a, he had a hand that would cover a milk bucket, you know, big hands, huge, Swedish. And where we were, there was a road came in like that, came down a dip and the, up go past a church there, and right opposite there,

10:00 where it turned down was they've got these, stages of the cross right there up this big hill, right. So the kids got toboggans, the kids and that, one Sunday morning, he borrowed a toboggan off these kids, and he charged it up the top of this hill where the crosses are, and there's four of us on it with, Yantzy's on the back, and we come hurtling down that hill, and of course, this road's ice now, the road is ice, that's snow, hurtling down here,

10:30 hit the ice, shoot up here. And by that time, Yantzy's off the back, he's hanging on, and he's (UNCLEAR) and we shoot up there and get to the church as they're all coming out the church, God. Knocking them all out of the way. So, quite funny it was, but the guard didn't like that too much though, so he stopped us having that. And they, the young blokes were going in the army

11:00 being called up to the army and they challenged us to a game of soccer. We'd, there might have been one of our blokes played soccer, the rest played rugby or Aussie Rules. So we played a mixture of them. We belted hell out of these kids. All the locals, they said to us after "You can't work too well, but you can play football all right." So at any rate,

11:30 then, it thawed out, and by that time, you start work at five o'clock in the morning, and you are finishing about 11 o'clock at night. And a young bloke from west, out of the 11th Battalion, name's Fraser, I've forgotten his Christian name now, his father was a politician in the west, he was a Liberal politician in the west, I think. And he said, "Do you want to have a go at escaping?" and I said "Yeah, too right." So he said

12:00 "Well, I'll be with you." Well, and they got a thrashing machine there and they had all this wheat and everything that's been stuck in there rotten for years, it's full of black dust, you know from the tray grooves and everything. And they decide that they were going to thresh all this wheat, so they get a thresher in this village, and him and I are on there, loading the sheaves of wheat into the threshing machine, and they're throwing them down from the loft to us,

12:30 except it, there were a couple of girls there, and they'd yell out, you know, and you'd look up and it'd hit you, bang, right in the face and you'd be covered, and we both finished up sick, we both got crook, I was in bed for a week, and they carted him off to hospital. And they, I got tablets like that, like horse tablets, I could hardly get them down. Anyway, I was there for a week and I come good. He never come back, he died. Never ever found out what he died of, or what

13:00 it was, but it was just black dust dropped down on us. I've had a crook chest ever since, so that's probably what's killed him. So that fell through, and then two blokes, one of them out of our, my battalion, and a bloke from Sydney, Len, Lenny Steele, they arrived from another working party where they had been causing a bit of trouble, they got rid of them. So they turned up there, well, Bob Puntry [?] he was in our mob,

13:30 so he said, I said, "I was going to escape with this bloke, but he died. Do you want to be in it?" and he said "Yes." and he said "Lenny will be in it too." so we saved up our, by that time, we're getting Red Cross parcels, and we got British battle dress, boots and everything, and a slouch hat, and what beat me, we all got our correct size. So they must have got them from the army, you know, through the Red Cross, come through the international Red Cross, so they must have got our

14:00 size from the army, for sure. Because we got the right size boots and everything, and a slouch hat, well we left that behind, we didn't take that. So at any rate, we save up our food and there's three of us, and we've got British battle dress, and the overcoat, and a forage cap. So off we go, we were out for 10 days. And we come to this place, where we, what we did, we walked along the side of the road at

14:30 night and then as soon as it started to get light, we'd look for somewhere we could get a bit of cover and we camped there for the day, as soon as it got dusk, off we go again. And, how we knew where we were going, the local Bürgermeister [Mayor] used to come in and talk to us, you know, he wanted to know about Australia and everything, and we used to tell him. So I said to him one day "Have you got a map of the area, so that we can see where we are?" "Oh, yeah." So he got a little map, he thought, it was only a little

15:00 thing, it wasn't a proper map, but it gave us the direction we had to go and everything, you know. But, anyway, we come to Hammelburg, and we couldn't get over the river, so we said "Well, what are we going to do, we can't get over this river." So he said, Lenny said, "I'll tell you what we'll do," he said, "We'll march through the town, three abreast, and if anybody

15:30 challenges us, we'll give them the Heil Hitler salute." I said "Right oh, we'll give it a go." Because they had like a pioneer battalion there as well, their uniforms were brown, not, they were lighter than ours, but in the dark, they wouldn't know. But the only thing we were missing was the Swastika arm band, the red arm band with the Swastika and that on it. So that's what we did, we marched over the bridge, through the town, some blokes came out of

16:00 the guest house, which was a boozer, they'd be going back to their camp in Hammelburg. "Heil Hitler." "Heil Hitler." Never took any notice, just went straight though. It pays to be cheeky. Anyway, we finally got caught, I don't know what happened, but somebody must have spotted us, because we're going down the road, or on the side of the road. All of a sudden, these blokes popped up from everywhere, all around us, the home guard in

16:30 this place, it was. And, so they marched us into the town, it was only a little town, and handed us over to the local copper. And he said to us, "Englander?" We said "No Australian." He said "Australian. Cretea?" We said "Yes." He said "Me Cretea." He got wounded and he was invalided out of the army, so I thought "Oh, well, you know." And

17:00 anyway, after they went, he turned out that he was all right. He said he'd fought on Crete." And he was proud that he'd fought us." You know. He must have thought that we were all right, because in the morning, he came in with a plate of scones that he got his wife to make for us. So he wasn't too bad. So then they took us back to Hammelburg, and 30 days bread and water, and I went to another working party in a different town.

17:30 I was only there a few days; I don't even know the name of the town. I was working in a sawmill, and there was three of us working in this saw mill. Jack Cummings from Narrandera, and a bloke from the west, a red-headed mug. And Jack and I had lifted up this big log up, huge log, and both of us on the butt, lifted it up, and he was supposed to put a sapling under that to prop it up, so he did, and I'm standing there, Jack's that side.

18:00 And he put the sapling in and he said "Right oh, it's right." So we let it go and whack, down it comes. We've got it up here, mind you, and we're sitting it on my knee here, and it landed on my foot. So Jack's got hold of the thing, and thrown it off on his own, and he had to cut the lace of my boot to get my boot off. So the guard said "Oh, we'll take him down to the doctor." So Jack's piggybacked me down to this quack [doctor], and he got hold of my foot

18:30 and went…., and that was that, I woke up on my back in the barracks after that. So off I went to the hospital the next morning. I've got to take everything I've got, hobble along, hop along on one foot with a crook knee because I've had a whack on that as well, and get on the train, and I'm going, the guard said, "There's a seat up there." so "Well, go up there and sit down." and I'm going along there, and this bloke's shoved his foot out and tripped me up. I tell you what, everybody knew what I meant, they didn't

19:00 understand the language, but everybody knew what I meant, I could tell you. But anyway, a few of them went crook at him [were angry], some of the Germans went crook at him for doing it. But they, I've got a foot twice the size, you know. Anyway, then I've got to hobble two kilometres to this hospital. POW [Prisoner of War] hospital. And I get there and I'm having a shower, and this Scotch doctor comes in, and he said "I hope you're not malingering." and I poked my foot under his nose, and I said, "If you had a bloody

19:30 foot like that, would you be malingering?' He didn't like me; he wouldn't touch me after that. We had a Russian bloke there, he used to look after me. Russian doctor, he wouldn't go near me, the Scotsman, probably frightened I'd abuse him again.

**Did the Russian doctor speak English as well?**

None, no. You don't have to speak English, everybody can understand one another. Without, you know, going into

20:00 details, but everybody gets the gist, with sign language and everything, and a bit of, everybody, most

people have got a couple of words of English. And then we all had a couple of words of German, and the Serbs, we could understand them. There were a lot of Serbs there, a lot of Serbs in that place. Of course, they were loyal, they fought the Germans, and they didn't last very long, but at least they fought

20:30 them. And anyway, this Russian was a pretty good doctor. The orderlies which, there was, one from Leeton in New South Wales, one from Melbourne, Pinky, Pinkerton, and a Russian, Serge, Sergy. He would have been a film star, the Russian, you ought to seen him, big fellow, massive, well built, curly hair, a really good looking bloke, you know, a real

21:00 man's man. If he'd been a, if he was a Yank, he would have been on the films, without any worries. And him and the, Ripper Bynon [?] from Leeton, oh, the, what they used to get up to, those two. They had the opportunity, you know. There was a fellow from, it's not the Laurie Oaks, but that was this fellow's name from New South Wales, well, he had the doctors

21:30 in everybody, the Germans in particular. The German doctor used to come in, and while I was there, I got tinea. I had it from here, all around there. Oh, hell of a mess, they painted me blue, purple, red, every colour you could think off. Anyway, this German doctor would say "What's wrong with him now? Show me." Oh, he wouldn't even look at me in the end, just walk past.

22:00 So I could have been bludging there for months. And then, this Laurie Oaks, he had them bamboozled, because he'd get out there, and he'd get out and he'd be on his own, he'd run down the other end. Playing tennis against himself. No bat, no tennis racquet or anything, they all reckoned he was mad. Mad enough all right, he was trying to get repatriated. Because they did have a

22:30 repatriation of a few. Some of our blokes got repatriated. One bloke in particular from Cairns, he did, he had shocking asthma, he couldn't move. He'd only got it over there, and you know he could hardly walk, and so he got repatriated home in 1943, and a few others. At any rate, while we were there, this, they

23:00 found out if you were a corporal or above, you didn't have to work. That was in the Geneva Convention. So I said "Well, that's not a bad go." and this Bluey Cork from the ASC, [Australian Service Corps], he'd lost an eye in Greece. How he lost it was, if they were driving a truck in Greece, they drove continually, because some of them would run them off the road.

23:30 They were only narrow roads, shocking mountain roads; you've never seen anything like it. And they were getting bombed and machine gunned all day, some of them had enough, and those who would drive would drive them continually, and Bluey, and the roads, half of them you'd be on the side of a hill like that, and that side would be like that. So he was on one, and he wanted to get round that side, so he's jumped out, ran round, and you know the,

24:00 where you had the bracket sticking out that they dropped the pin into, to hold the tailgate up. Caught his eye on that as he went past, ripped his eye right out. So he said "I'll promote you." So he said, "You've got your papers." I said "Yes." He wrote in them that I had been promoted in the field to a corporal, and dated it and everything. It looked pretty good. At any rate, I went back to him, after I'd left there and went back to the, Hammelburg, the main camp,

24:30 I said "No, I'm not going to work anymore." So they sent me down to this bloke, that was in Bavaria, too, and they were all NCO's and everything apparently, 383, I think they called it, or 332. I was there for three or four months, I suppose, two or three months, oh, I'd had enough of it. When the Canadians came in, they started handcuffing us, because, the Canadians, landed on,

25:00 when they went to Dieppe, they didn't have time to worry about prisoners, so they just tied their hands up, right, and their feet, and tied them together, left them laying there. Because they had nobody to look after them, they only, undermanned as they were, they shouldn't have even gone there at any rate. So of course, when they, because they all got taken prisoner, and they come in, and by that time, we were getting Red Cross parcels and

25:30 everything, and cigarettes. We'd give the Canadians cigarettes until they got some, and they, you know, pretend they handcuffed us, so every morning, we'd be handcuffed at a certain time. Now if you were having a wash or something, and you were a bit slow, and you, they'd put your hands through the wire outside, handcuff you on the other side of the wire, and you'd stand there all damn day. Until

26:00 we woke up the, the keys on the Cross and Blackhawk Herrington's tomato sauce tins, you know those old oval tins? We could open the handcuffs with them. So then, in the end, the guard used to come in and hang them on the back of the door, hang them on a nail on the back of the door. It was a waste of time. One bloke in particular, a little Pom, a sergeant, when the International Red Cross arrived at this camp, he's got his handcuffs on to show them, "This

26:30 is what they're doing to us." You know. Making a big song and dance about it, but, that was at the time when they were hanging them on the door. Anyway, he couldn't get the damn things undone. He had to go to the Germans and ask them to undo them. I reckon it served him right. At any rate, at that time, I heard that my brother was up at, in Poland. So I went along to see these Germans, I said "Can I go up and see my brother?"

27:00 he said "Do you want to join him?" I said "Yes." "Oh well." He said "We'll see." So at any rate, I think

that in the end there was about five of us that went up to Lamsdorf, which is in Silesia, and get up there, and I find out he's in a coal mine, so I said "Hell with that, I'm not going down there." So, I went out to this place there,

27:30 Meinfeld was the name in German, but it was, I don't know what the name was in Poland before, but it was Polish originally, in the Polish Corridor, and that was a sawmill. And there was only 10 working there, 10 on the working party, that's, that was this, where, there was eight of us there, I think, or seven of us, a couple of them weren't there. And

28:00 we had to, we what happened was, in the, in our, where we were, was an old pig sty, and it came in, the front of it was onto the platform at the railway station, that's where the guesthouse and everything was, on the platform, and this was the pig sty belonging to that. And that had a little door there, was a pretty low door, and a window alongside it,

28:30 and it came in and then stepped down, and that's where we slept at the back. Had five double decker bunks, right, and a table the table was made out of tongue and groove flooring, and it was a bit open. So anyway, we decided, we got a hacksaw blade from in where the chain, where the saws were, got a hacksaw blade. So we

29:00 got a lump of wood, measured it, a big window in this room at the back where we slept, it was about that wide and probably four foot high. And it had two bars, flat bars across there and five bars down, five? Three. There was five spaces, three bars. And we measured that, and we got a bit of wood, timber longer, we marked

29:30 the bars, the middle bars. Got this wood, forced it in, sprung that, and we cut in between that and at the top with this hacksaw. We did it night after night, it did to do it. And we put the saw blade on top, it fitted in where the tongue and groove was, and put it in the gap. They used to look under that table, they never looked at the top. Never looked

30:00 at that. And we cut it out, our, and every month, and the officer in, he was called the control officer, because he controlled the whole area where prisoners were working, and working parties, you know. They had a company of guards that looked after them all. They used to come down every month and test those windows, those bars. Never woke up. We couldn't get over it. Anyway, I'll go and see if it's still there, if

30:30 the place is still, it would still be like it, if they haven't altered it. Because after we escaped, we tried that, and it didn't, they didn't wake up. We never got out that way, anyway. Well, we did get out that way, but we told them "We got out another way." I'll tell you about it later. Anyway, and while we were there, there was four Poles working with us. They taught us how to make our own grog. We, this saw mill, was saw mill and a flour

31:00 mill. So we used to knock off the flour, and we got the Poles, worked further away. They worked at the beet sugar factory, so we swapped them the flour for the sugar, and the Poles they taught us how to make it. I could, reckon I could still do it. Two kilos of sugar to a litre of water, yeah, add a bit of, all you need is a piece of burned bread and a bit of yeast.

31:30 Put it in a vat; sit the bread on top of the water, with the yeast on top. Cover it over, leave it for three days then put it through a still, which we made from an old rubbish tin. And we wired the lid on it, and corked up the top with clay and everything, and we got a coil, copper coil, we had that in there, and come to a drum, come out 90% alcohol, and then we'd break it down with burnt sugar. Burnt sugar and water, and

32:00 break it down, it just looked like whiskey. Colour of whiskey and everything, tasted a bit fiery but. And this Welsh bloke and I, we'd be out there with the cross cut saw, cutting up logs and we'd be singing and everything, we were quite happy, I could tell you. And all the Germans reckoned we were off, we were mad. They used to call us the "Forique-ringlender." the two of us, you know, we were there singing. And we got a gramophone and two records from the Red

32:30 Cross, we had it for a fortnight. And one of them was Peggy Lee, Why Don't You Do Right they were from the 1943 swing series these records, and the records got worn out in that fortnight. We had them going all day long, we'd be working away, singing and that, carrying on. Any rate, a guard we got there for a while, he came from Baden-Baden.

33:00 First day he was there, at the back of that place where we were, there was a wire cage as well, right, big barbed wire cage, and they used to lock that cage, and our door was open until about eight o'clock at night then they'd lock it. He didn't even bother to lock the cage, this bloke. He come in at half past nine, he said "Oh, you're all still here." we said "Yeah, why?" he said, "Well, I know you got,

33:30 there's Poles working around here and all the rest of it, and I know you're friendly with them." he said "As long as you don't cause any trouble. As long as you're back here by half past nine, it's all right with me, don't cause any trouble." So when you got a bloke like that, you wouldn't do it in any case. But they used to change them every month or couple of months, because they didn't want them to get friendly. And of course, he'd share, if he had cigarettes, he's shared them with us or anything, so we'd do the same with him.

34:00 Anyway, he, they shifted him, and we got another bloke there, and he told us “Now be careful, this bloke’s killed three POWs already. He’s already shot three. And nobody likes him, his own company never liked him at all.” he said “He very bad man.” Any rate, as soon as he’s gone, this bloke lines us up, and he’s looking straight at me, and he says “Before I leave here, I’m going to shoot one of you.” And he’s looking straight at me, and I said “Well, you’re not going to get much of a chance

34:30 with me, I’m going.” Not to him, but. Anyway, a Yank was there at that time, he was an American pilot flying with the RAF, before the Yanks come into the war. Now he came there, so he could escape. So I said, we had a meeting that night, “Well, what are we going to do?” I said “I know what I’m going to do, I’m going.” And I turned around to him and said “Do you want to be in it?” “Oh, no, not really, not yet.” so

35:00 this Welsh bloke that we used to drink the grog with, he said “I’ll come with you.” So we got civilian clothes off the Poles we worked with, working clothes, and I had a parcel sent from my sister, this is what got me, right, and she wrote and told me there was a Christmas cake, and what was in it and everything. When I opened it, I’ve got a green, pale green shirt with red and white stripes,

35:30 I’ve got a pair of boots, not my size and a few other things, oh, and a light grey polo neck sweater, and different things, and a note, from the San Francisco Red Cross “When this parcel was shipped from your boats to us to go to Europe, it was empty.” That’s our bloody wharf labourers and our sailors, merchant navy,

36:00 they were knocking them off. It, I wasn’t the only one, heaps of them got them like that empty, and a note from the San Francisco Red Cross telling them it was empty, and they’d filled it up. They wouldn’t even know what size you were, or anything. So anyway, the shirt come in handy, and I got a hat and clothes off the Poles, and they gave us German money, they were good blokes, they were all only young fellows, they came from near Krakow, so at any rate, and we used to load timber onto these, onto the

36:30 train. This was only a local train, and it was this, there was two girls, conductresses, one was a blonde, and one was a brunette, German, and they were pretty friendly, and we’d be loading timber onto it, and they’d be talking to us and that. Anyway, we got out this night, well, what happened, we made a key, and we could get our hand out this window onto the platform, and we could get it down and open this old fashioned lock. We made a key

37:00 out of a bit of metal, you know, a bit of three eight rod, and flattened the end of it, and we could open this, so we had the story pat with the other blokes, we’d keep the window, we tell them, “You tell them we got out there, we’ll tell them the same if we’re caught.” So, right oh, so any rate, off we go, so we walk down to the next train, next station and get on the train, and the brunette one,

37:30 the brunette conductress is on it. She didn’t turn a hair, she said “Where are you going?” in German, “Where are you off to?” you know, we said “We’re going to Switzerland.” she said “Oh, well, you have to go to Namslau, first, then you have to go to Breslau, then you’ve got to go to Leipzig, then you go to Dresden, and you can get the express to Munich, and then you can get a local train from there, and you got to this place, a little village only about 30 miles from the Swiss border. If you get to there, you should be all right.”

38:00 So we get to the end of the line, and we’ve got to wait, she said “You’ll have to wait for a couple of hours for a train to get back to Namslau.” Oh, so anyway, when we get off the train, I reckon this bloke walking up to speak with the Poles, so we follow him, and it was, you go into the barracks, and there’s about a hundred Poles there, boy, you should have seen them when we walked in. Anyway, we explained what we were, and we weren’t going to dob [inform]

38:30 them in if anything happened. So then, we went back, caught the train to Namslau, bought the tickets to Breslau, got to Breslau all right, bought the ticket to Leipzig, got to Leipzig, bought the ticket to Dresden, got to Dresden, and what brought it back vividly was last year, when they had the floods in Europe, and they showed the Dresden railway station, I don’t know if you saw it, but all you could see to start with was this big glass window, with bars,

39:00 you know, sections of window at the end. It’s huge place it was. And that was it. Well, we got to Dresden, we had about three or four hours to wait for the train to Munich, never been challenged at all, so we were waiting there, and all this hall, it’s a huge waiting hall, and the door was up there, and we down this end and the entrance to the platforms was there. And all along there, right round there was people, waiting for

39:30 trains. And the coppers come in with their, you know, the big breast plates, you’ve seen them in pictures and things, I think, some shoots, they call them. And they came in, checking the papers. And Taffy Price said to me “We’ll be gone here.” I said “No, we won’t.” he said “Why?” I said “There’s two blokes up there, that, they’re either the same as us, or they’re deserters.” because I could see them, they were very edgy, and they were trying to keep

40:00 out of these two coppers. I said “As long as we keep ahead of them, we’re sweet, we’ll be all right.” Sure enough, they got them. So we got on the train, and it’s like our old country carriages, the corridor on the outside, and the compartment in there. We’re standing in the corridor and this

**I think we’ll have to pick up at the next tape, if that’s okay.**

Yes

# Tape 4

00:30 **So if you could pick up where the two blokes had just been picked up?**

Oh yes, so anyway, they pick up these two blokes, and we were right, they don't bother any more. So we get on the train, and we're standing in the compartment, the passageway down the outside of the compartment and this corporal in the army comes out, and he said "What are you?" and we said "We're Poles." "Oh." he said "Come in and sit down."

01:00 and I said "Oh no, we're all right." we spoke in German "We're all right." "Come on." he said "There's room in there, come in and sit down." so all right, we go in and sit down. They're all servicemen going home on leave from Russia. So after a while, one bloke pulled out a bottle of wine, opened it up, passed it around, this bloke's passed it onto me, had a drink, passed it onto Taffy, he has a drink.

01:30 A bit later, another bloke gets out a bottle of wine, all Polish or Russian stuff, and round it comes again, and Taffy had his mouth organ, and he played the mouth organ, so he plays all the German songs, and every German song he knew he could remember, and they're singing and the bottles are being passed around, you know. We were all half stung by, and anyway, that went on, and we got held up,

02:00 oh, two or three times, and the major railway terminals, you know, where they're a lot of lines going, they'd been bombed to blazes. And everywhere we stopped, where they're fixing it, all the blokes doing it are British POWs. They were, some of them were from the airborne division that was captured at Arnhem and that. And they're all fixing up all these railway lines,

02:30 we're sitting there, we can't even say a word to them. And anyway, that was all right, they didn't take any notice of these blokes, they just thought we were Poles and that was it. So we got to Munich, and we get off the train, and this little bloke in a leather overcoat, I knew what he was straight away, no question, Gestapo, and he's got his eyes on us straight away. "Papers please."

03:00 Because, naturally being young, they think you're deserters, unless you're hobbling along on one leg, or something, they reckoned you're deserters. So at any rate, he said, anyway, take us into the station master's office. And they ring up, down comes the Gestapo, two of them, black uniforms, Mercedes Benz tourer drive it onto the platform. "Come on." put us in the car,

03:30 take us back to Gestapo headquarters at Munich. We get interrogated there, fingerprinted, photographed, strip searched, everything, they wanted to know where we'd been, how we got there, so we told them everything, no good trying to hide it. And they kept us there until they checked up that we were fair dinkum, you know, that we were prisoners of war. And then they checked up everywhere we'd been, to make sure nobody had been killed or anything like that,

04:00 that we hadn't, and then the, this big bloke said to us, "Come in" and took us out into this, well, it was where their, their mess hall, and he got us a meal. And he said "You've got to stay here until we check everything that you are all right, and then we'll have you home to the army." luckily, because being in civilian clothes, they could have shot us. They were quite within their rights if you were in civilian clothes.

04:30 Anyway, they didn't, then they handed us over to the army, they put us in a military jail. They split us up; I went in with a Russian. But, well, I, after a while I doubted it, I had a bit of a query about it, because he wanted to know how we'd escaped and all the rest of it. Any rate, he'd been, he had been badly burnt,

05:00 he was a dive bomber pilot and he had been badly burned, and he had a stack of photos that high, how they fixed him up, the Germans. Now what the Germans did to the Russians, I couldn't understand it, I didn't, he'd had to be caught by the air force, because a German soldier would have shot him straight away, they wouldn't have bothered getting him fixed up, and that's when I started to doubt a bit, you know, because he asked that many questions. Any rate, I still had cigarettes, my cousin in England had

05:30 sent me up, a box of cigarettes and they were Flog Wortons [?] never heard of them before, and they had ivory tips, purple tips, all the different coloured tips on them, you know. It's a wonder the Germans didn't see me smoking them, and wonder what they were. Anyway, the RAF come over and bombed the Munich railway station, which wasn't far away from us, and we were in this cell

06:00 and all the Germans, the guards and everything have gone to the air raid shelter, and in the, in English, Russian and French on the back of the door is "In case of an air raid, stand in the doorway." they were 27 inches thick, the walls, so stand there. Anyway, he was very panicky, so I gave him a cigarette and everything, so it calmed him down a bit. Next day, they took him out, and two days later, they took us out, and when

06:30 we go out, they've got, there's still bodies laying in the street, with tags on them, "Do you know this

person?" in German and four guards are with Taffy, and I, the Welsh bloke and I, one in front, one behind, and one either side of us. All these people are coming up to us and saying "Englanders? Englanders?' "No." he said, "They're French." They were telling them we were French. They would have torn us to bits, I'm not joking, they would have. So at any rate, we went out to this camp in Munich,

07:00 it used to be Stalag 7A, that was where my brother was originally, and went into the draft compound there, go in the door, I've got a palliasse, which is a bag of straw, go in there, put it down, this Russian picks his up, comes over, puts it alongside, it's him, and he's got a loaf of bread, don't know where the hell he got it from, breaks it in half, that's my half. He's got some home grown tobacco, there, that's your half,

07:30 so he probably was a Russian. Anyway, and that was full of Yanks [Americans], from North Africa, and they arrived there, this is no bull, they arrived there with all their gear except their weapons, packs, everything, and they had a 1% casualty list. Whole unit of them, 1% casualty list. And that's where they turned it in. Now, that was in North Africa, where the Brigade of guards

08:00 had taken it, that's a brigade of guards is three battalions, and they had a whole division of Yanks took it, took over from them to hold it, and they tossed it in, with a 1% casualty list. And you know, they wouldn't even give us a smoke, they wouldn't even talk to us, we were in a draft compound which is separated from them, go over, "Oh yeah, how are you?' wouldn't even answer us. So you'd imagine what

08:30 the language was that flew at them, I could tell you. So any rate, we were there, oh, two or three days after that, and they sent guards down from Lamsdorf to take us back to Lamsdorf. That's probably a thousand kilometres away, yeah, I couldn't get over it. We were in a prison camp, mind you, and they send guards from another one to take us back to there, to put us in jail for 30 days bread and water. And on the way back,

09:00 it's a three or four day trip, on the way back, we had to cross over a railway line to get to another platform, we had to change trains. And we're going over there, and we're walking across there, and this bloke's coming the opposite way, and he's dressed in a suit, wearing a Homburg hat, carrying a brief case, and he got, come to us like that, he said "They've landed in Normandy" and just kept walking. Plain English.

09:30 That was the 6th of June 1944, and who was he, what the hell was he, who would know. You wouldn't have a clue what he was, but it was perfect English "They've landed in Normandy." that was all he said. Couldn't get over it. Anyway, we went back there for the 30 days bread and water, and

10:00 went out to another working party. It was at Bitkil [?].

**Before we start, would did you have to,**

Yeah, are you right? No, I'll have a drink

**I'll give you a break.**

it was out near Jagendorf a place called Jagendorf, which is down in the corner between Poland, Germany and Czechoslovakia, right down in that corner there, and anyway.

10:30 Actually, the sergeant major in, at Lamsdorf, his name was Sherriff, he was a POW in that camp in the First World War, he was a RSF [?]. And he got us to go out there, there was me and that other Australian in that photo, and a Scotsman, Bugsy Moran, he was real Bugs he was, he was nuts. He said,

11:00 "They'd been there since Dunkirk." since they were captured, "We've never heard of peacetime." so they said "They've asked for more men, will you go out there, and find out what's going on, and if you think anything needs to be done, cause some trouble, or let me know?" This is, he used to do that, he had about 50 blokes at Lamsdorf, that he'd send out in working parties like that, to cause trouble and that.

11:30 Anyway, we went out there, and we arrive there in the afternoon, we walk around, there's no, they're in a barracks, but they're not there, they're all working. Some of them are in the clay pits, others are in, whatever, in the factories making the bricks, and we walked around and we came across an old quarry, and it's had trees growing up in it. No wire or anything. So I said to Bugsy I said

12:00 "We'll see if we can get out tonight and go around and have a look around the area." you know, see what's going on. So he said "All right." so I asked, a little Scotch bloke there, I said, because you went in a door there, and on the left was one room, and on the right was three rooms, no doors, just three rooms. Now, they're all heaped down in the bottom, and the next, and the next, now, they used to get your boots and trousers every night, right, they reckoned if you didn't have them, you couldn't escape.

12:30 So any rate, you always had something hidden somewhere, any rate, I said "What happens when they count them?" and the Scotsman said "Well, they go through there and count them, count them, count them, then they come into our room here." so I said "Do they come back in here?' "No" he said "They come back into our room and go out." and I said "Well, do us a favour tonight, will you." he said "What." I said "When they come in here, will you sort of close your door a bit? Don't shut it completely, or they'll wake up something's on, just,

13:00 you know, bump into it to close it up a bit." he said "Oh yeah." I said "And in the morning, if we're not there, you collect our boots and trousers and bring them down the back where the, near the old quarry." he said "All right." So at any rate, we did, so we went round the next, out, shot out that night and went round and there were some Poles in the barracks at the back, and so we knocked on the door there, they were Poles, so we stayed there the night, we had a look around

13:30 to see what was what, and finished up there early in the morning, he bought them down, so we knew we could get out there. As long as he was there, we'd be right. So we eventually did, this, that other Alan Mandus, his name was, Curly Mandus, and a mate from Bristol, don't know what, his name was Bill, and I used to call him "Bristol Bill." don't know what his surname was, I know he come from Bristol in England, so he came with us. And

14:00 Bugs Moran, before we went, Bugs Moran went down, and he used to, he put on a mad act. He'd fill up a bucket of water. He'd go out, grab a bucket and go fill it up at the tap. He'd walk back to the barracks, and he'd put it down and look at it, then he'd tip it out, then he'd pick it up and go fill it up and do the same thing again. And at night, when they came round, he made sure he'd be in bed, and when the guard came round to

14:30 count them, he'd be throwing his arms around, whacked a bloke a couple of times, so that was enough. So he took him down to the doctors, and Bugs took some bits of paper and that, and nearly every day the Flying Fortresses [bombers] used to come up from Italy. So he's walking along, and they're coming over, so he stands still, and he gets out these bits of paper and he puts pieces all round him, and the guard said

15:00 "What are you doing that for?" And he says "They'll see them, and they won't bomb here, they'll know I'm here." So the guard took him down to the doctors and he said "I want him sent away, he's mad, he's forique." So he went, that was the end of him, off he went back to camp. So anyway, we took off and we got up in the mountains, and it started to rain, and we come across an old burnt out place, I don't know what it,

15:30 it could have been an old Jewish camp or something in the old days. And it's burnt out that's, anyway, it was an iron roof, still the iron roof there, for a bit of cover and that, and I had a bar of chocolate, so, found a tin there, and we got plenty of water and boiled it up, got a fire going under that, and boiled it up, cleaned the thing out, boiled it up again, put the chocolate in.

16:00 Anyway, Alan Mandus, he got pleurisy, we didn't know what it was at the time, but it turned out he suffered from pleurisy, and he'd had it before. And we thought he was dying, and anyway, we were out a few days before it started to rain, and we got soaking wet, and we, and anyway, we decided we'd better get him down the mountain, and get him to hospital because, get him handed him over, because we reckoned he was going to die

16:30 on us, you know. So we didn't want that to happen. So anyway, we went, we get down, and we're walking along, and this Brown Shirt come along, and he's on a bike, and of course, he wheels around "What are you?' so we told him, "We are POWs and he's sick, we want to get him to a doctor." So he's marching us along the road, and he's abusing us all the time in German, and everything, you know. The next thing we know, he's just picked up his bike, and bang, he's hit us,

17:00 we're walking along three abreast , we're helping Curly in the middle, and he's just threw, thrown his bike and hit us in the back with his bike. Oh, and he's abused the hell out of us. I tell you what, it was a bit windy then, I thought he was going to shoot us, because he had a pistol and that with him. But anyway, he didn't, but he, they got him to a doctor, and anyway, we went, we got carted off to camp and Curly got, he was there, he stayed

17:30 there for a while, I don't know where he went eventually. So that was that one. So I went back in, and I went to another working party, they give me another 30 days bread and water, went to another working party, and it was making, it was a fabric sort of place. I was there two days, and a guard arrived there, and grabbed me, carted me off to Lamsdorf, and I was stuck in the charge

18:00 compound, charged with sabotage. And we were in this compound, it's right up in the corner of Lamsdorf, oh, it's hard to sort of try, but if you were going in the main gate, you went through one gate and that was the Germans' offices and that there, and when you went in there, from a working party or anything, you always got searched, your gear always got searched. Now if you wanted to bring

18:30 anything in, you'd leave a cake of soap or some chocolate or some cigarettes on the top, and if you got the right bloke, he'd just look at you and just lift up your things and politely put it in his pocket, whatever it was, and straight through. That's how half the radios and everything got into camp. They were willing to take a bribe. Soap, perfumed soaps were worth a fortune to them, for their wives

19:00 or girlfriends or what, you know. That's how they used to get in, so if you walked in there it was a main road, right up to the end of the camp, and it was barracks up either side, different barracks, and ablution blocks in between. And on the left, right up there was this one barrack on its own and it had a double wire fence, down the middle, ten foot high, with coiled barbed wire in it. And on the three sides, and then just the single wire on, where the road

19:30 is, because on the other side of the road is all barracks as well. And there was a machine gun in that

tower, one in the corner over there, and a guard in there of a night with a dog. And the Scotchmen and I, Paddy Klim, his name was, got out of there in broad daylight. I'll tell you, Paddy, I'd met Paddy in the jail at Jagendorf before. I'd been in there a couple, two or three times before, and I'd met Paddy in there, and

20:00 what we used to do there, that was a control centre for the area, and all the Red Cross parcels went through there, and there was a Kiwi [New Zealand] sergeant major looking after them there. He used to send them out with the different working parties. And when you come out, if you were doing 30 days in there, when you come out, there'd be a Red Cross parcel there, but it wasn't yours, they used to split that up. Anybody that came out always got

20:30 a cigarette and something to eat, they'd be left there. It was sort of an unwritten law, they just did it automatically. One would be put in, if there was two or three there, and they'd help themselves, but there'd be always some left for you if there was anybody in the cell. At any rate, Paddy's there, in this draft compound in Lamsdorf, and he just came to me this day, I've got to tell you, it was the funniest place out, there was two Scotsman. One in bed over there, and one in bed

21:00 over here, and they're having a competition. See who can stay in bed the longest, without getting out. So all their mates are doing everything for them, they're getting their food, they're carting their waste out and everything else. It went on for days and days and days, it's unbelievable. And it was getting a bit cold then, so they're burning boots and everything in the stove. The Germans never came in there, except the bloke that came in there with a dog of a night. And it was a savage dog, too you couldn't.

21:30 A lot of the dogs, they used to like chocolate, but he wouldn't take anything that dog. Anyway, Paddy came to me this day, he said "Do you want to get out of here?' I said, "Yeah, why." he said "Come with me." So, the, your food came in a big tub, round metal thing, and it had two brackets on it like that and there was two wooden handles with a cleat on that fitted on those brackets on each side and one bloke in front and one behind, so

22:00 they brought it up, and we'd had our, after lunch, you know. So Paddy says "Quick grab that." so I grab that, he's out the front, so he walked up to the guard on the gate, there's a gate there, a single gate, and he said to the guard "Open the gate." because Paddy spoke good English, good German. The German suited them great, the Scotch accent just fitted them perfect. And the guard says "What for?' and he says "We've got to take this out there."

22:30 into the next barracks, in the gate there into the next barracks. "Oh." the guard said, "I don't know anything about that." he said "Didn't the sergeant tell you?' he said "No." "Oh, well." he said "Don't worry. I'll see the sergeant when he comes back, I'll tell him you wouldn't let us do it." And the guard said "What have you got to do?' he said "Take it down in there." he said, "Where do you put it?' he said "Just inside the gate there, and they come and collect it." So he said "Oh, all right, I know." Paddy said "I told you,

23:00 don't worry. I'll tell your sergeant when he comes back here, you wouldn't let us do our job." so he said "Oh, what do you have to do again?" And by this time, all the other blokes in the barracks are coming out of the barracks watching us, they woke up something was on. And he said "Where do you have to put it?' and he said "Just inside the gate, and then we come back here." so he said "All right." he opened the gate. Well, the silly bugger, he's got the rifle on his shoulder and he's standing there with this gate open.

23:30 So we walked down the road, dropped the thing, get inside the gate, drop it, as we get in, Paddy says "Right." we drop it and race into this barracks ripped off our jackets, grabbed a jacket off another bloke there, and a hat, he did the same, and out we went again across the road, into the other barracks. And we went into see this sheriff, the sergeant major, and there was another Kiwi Sergeant Major, Archie Horne, "Trader Horne" we used to call him, and

24:00 he got on well with sheriff, he got it organised. Got swapped over with a Canadian and out on a working party the very next morning, as a Canadian. And that poor, you could just see him standing there with the gate open and all these blokes, you've only got to move, and they're all out the gate too. I said "How did you get away with that?' he said "I noticed this morning all the guards were new, I'd never seen any one of them." And that's

24:30 all it was, new guards, and he'd been wide enough awake to see it. And we were the only two that ever managed to do it out of that camp. Anyway, and we went out to another working party, and I took off again, a bit later, and I got taken back to Jagersdorf again which was the worst thing that could have happened. And they asked me my name, I gave them the German, the Canadian name and number,

25:00 and this voice popped up, female voice said "That is not him, that is the Stephenson." You know that woman arrived there, I got married in England, that woman arrived there before my wife arrived here. Supposed to have married one of our fellows, and she was supposed to be a Czech. Well, she might have been a Czech, but she was working for the Germans when she dobbed me in. If she was a

25:30 Czech, why would she dob me in? Because I'd been there a few times, and they knew you. That was it. So, I believe she married a bloke named Ray Kent, I don't know whether you should put that in though. Yeah, so, anyway.

**What was the working party that last time, you'd gone out on?**

That one.

**Yeah, as a Canadian, you'd gone out on a working party, what was that?**

They were making stuff like Bamberg silk.

26:00 I was working in the dye house. I told them I was a dyer; I don't have a damn idea on dying. And any rate, I was working in the dye house. And I got all this silk and I cut it up, it was like a Bamberg silk, it was like a, I don't know, they used to use Bamberg silk a lot here, before the war. And I cut it up into scarves and dyed them purple. So all the blokes had purple scarves they used to wear.

26:30 **And how did you get out of there?**

Just took off. Took off again, went into Lamsdorf again. And we got out of there again by visiting the hospital. The hospital was out of the main camp, and it was in amongst a lot of pine trees, and everything, and this English bloke,

27:00 his name was, Vincent, Paul, not Paul Vincent, Athol Vincent. I was sitting in the, sitting at home, in Prahran after the war, 1947, it would have been August or September 1947, reading the Herald, and this is how things strike you. Two things happened there when I was in Prahran, reading the Herald. One was a Greek

27:30 bloke that worked for us, he had a place in Richmond, and he had about eight Greek girls living there. And he, it was on the corner of Rowena Street and Lennox Street, he finished up selling it, he was a good bloke and a good worker. But I see that, and I said to him the next day "Hey, Nick, I see you got your divorce." his name was Nick, oh,

28:00 Nick Margaritaropolous, and I said "I see you got a divorce." and he said "No." and I said "Yeah, I read it in the Herald last night." he said "No, not me." I said "There wouldn't be two Nick Margaritaropolous from Salonika would there?" It was him. And I was reading the Herald this night and I read about this bloke that's just been released from Poland. He's been in there since,

28:30 it was 1947, he's just been released. This is this Athol Vincent. We went to the hospital visiting, and broke away, and he wanted to go to the Russians, I said "No way, I'm not going anywhere near the Russians." The German guards had told me "Don't go near them, they'll shoot you first and ask questions afterwards." So I went off down towards Czechoslovakia. So he had another two years after the war ended before he got out.

29:00 It would have been September, yeah September, I think, 1947. So I got caught again, and we got caught at a place called, what was it Melnic, Melnic [?]. I don't know whether that was a Czech name or a Russian or the German name for the Czech.

29:30 So anyway, then they took us into Prague, and we were in a room would have been about as big as this. Forty Russians and eight of us. Yeah. It was a little bit bigger than this. Forty Russians and eight of us, and we were this is getting on, this is early 45, and, haven't had lice for years.

30:00 Not in there 10 minutes with these Russians, and "Oh, God, not again." I said. So at any rate, I complained to the German guard, and he got the officer. And I complained to him, he said "What are you complaining about?' I said "You've stuck us in here with these. And we're lousy and dirty, we can't have a shower or anything, what are you doing with us?' you know, so, at any rate, he said "I'll get you moved." So he marched us out,

30:30 and it's only a narrow road, a lot of traffic on the road and that, and we're walking round the bend, and we're only got, we're single file, the eight of us, and this young bloke rode up beside me on a bike, and he said "Follow me." and we're going around a bend, and he dived down this alleyway, so I dived down there after him. That's where the family I was living with in Prague. And got away with him.

**You just ran down the street did you?**

Yeah, and finished up at his

31:00 place, he went round the back way to that. But that was well after, that would have been in April then. We brought him, he came out in 1949, the son, we brought him out here, yeah. He wrote, was a, very anti-commo,

31:30 and he got out of there, he had to escape out of his own country. And he got to Holland, and he was staying with a bloke he'd met at a Scout Jamboree before the war, and he was staying there, and he wrote and asked me "If I could nominate him to get him out here." so we did, we nominated him, and brought him out. He was here for about six months, he was a funny bugger he was.

**What was his name?**

Lansky, Beder Lansky.

32:00 And he, Beryl carted him down to the aircraft corporation for a job, when he first come here, because he was a jet engineer, and he was no dill, he was a bright, pretty bright bloke. And anyway, he wouldn't

stay there, they wanted to keep him there, they said “They didn’t have work for him up to his abilities there, but they thought they were going to be doing it, and they wanted to keep him there.” He

32:30 finished up as a designer for General Motors. And he went to Sydney, and we had to have, Val’s sister was coming out here, so we had to get him a place, you wouldn’t know where Spud Motor Bodies used to be. On St Kilda Road, down towards Park Street, on that side of the road, on the Park Street side of the road. There were all old houses there like rest of them, you know, in those days,

33:00 and he was staying there in a boarding house. We went into see him one night, you wouldn’t know, we called in and said “How are you going?’ we said “Oh, it’s cold tonight.” he said “Yeah, you should have come last night.” I said “Why, did you buy some wood?’ he said “No, I just sawed the legs off the bed and then I had to saw the legs off the cupboard to match the bed.” When he was here, I’d be listening to the football, I’d be working in the garden and that, and

33:30 I’d be listening to the, over the radio, onto the football. Anyway, I’d be working away, the next thing, I’d hear classical music, Dvorak, and he was mad on Dvorak, and then it, all this classical music on. So I’d run in and turn it off, and say “You’re a bloody pest Beder, what are you doing?” Any rate, he kept doing it and I said “Look, there’s a bike there, go for a ride on the bike, and I hope you fall off and break your bloody neck.” So he got on the bike, and away he went, and he come back and he said “Donald, I

34:00 did ride ze bike, I did not fall off and break ze bloody neck, though.”

**How old was he, when he boarded, when you, on the bike?**

He was about 19 then, he came here in 49, he would have been 23 or 24.

**He was 19 when he said follow me?**

Yes.

**Can you tell me about his family? When you were staying with them?**

His family? Yeah, they were great. Never allowed in the kitchen, oh

34:30 no you couldn’t. Well, we were brought up to help in the kitchen you had to do the dishes and everything. Went out to help and they said “Oh no, you’ve got to sit down, you can’t do that.” so no way.

**And they were quite happy for someone to come into their house?**

Oh yeah, well, actually, their, they lived in a flat, they were on a ground floor flat and the flat, no, they were on the top floor flat, and the one underneath was, Mrs Lansky’s brother, and he was the

35:00 coach of the Czech Cup soccer club that was in the World Series, the World Cup just, I think they won it just before the war. He was the coach of that team, and he was away, so I slept in his bed. That was great; you could have a bath, and sleep in a bed, and everything. And shared all the, you had the same as them; you had as much as them. Then there was a,

35:30 but while I was there, and then when the Russians come in, there was a Kiwi bloke, he was part Maori, that I was on a working party with, and when I escaped it, I had a slouch hat, and I gave him my slouch hat and said to him “Here, look after my slouch hat, you’ll stand out like a dog’s hind leg, if you’re out running around.” you know, so he said “Right oh.” So after the Russians come in,

36:00 I’ve walked up the street near where I was staying with these people, and there’s this bloke sitting in a truck, three ton truck, I walked up, he’s got my slouch hat on, and I said “What are you doing here?’ he said “I’m picking up these POWs, taking them down to Pilsen.” I said “How?’ he said “I’ve got a pass off the Russians.” See he’d been, the Russians had released them, see, and he said “I take

36:30 50 down at a time, and then I come back and.” he said “You want to be my jockey.” I said “Right oh, I’ll come with you.” So down we rode, down to Pilsen, the Yanks were at Pilsen, which was only 70 ks [kilometres] away. Take 50 down there, and get cigarettes and coffee and K rations, and whatever else off the Yanks, and bring them back, giving them food and cigarettes and coffee and everything, and we did that for days after that. We’d go and

37:00 you’d give them to all the people you knew, you know, and the Yanks didn’t mind. And one day, this big Finn came up to us, huge bloke, you know, the Finns were fighting the Russians before the war. And they were beating them too, yes. And this Finn, he was in the German army, and he made no bones, he said “I’ve been fighting the Russians all the time, I was in the German army. Will you take me down to the Americans?”

37:30 We said “Yeah, but we’re going to hand you over to the Americans straight away.” he said “All right.” So a great big bloke, so we get him in, took him down, handed him over to the Yanks, we go down the next day, he’s in American uniform, he’s an interpreter. Big, huge bloke, great big fair, you know, blonde big fellow. Well, he would have been six foot six and built like a country dunny, you know, oh.

38:00 So, and a Gestapo bloke came up to us and offered us a tobacco tin full of rubies and emeralds and everything to take him down there, and no way. No way. Dobbed him in straight away. You know, you could have made a lot of money then, could have done.

**So where exactly where you when the war in Europe ended?**

In Prague. Yeah, the

38:30 Russians come in there on the 9th of March, and it was funny, when you went down to Pilsen, the people at Pilsen said “They’d wished the Russians had of liberated them then.” that was a working place, factory area, Pilsen. Prague, “Oh, I wish the Yanks had of liberated Prague, because the Russians, the Russians weren’t very nice.” Anything from, female from 9 to 90 wasn’t

39:00 safe in Prague even. They used to give them three days, whenever they entered a town, their troops could do what they liked, three days. Didn’t matter.

**Pretty lawless, was it?**

And they lived off the land, if they wanted meat, they shot a cow, they didn’t care whose it was. Friend or foe, it didn’t matter. I tell you, when you see them running around with an Iron Cross hanging around their neck, there’s something wrong.

39:30 I mean they, what they let loose into the town was the real peasants, that they are used to sleeping with their animals in their house as well in winter, you know. And they were oh. Actually when we were in that room, in that cell that I was talking about with the 40 Russians, one of them come from Leningrad, a little bloke. And we used to, I used to get on all right with him, and he said to me, “They won’t

40:00 want us to go home, the Russians.” I said “Why?” He said “They won’t want us to go home and tell the people that even though we’ve beaten the Germans, that their living standard is a lot better than ours. They won’t want us to tell them that.” And do you know, they marched them home. About 10% of their prisoners of war got home. That’s no joke, that’s fair dinkum. They had a hell of a time, poor guys, but then again

40:30 there was a million Russians fighting for Germany. That fellow you said.

# Tape 5

00:30 **Yeah, we were talking about Prague, at the end of the war.**

Yeah.

**Can you tell me how you managed to get back to?**

Well, we eventually went to Pilsen, and I stopped there, and then the Yanks went into Reims in France. They made a big mistake there, they took us into camp, de-loused us and they gave us second hand

01:00 uniforms. American uniforms, right. Well, a windcheater, shirt, trousers, boots and everything. So when we’re getting dressed, there’s all these kit bags. They’d given us a kit bag as well, and there are all these kit bags, full. Of course, you’ve got to remember all prisoners of war were pretty good thieves. Shirts, oh, that’s all right, put a few of them in the kit bag, trousers, oh.

01:30 So that’s what we did, we got a, we went up to, in Reims, we’ve got no money or anything, so we go up to town, go into a café, well, we’re going to try and sell these shirts to this café bloke for a bottle of wine or something. So we said to him “You want to buy a shirt?” He said “Oh, no, no, black market, oh, no, boom, boom.” And he said “You not American?’ and we said “No, Australian.” “Australie, come in.”

02:00 help yourself, bottle of wine, no worries.

**Why do you think that was?**

Because of the reputation in France in the First World War. They still tell tales about the 8th Battalion, how they were all leaving the town because the Germans were coming back and the 8th Battalion was going up there to meet them, and as soon as they saw the 8th Battalion, they all went back to their houses. That’s

02:30 a fact. So, well you’ve heard of the Menin Gate in Belgium, well, that goes on still from the First World War, so their reputation was pretty good. Even the Turks, we’ve been to Turkey, I went to Gallipoli and that, and we could still be in that. The Turks, Australians, still popular, no trouble. They’re the same here, I bet you

03:00 our blokes, our people in the Gulf War now, have got a better reputation than the Yanks. They’re not trigger happy, like the Yanks, for sure. They’re trigger happy, always have been. That’s why they have so many friendly fire accidents.

**And you had a nice night with the café owner at the café?**

Oh, yes, that was all right. Nice night there, had a few drinks with him, you know.

03:30 Tried to get a lift into Paris with some Yanks. No, they wouldn't take us in. So at any rate, then the RAF, or we got flown from Reims to England to Horsham in England, 28 in a Lancaster. We had a Kiwi pilot, Kiwi crew in ours, and got mainly, Australians and New Zealanders they were flying them.

04:00 And we got to Horsham and they said "Right." they gave us a pound each, English pound each. And they said, "Well, they'd take us down to the station in the truck." There was nine of us then, there's five army and four air force. So they said "The air force go to Brighton, the army go to Eastbourne, and you'll be met at the station." So we get down the station, and they dump us there, and they said,

04:30 "The train will be here in 20 minutes." So Pat Ferrero, he was a fighter pilot, for South Melbourne, used to play cricket for South Melbourne before the war. He looked up, he said "There's a pub over the road." "No." "We've got a quid, come on." So we all go over to the pub, so we go in there, and the woman sees us coming in and a fellow from the west, Ted Opey, he's still got his old slouch hat, so she sees us coming in the door,

05:00 pulls out a bottle of whiskey and a bottle of gin. And, we said "We want beer, we've got money." she said "It's on the house, help yourself." We said "No, we've got money, we can pay for it." she said "I'm that bloody glad to see some Australians again." She came from Sydney and she was over there on a holiday and got trapped over there, so she finished up running the pub at Horsham. So, we went back to Eastbourne, new uniforms and

05:30 checked over, got the uniform and we could get some pay, so we said "Right, we're going." the five of us, and the air force blokes came back too, and we went back to Horsham for a week. Any rate, we went there on a Saturday, and of course, there was a big Canadian barracks just out of the town, they're all in there as well, so they said, oh, we'd had quite a bit of drink by that time. They said "Come on

06:00 down the hall, have a dance." So we went down there, and we must have been a bit over the limit, because none of the girls would have a dance with us. So we said "Well, if they're not going to dance with us, they're not going to dance at all." so we got his slouch hat, stuffed it up with paper and we used that as a football. And we played rugby up and down the hall. And we went over, back with the Canadians to the barracks, and the Canadian said "He's not here; you can sleep in his bunk." So of course in the morning, the sergeant major comes in,

06:30 "What are you doing here? Out." we all got kicked out. So we went down, back down the pub, and this woman says to us "Go upstairs to the bathroom, there's razors and everything up there, clean yourselves up." So we did. We come back, she said "Come in here." and there's a little servery through into the bar at the back. All the old blokes are in there, and she says "Have a listen to them." And there's these old blokes there out the back "Did you hear about those Australians last night? We thought the Canadians

07:00 were wild, but they're nothing on them Australians." At any rate, we stayed there for a week, and she was trying to marry her daughter off to this Ted Opey from the west. She wanted to marry a Canadian provo, her daughter, and this woman didn't like him a bit. And she's trying to talk Ted into, to try to get her to marry him. He wouldn't be in it.

07:30 **So how long were you in the UK before you came home?**

Well, I arrived there about the end of May. I could only, September, I think it was, September or October. September been there, when's the Caulfield Cup?

**You're asking the wrong guy, I don't know.**

It'd have to be October, wouldn't it?

**Yeah, okay.**

It's pretty well into October? Well, it would have been the end of September, by the

08:00 time I come home. Because I kept dodging, I met my wife over there, and we got married, so I kept dodging, and every time there was a ship going home, I kept dodging so as I'd miss it.

**How did you meet your wife?**

That's a very strange story, in a pub. We were all, there was about 10 of us. The air force, one bloke was a squadron leader he'd been a POW, and he's the wildest bloke I've ever met in my life. And we're in this pub and we're having a beer,

08:30 and talking away, and these two girls come in. They were going to Covent Garden to a dance. Anyway, these, there were some Canadians in there too, and they were giving these girls a hard time, you know, any rate, we sort of got rid of the Canadians, without any trouble, you know, they just went when we told them what we thought of them, they gave it away. So anyway, then, somebody said

09:00 something, and I'd just taken a big mouthful of beer, and started, I couldn't stop trying to laugh, and I turned my head around and of course, the mouthful of beer flew all over this girl, and that's, yeah.

**A great beginning to a relationship.**

Yeah. So we were, we got married in July, 10th of July. Six weeks we knew each other, that's 58 years ago. In July.

09:30 **And she was happy to come back to Australia?**

Oh, yes, well, she was only, 19, she wasn't 19, she was still 18 when she came here, yeah. Big step. Bloody big step. The whole family come out here eventually. We had the lot, 13 of them.

**And when were you discharged?**

December 45.

10:00 Oh, no, I didn't have to go anywhere, just came home and went through Heidelberg and the, checked up and everything. And then, till December, till the end of December 45, it was all leave.

**You deserved it by then, hadn't you?**

Yes, so I lived with my sister then, in Oakleigh. That's just up North Road.

**Did you find it difficult to come back to….?**

Oh, did I ever.

10:30 Oh, when we came home, when I come home, all the relations are there at my sister's place, wanting to see me and everything. Oh God, couldn't put up with it. And they were taking about how bad it was, you know, the butter "You couldn't get much butter." and I thought "Good God, you should have seen England." Didn't really, you know. But I tell you, when I went on leave, when we got married, we got, had to get a special pass,

11:00 three days, they gave us three days to get married. Special thing. We got married at the Chelsea registry office. We had some peaches, from the Australian Red Cross, a few tins of peaches and that, couldn't get anything else. What we did get, what I did was, when I was picking up me leave pass, and they'd give you a ration ticket as well, so if you wanted to eat, you had to hand your ration ticket over. So, while he's doing something else, there's a pile of

11:30 ration tickets on the desk, took my hat off, dropped it over, and. I had a heap of ration tickets, gave them to Beryl's mother. You couldn't get anything.

**Could you even begin to describe what you'd been through, when you came back?**

No, no. No, couldn't, couldn't, no. It's funny though, you know,

12:00 we had a bloke with us, he was part American Negro. "Snowball." we used to call him, Snowball. A good bloke. We, actually in Alexandria, we got in a fight with the free, they weren't the Free French, French sailors, in Alexandria harbour, there was a fleet, French fleet there, kept in by the British navy. They wouldn't fight for us. They wanted to get out and go and fight with their own

12:30 fleet there in France, you know. They wanted to go there, and they wouldn't let them, because there's battleships and everything. And they were on shore leave, and everything they're getting paid and they're on shore leave all the time. And we're ashore, and we're there, this is just as we're going back to the unit after Bardia. And these sailors pull us up, and there was three of us, Snowball, and Dick Williams, he was down there in Brighton, and me.

13:00 And they said "What are you?' we said "Australians." and they looked at Snowball, they said "You're not Australian, you're a black bastard." and Snowball went whack. So then it was on, and they're yelling out for their French sailors, and of course, we're yelling out for Aussies. Of course, there was a big brawl on then. All because of him saying "You're not Australian, you're a black bastard." Snowball didn't like it. We could call him that, not

13:30 them though, yeah. Actually, you would have laughed. At, in Palestine, you know the reputation of Negroes, don't you? No, well, Snowball was half Negro, and his mother was Australian. And he was in Don Company, and he was in C Company. Well their lines are there, and their showers were

14:00 half a mile away, our lines were near ours, they were just across the road from ours, and our showers were just behind us, so they all used to use our showers. So every time Snowball would go for a shower, somebody would yell out "Snowball's going for a shower."

**Why, so everyone could test the theory, or?**

Yeah. Just a joke, you know, just a joke.

**You were talking to us before about that reputation of the Australians**

14:30 **in the First World War.**

Yeah

**Actually with fighting and boozing and getting around?**

Oh, they used to booze all the time when they got on leave, yes. Well, our mob did too, most of them, a lot didn't, but the majority were. Well, you know what Menzies [Australian Prime Minister] called the 6th Division, don't you? "The unemployed and the unemployable." That's what he called us originally. Changed his mind after though. When we were at Barce, he came there on his way to England,

15:00 and he's on the back of a truck, telling us all the bull about what a good job we've done and everything. This is the bloke who called us unemployed and unemployable. And somebody said "Where's that bloody beer you promised us?' and they closed in a bit, you know, he was off, and into his car and away, he was gone like a rocket.

15:30 You had enough?

**Right, well, do you want another 15 minutes, or**

No, I'm right, I don't mind.

**And what happened, did you find it difficult in other ways, to come back to Australia?**

Yes. I could, yes, it was pretty hard, pretty hard. Yeah, it was, see, when we did eventually come home,

16:00 we were on the Tranto [?] When it arrived in Sydney, they hung a big sheet out "Hell ship, the Tranto." It was a, a heap of English marines were on it, 300 WRNS [Women's' Royal Naval Service] coming out here from England too, after, you know. So anyway, a fellow, was in the 2/9th, he came from Richmond originally, but he was up in Queensland cane cutting when it all started,

16:30 so he joined up, up there, so he was in the 9th Battalion, Queensland unit it was to start with. And Snowy was a big fellow, and they gave us a couple of sausages, and a mug of cocoa or something for tea this night, and Snowy said "I'm not going to eat this rubbish." So he marched up, the OC [Officer Commanding] troop is the brigadier or whatever it was, of the marines.

17:00 So he's got a guard outside, so Snowy, over the chain to stop him getting near him, this guard says "Where are you going?' he said "In to see the brigadier." he said "No you're not." he said "Are you going to bloody stop me?" And he's just stormed past him and he walked in there, said "Do you call that dinner?' and he said "Yes." and he said "Well, you bloody eat it, I'm not." and walked out. Now when we pulled into Colombo,

17:30 on the way out, about a hundred yards away from us was an Australian cargo boat. So Snowy said to me "How about going over and having a word with the crew on the boat?' I said "Yeah all right." he said "Well, come on, well, we'll strip off and we'll swim over there." So we've got shorts on, so we dive in and swim over to, have you ever been to Colombo Harbour? It's the filthiest place you've ever seen. Must have been stark raving mad. Any rate, we got

18:00 over there, and they looked after us, and we had plenty of VB Victoria Bitter – beer], and they took us back to the boat that night. The next morning, when we're leaving, I've had breakfast at the mess there, and I went to get up, and I couldn't move. Couldn't move, and I thought "God, I've picked up something in that water." Anyway, I tried again, and I couldn't move, so they had to get the doctor. So he got a stretcher and everything and got out to the hospital, and they had to stop the boat, we'd left Colombo, and they had to stop the boat and turn it around and,

18:30 I had, my appendix was on the point of bursting, he just got it, yeah. So I've come home from there in the sick bay, and finished up at Heidelberg hospital.

**So you went straight into hospital?**

Yes. And the sister and that was down the wharf to meet us, and they had to come out to Heidelberg. And I've been going there ever since, on and off.

19:00 **What else has taken you there?**

Beg pardon?

**What else has got you?**

Oh, skin cancers, now. That and, just got ulcers, different things. Arthritis, a few other things. No good. Yes, a few other things. No, but, it was difficult to come home, it was difficult to come home. Very difficult.

**In what way?**

Well, if you were in the army,

19:30 all your mates, well, your platoon and your company, is like your family that's all. And you're with them every day, day in, day out. And you've got to rely on them, they rely on you. If you don't pull your weight, you're gone, you're out. So, and then you come home, and you're on your own, and you're talking to people you haven't seen for five, six years, good God, it's pretty difficult. See, I'd

20:00 left in March 1940, and got home in September 45. Over five years.

**And you were 17 when you left.**

Yes, yes. 23 when I got home. So all your youth's gone. That's the time you should be enjoying life, isn't it.

20:30 **Was it also difficult that for someone who hadn't experienced it, wouldn't understand?**

Oh, they wouldn't understand it. I'd guarantee that there's more, better stories than mine, don't worry, guarantee it. You've got no idea what some of the blokes got up to in Germany, no, I couldn't possibly start to tell you. Now when I was in the

21:00 draft compound, on so called sabotage, I didn't know what for, there was a Scotty there, he was on, called sabotage too, but he was a gardener. He used to go out and do gardening for the colonel of the place, right. Colonel come home early one day and caught him

21:30 with his wife, so he was in there for sabotage. Malcolm McDonald, and he got wounded in Prague, they had an uprising in Prague. Ten days before the Russians got there, they had an uprising. Now they ripped up the cobblestones and the tram lines, and blocked off all the roads out of it, going towards Pilsen and that. They had all these tram lines sprouting out of these

22:00 pitches, you know, barricades. And they had a tank battalion in there, the Panzer division, in Prague, running around shooting up everything. Pretty hairy. And he was one of the ones manning the barricades, you know, and he got wounded there, and he got flown in, the Czechs flew him home to England, straight from there. And when he was England, I told these Czechs, free Czech air force, they were all looking forward to

22:30 going home, I said "You be very careful, because from what I've seen, they're having nothing to do with you people that are here. They are only worrying about the Czechs that have been with them, they're not worrying about you people." And they didn't either, because this judge was a friend of Benes, who was the President of Czechoslovakia before. And the head man of the party, they pushed him out of a upstairs window [Jan Masaryk].

23:00 **They did the Germans?**

The Russians, not the Russians, but the Czech commos [communists]. Pushed him out the window. They didn't want anything to do, with anybody that had had anything to do with England. They wanted the Russians in there. And you know what happened thereafter, I'll tell you. Uprising against them eventually. That is one of the, that would probably be the best city there is in Europe,

23:30 Prague. Beautiful city, beautiful city.

**Did you, were you confined to the house when you were with the Czech family, or could you?**

Oh, yeah, until the Russians came in, yeah, oh yeah.

**And were they worried about being caught at all?**

They never showed it if they were. I mean, they would have had no hope if they had been caught, they would have been shot out of hand. They wouldn't have worried about them, no. So, you see,

24:00 just think how many people you know that would do that here. Do you think you'd know anybody that would do that?

**I'm trying to think of one person.**

Yes. So, because, did you ever read that story of Andrew Rule, wrote about the bloke from Crete? Did you read that?

**Yes.**

Do you know, we went back to Greece and Crete in 91. 300 of us, with our wives,

24:30 there were 300 all together, right, with the wives. We were all, most of us were POWs and we went right round Greece, you've never seen the reception we got everywhere we got. Now when we went to Crete, in proportion, there was a bigger crowd. We had to walk, they crowned us with laurel wreaths and everything, you know on your head, you know, and they're calling us heroes, and demi-gods and all this you know. Makes you feel about that big, I can

25:00 tell you. And we had to walk half a mile up the main street, and it's very narrow, right. And it's only a small place. And there was at least 30 thousand people there, and our, the women had to walk along behind us, they couldn't walk alongside us, you know, because it's that narrow. And even their, they're kissing their hands and that, the women and that there, the Greeks, the Cretans, they're kissing their hands, the women.

25:30 And that's a fact, they called us "Demi-gods" and everything. And it's the same here at the Cretan village up at Wantirna. I've been up there a couple of times, been invited up there, and I don't want to go there anymore, because they make you feel about. The first time we went there, was after we came

back from Crete in 91, and they asked us to go to their, because the head of the

26:00 Greek army was coming out here for a special occasion for them, you know. And they asked us to go to the ceremony, then they asked us to go to back their church, which we did. And then they said “We’ll, you’re welcome out at the Cretan village.” So, it was, we took five, I took five other blokes. Now, only one of them was with us in Crete, the rest had, were in

26:30 Crete, with us, but they hadn’t been back yet. So I said, “Come on, you can come with us, they won’t mind.” So we got up there, and this big bloke from Frankston, Chiller Hill, Chiller was his nickname, Bob Hill. They said “Well, what would you like to drink? Beer.” And I said to Chiller “You liked the ouzo a bit, didn’t you.” and he said “Yes.” so I said “You got any ouzo?’ they said “Yes.” So they brought him out an ouzo. This is five o’clock. 11 o’clock at

27:00 night, Chiller’s thumping on the table “Where’s me ouzo?’ A little bloke with us, Jackie Weekes, Peter Graysthorne, the head of our army, he was over in Greece with us. He’s a great bloke, he was. He’s not our head of the army now. He was, there, at Wantirna too, and he gave a speech. And Jackie Weekes, he’d been on the ouzo with Chiller and he was pretty full. So, they had steps onto this platform it would be about six foot high.

27:30 Jack staggers up there, and he said to him, “Excuse me Peter, but” he said “I want to say a word now. Do you mind?” And he just took it. At any rate, someone from Nyora, which is out, up at Gippsland, he drove this Bob Hill home, who lives in Frankston. He got home about four o’clock in the morning, because he drove Bob Hill home, and he couldn’t find his own house. He didn’t know.

28:00 That’s what the ouzo did to him.

**That trip back to Greece and Crete must have been incredible.**

It was, it was. We paid our, we all paid our own fare. Right, now, for the 70th they gave us a slip to fill in if you wanted to go, and they picked 20. You know what they, they said I wasn’t fit enough to cope with the travel.

28:30 And they took a woman whose husband, there was supposed to be one from each battalion, you now. And they took this woman whose husband had transferred from us when the, soon as we hit Palestine. She come from Tassie. Never seen her near the unit or anything before, and she went, representing our battalion.

**And was that perhaps one of the first time you thought about your experiences there, or,**

29:00 **had you. When you went back to Greece and Crete.**

Yes.

**Did it bring up a lot of old memories that you hadn’t?**

Yeah, oh, yeah, too right. It was great. You ought have seen us at, oh, one place they, a funny thing, they had all these parachutes strung out amongst the olive trees and everything. Of course, that was a reminder and they had all these forms there. Two thousand sat down to eat, and there was a woman come up to us,

29:30 and she said “Do you mind if I talk to you?’ in English. I said “Are you an Australian?” She said “Yes.” I said “What are you doing here?’ she said “I married a Greek and I live here.” she said “Well sit at the table.” So any rate, turns out he was a painter and I said “Is he a painter or a house painter?’ she said “He’s a house painter.” I said “I don’t know how he’d earn a living then.” Over there on Crete. So, she’d be, would be, be having a pretty hard

30:00 time, you know. She reckoned it was great just to have somebody to talk to from home, you know. But, no there was heaps of them stayed there after. Those were blokes who’d lived with, they’d been hidden out by families there, for quite a while. Some of them had been there for months, you know, hidden out. And we went to Prebally, have you ever heard of Prebally? It’s a monastery on the, outside of Crete, and the monks

30:30 hid out heaps of them, in, with, different villages, in different places, and had all the villagers feeding them for months. Until they got 90 off one night in a sub. It was the British, the British brought a sub in one night and got 90 off. Now a bloke from the west was one of them that got off from there, now he’s put in pumps for their wells, to pump the water up. A drinking fountain was there, he’s done a lot. And our division

31:00 had scholarships for the Cretan kids for years. They still put in for them. No, they’re very well respected by all the Australian troops. The people are very well respected by us, don’t worry about that. They’re a, they’re fierce, very fierce, but loyal. Staunch.

**Very brave too.**

Yes, very brave.

**And you’ve had contact with**

31:30 **the Czech family since, haven't you?**

Yeah, we're still contact, we still write. Still write.

**I think it was a break in the tape, you were saying you used to send parcels to them?**

Yeah, we used to send food parcels, till about 1949 or 48, and then they said "We've got enough." you know "We've got food now, good food." Yeah, the old days, hey?

# Tape 6

00:30 **Okay, great, well, we'll start there, M.r Stephenson.**

And this race meeting was organised, and all our camps were on the main road from Gaza to Tel Aviv, scattered either side of the road, you know, different camps. And they had this race meeting at Bardia and the whole division was there, except for those who had to stay in the camps on

01:00 duty. And there was a full list of races with bookmakers and everything. And they got the horses from the Arabs. They named them their owner. Our colonel's was named Ajax, and it was in the main race, which it duly won, so we all had a very good day. It was a good day.

**Did you have a bit of money on Ajax?**

Oh yeah, we all had a few bob on that, it was ridden by one of our fellows too, he was an ex-jockey, he rode it. It was a bit of a break from

01:30 the training and that. So that's all there is about that.

**Oh okay.**

Now I've got to clear up, where I said that I went to this place and I was dying the Bamberg silk and that.

**Yes.**

Well, I didn't go to there straight away, when I said I did. I was sent to this place and we were working in snow up to here. Cutting these supports for the coal mines, and there was Jewish girls

02:00 loading them onto trucks. Only kids, they were, about 14, 13 or 14, and any rate, this day, we had a Red Cross parcel, and I had the chocolate, and I was, this girl, about 14, she was picking up the things to put on the truck and I gave her this bit of chocolate. Well, her face lit up, you should have seen her. At any rate, that night, we'd been, I was only there about a week,

02:30 and you'd be working in the snow, and the snow would get down in your boots, your feet were like ice, no heating of a night, and you'd be back the next day. After, that day, that evening, when we got back to the barracks, there were 50 of us working there, they had a meeting and decided they weren't going to go to work. They were going to jack up and refuse to work. So they lined us up in the morning to go to work, "No, we're not going." So the sergeant went and rang up his control office, and he came out and told

03:00 all the guards to fix their bayonets, you know, made out they were going to bayonet us. They got behind us, gave us a bit of a dig, but nothing. So they said "No, we're not going." so he went and rang up again, he came back and he said "Well, I've got orders to shoot every fifth man." Well, you should have seen them, everyone count when they first. Anyway, five of us stuck there and they marched them off to work and then the five of us, and one of them was a London Jew, big London Jew, Sid, he would have been a Pole or

03:30 Russian originally. And he was with us, and once they'd gone to work, they said "Well, get your gear." and they took us the other way, and put us on another working party. Well, while we were going to this working party, we were two days going to this working party, it wasn't that far away, but we had to wait for a train, and troop trains are roaring through going to Russia and everything. We're on this station, waiting for the train, and a troop train pulls in

04:00 all flat cars with Panzers on it, tanks, and a carriage at the back for the tank crews. And this bloke comes, in a black uniform, comes down the platform, starts talking to the guards and he asked him what we were, and the said "Well, they're English." So he come up and he spoke English, he's talking to us in. He pulled out a pack of cigarettes, and he starts having a cigarette, and I said "Have yo got a spare one?' you know. "Oh, haven't you got any cigarettes?'

04:30 and I said "No." so he got another fellow. They went down the train and came back with two forage caps full. He said "Here there was five of us. Share those amongst you." And do you what who they were? The Hermann Goering Panzer Division. The Waffen-SS, going to Russia, that would have been the big, I suppose January, January or February 45, so I don't know if he survived or not. But that surprises

05:00 you, that those sort of things happened, you know.

**Why do you think he showed you that kindness?**

I don't know, don't know. Just, you've got to remember too, the Waffen-SS, they're not like SS, they were soldiers, and anybody that volunteered was in the Waffen-SS. So that means all the AIF [Australian Imperial Force], if we were Germans, we'd be the Waffen-SS. I mean, they weren't all decent, but he was all right.

05:30 **So when they said they were going to shoot every fifth man, they actually just took five of you and….**

The other 45 went to work; we were the only ones that stuck out. .

**Instead of shooting you.**

And they did nothing to us. They just shifted us to another. And they told them, they shot us.

**That's what I was going to ask you**

Because I met one of them in London. I was walking down the Strand in London, and he's coming the other way, and when he saw me, his face went white. I said "What's the matter?' he said "You're supposed to be dead." I said "Why?' he said, "They told

06:00 us they'd shot you, you blokes." I said "We're still here." Well, I suppose they thought they'd, they never had any more trouble with them, probably.

**So after that platform, you got sent to which work camp?**

There, where I was in the dye room, working with the Bamberg silk. So that's that cleared up. That's about all.

**Okay, well, if it's okay with you, I'll go back to your early life.**

Yes

06:30 **And we'll explore a few more things, if it's okay, I jotted down some questions while you were speaking yesterday.**

Okay. Good.

**I wanted to hear more about your very early young life.**

Yes.

**Your dad and mum were still living and still in the home?**

Yes.

**Your dad was a brick maker?**

Brick maker. Yes.

**And what did you feel about schooling, what are your thoughts about schooling?**

Schooling? Oh that was all right, went to Surrey Hills State School.

07:00 Got up to mischief the same as all the other kids, you know, but we were in a class of 50. They complain about 25 now, and we were in a class of 50. And we had a woman, when we were in 5th and 6th grade, she taught, and if she got angry, she went red right down. Wore a V neck dress that was glowing real red. And we used to get her mad everyday, practically. A funny thing now, the

07:30 headmaster of the school, when my son was going to the East Bentley school, he was in charge of the area, and he was a First World War soldier. Reynolds his name was, Mr Reynolds. And his son was in our class at school too, with us. And when my son was here, he said "I thought I recognised the name." because I saw him there one day, and he was in charge of the whole area. So little things keep

08:00 coming up, don't they, you never know, it's a small world. So, there was, out at Surrey Hills, that was, the street we lived in was a war service home, all war service homes. The woman next door, she was French, one of the blokes had married a French girl there. The one, the other side, we grew up together, Arthur Allan. He always reckoned, he said "My old man sunk the Emden because he was

08:30 a gunner on the Sydney." So nobody else had anything to do with it, just his father. And that was a, I should have been on the Millionaire, that was a five hundred thousand question with Who Wants to be a Millionaire [TV quiz show] once. "What ship did the Sydney sink in the First World War." up at New Guinea or somewhere round New Guinea, Bobrabor or somewhere. That's what it was, the Emden

09:00 was the ship they sunk, I knew that. Because of Arthur telling us all the time how his father had sunk it. So, it was a pretty good area, everybody knew one another, and then when things got tough and there was no, in the Depression, we never went hungry, but we didn't eat what you'd call good food. A lot of rice and that, you know. But Mum, the swaggies [homeless travellers]

always got some tea and that, they never, always got something.

**Your mum found a way.**

Oh, everybody did, everybody did. See the fellow, Snowy Gobell who got killed in December at Bardia, he was a school teacher. But during the Depression, he carried his swag round Australia. And he used to write to a school teacher in Geelong, he came from Geelong. And she used to write poems in his

letters, and he'd read them out to us. Everybody, you know, they'd read out their main part of their letter. And this day, she hadn't heard from him for a while, and I forget the main the poem, but it finished up "Oh, awful thoughts, could poor old Ted be dead?" Two months later, he was.

**So hard.**

**He was quite a good mate?**

Oh, well, yeah, he taught me a lot. When I went in there, I suppose I had a bit of a chip on my shoulder, you know, young, cocky, and I hadn't had a good life, you know, for a couple of years. And had a bit of a chip on my shoulder, but he didn't take any notice of that. He said to me one day "Do you want to go down to the gym?' like, the 7th

Battalion, Rex Staters, he was a padre. He had a gym and that was closer for us than our own. But went over there, and he put the gloves on so "We'll have three rounds." This Rex Staters was a professional fighter before he was a padre, you know. And for two rounds, I'm going very well with Ted, you know, with Snowy, then in the last round he just let me go, and just whack, whack.

Very good friend after that. Taught me a bit there.

**He waited for you to get tired and then….?**

Oh, no, he didn't wait for me to get tired; he just showed me that he was only letting me do it. Yeah.

**So what had happened to him, in the end, just to clarify that?**

Oh, he got killed on a patrol outside Bardia. Actually,

they got lost, and the officer with him was arguing which way out to go, because they didn't, it was the middle of the night, and so they decided they'd wait till daylight. And when it was daylight, there's a post full of Italians about a hundred yards away from them. And all their rifles, the firing pin was blocked up

with sand and everything. So they, they got, he got killed and about 500 got wounded.

**Was it common to, you said it was common to read out letters to one another?**

Oh yes.

**Just for company?**

Well they, yeah, certain things in it they wouldn't read out, you know, but they, you knew what was going on everywhere, you know, keep you informed, because some blokes never got letters at all. A lot of people never

got letters at all. Others used to get a lot. So it was common for some of them to read them out, yeah. Same in the prison camp, if you got a letter they, you know, they'd read them out.

**Did they get you very regular mail in the prison camps?**

No.

**About how often did they?**

I think we used to get one a month, we could send. One, they sort of let us, it wasn't very big, you'd fold it up and everything, you could send

it, I'm sure it was only once a month. And sometimes you'd get two or three in a batch, and then you wouldn't get any for months. Same as the Red Cross parcels, we were supposed to get one every month, but I think when the Germans were short, they helped themselves. So you never got them regularly. And it took a good six months before we got any, and that was the worst part, the worst. The first six months, or the first year,

was pretty tough.

**Who wrote to you?**

Well, my aunties, mainly, my sister, and the one aunty from Mont Albert, she used to write to me. Then my mother's brother lived in Birmingham, and their daughters used to write to us, and they sent us cigarettes. I think they, two or three lots of cigarettes I got

14:30 from them at different times. We went up there to see them, after, when we arrived in England. And my cousin, he was a big, big fellow he was. He was a POW in Germany, and he was a submariner. He got captured on an English sub. So he was in Germany too.

**How did he fare?**

He fared all right, yeah. He survived.

15:00 **Did you get any photographs or anything like that?**

No, of him? No. Never seen him.

**I mean of your family, they are sending you letters, did they send you photos?**

Yes, oh, it's in the album over there. One of the cousins, the girls, she sent a photo, yes.

**It must have been wonderful to see that Birmingham side of your family after the war.**

Oh yes.

15:30 We, I got a rail one to go up there, and I went up there, and got off the train, and this fellow said to me, didn't know him for a bar of soap, a civilian, he said "Oh, you're an Australian." "Yeah." "Well, have you got somewhere to stay? You can come home to my house and stay with us." I said, "Oh, thanks very much, but I'm going to see my cousin." So they were pretty good that way.

16:00 **How do you think the English people viewed the Australians, in particular then?**

Oh, they were good as gold. Like they, even the police, they, police would let our blokes get away with murder. Not murder, but they'd get away with things. I tell you this, that, this fellow, his son, now is a wine maker. And Jimmy, he joined up when he was about 15, come from Mildura. Scots they were, originally.

16:30 And he got captured in Greece at the Corinth Canal. They, that was the first time the Germans dropped paratroops on, they dropped them on our blokes at Corinth Canal. And so, he arrived in England a lot earlier than me. He'd been released a lot earlier. Had his 21st birthday in England after being a prisoner of war for four years.

17:00 He drank a lot, and he, in London, the Red Cross had two houses for us in Sloane Street, that we could stay in. And the Tube [underground] station was Sloane Square, and outside the, just out from the Tube station, there's a great new (UNCLEAR) there of a night. And I got off the Tube this night, to go and sleep in the house, and Jimmy's arguing with

17:30 an American. And the American's saying to him, "What are you Australians doing, coming over when the war's finished?" And of course, that was like a red rag to a bull, to Jimmy Hogg. And of course, he abused the hell out of the Yank, and the Yank's saying "Get out, you would never have seen anything about the war." And Jimmy had a souvenir revolver in his pocket so he pulled it out. He said "I'll show you whether I've seen it." and bang at his foot, of course

18:00 the Yank is off up the street. And Jimmy's chasing him, and he was that drunk, that if he would have been sober, he would have had him. And nothing was done about that. But, another day, this fellow, we had three brothers from Geelong, the Howe brothers, one of them got killed, the other two, Clive was the youngest, and he was a POW with us,

18:30 and he was, he wanted to go and get a hair cut. And we're in London, and there's a barber upstairs, and he said "Well, I'll go up here." and I said "Well, there's a bar there, I'll go in there, and I'll wait for you." so he said "Right oh." So I walk in there, and there's this Jimmy Hogg, and it's early in the morning, and he's drunk as usual. And he's arguing with this American. And the American's sitting on a stool

19:00 at the bar, it's not a hotel, it's like a, just a bar. And Jimmy's abused him, and told him, trying to pick a fight, and he wouldn't fight, so he's knocked his drink off, knocked his drink away like that, and no notice, and then he's pulled his chair out from underneath. Still wouldn't do anything. The next minute, two London Bobbies [police] come in, and by that time, he's

19:30 gone out to the toilet, and he's heaving his heart out. Sick as a dog. So, they walk in, and I had him under control, you know. And these two coppers said to me, "Is he all right?' I said "Yeah, he'll be right, no worries." and he said "Well, that's all right, we know what you blokes have been through, we don't want to cause you any trouble." so I said "Right oh, he'll be right." So with that, he looked up and said "Coppers, bloody coppers, what do you want?"

20:00 So at any rate, he, these two cops said to me "Can you control him?' I said "Yeah, why?' he said "We know a place where you can put him." I said, "Why, what sort of place?" "Oh no, get him dried out and everything." so I said "Right oh." Of course, he's starting, abuse them, and I said "Hey Jimmy." so he looked at me, and I went whack, so we carried him out and put him in the car, and took him round to this place. And my wife was, I had to meet her, I had to meet Beryl, and she's, I was about half an hour

20:30 late when I got there, and she wasn't too happy. Any rate, they took him round to this place, and it was run by Canadian women. And they stripped him, and put him in a bath, and put him to bed. And kept

him there for week. And he, never gave him, he had money with him, but they held that. Any rate, I never saw him again, until we had a re-union at Mildura in 1990. And he came in, and he had a beard and everything.

21:00 I said to another fellow there “Who’s that?’ he said “That’s Jimmy Hogg.” I said “It can’t be.” he said “Yes, it is.” So he came over, and it turned out, he was running the AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] up there at Merbein. I said to him “Do you ever remember being with the Canadian women?’ he said “Yeah, how did you know about that?’ I said “I’m the bloke that took you there.” He didn’t have a clue. Now his son

21:30 won the Jimmy Watson medal a few years ago for the Jameson’s Run, he invented the Jameson’s Run red [wine]. And he also captained the country wheat cricket team, when they played the English up there, years ago, so his son’s done very well. Poor old Jimmy, he’s dead now, poor chap, but he was a character.

**After the Canadians, did he get back on the grog then?**

No. Oh he did for a while,

**For a while?**

Yes, oh yes. But he straightened out up there, and then he was running the

22:00 AA at Merbein. Quite surprising, really the way you, oh, he was a mess. He went through all his deferred pay, four years pay, in England before he came home.

**That’s a lot of alcohol.**

Yeah, a bit, well it was mainly spirits, because the beer there, at that time, you could drink it all day

22:30 and nothing would happen.

**And asking about your family again. How old were you when your mum passed away?**

14.

**It was around the time that you’d left school.**

Yeah, well I was working before she did, but yeah.

**And how did she pass away?**

Well, it would, today they’d call it a stroke, in those days, it was, got a blood on the brain.

23:00 Pegging the washing out. Yeah.

**Was your dad around at that time?**

Oh he was at work, he was working, the woman next door found her. Then their, a friend of my sister’s came to stay with us, and they were, trying to, looking after us. And I went to work and they’d made

23:30 my sandwiches. I had jelly and sultana sandwiches. Could you imagine what it was like by the time I ate my lunch? Just a soggy mass. She still, my sister still remembers it.

**Because your sister’s friend didn’t know what she was doing in the kitchen?**

No. The pair of them didn’t,

24:00 no. Jelly and sultanas together, oh. So then the, we kept, my father got a housekeeper and they kept leaving, and I couldn’t work out why,

24:30 until one day, a housekeeper, she was a nice woman too and she was leaving, and I said “What’s the matter?’ you know, “Oh,” she said, “There’s nothing wrong with you kids, but I’m not staying here.” So I woke up something was wrong. And any rate, my brother and I, we went out one night, we’d been to the pictures I think, one Saturday night, and we came home. This woman used to sleep in the bed; we slept in a sleep out

25:00 at the back of this bedroom which was my sister’s bedroom originally, and she’d moved out. And there’s the old man snoring in this bedroom, and he was supposed to be in another one. So we knew what was going on then. And he reckoned he, they came home and my brother moved out, and I’d hurt myself at work, I’d taken a

25:30 lump out of my leg. At any rate, I was laying on the bed this day, and she came in to me and said “Why don’t you like me? I cook for you and everything.” I said “Cooking. You call that cooking?” Of course, my father come home from work, and she’s told him, so he said “Come here” and started belting me up. And the woman from next door came in, Mrs Allan, and took me in with her, and she said “You’re not stopping with them.” And any rate, he, then I went to

26:00 live with my mother’s sister in Richmond, and he took off to Sydney.

**How old were you when he took off to Sydney?**

16. So, it was, 10 bob a week is what we used to get to work. I got nothing out of that, because I had to put it into, to my aunty. The most I'd ever got before I joined the army, was two bob out of my pay

26:30 that I'd earned for the week, and all that bought me was a tin of tobacco, and a packet of cigarette papers. But I shouldn't say that, because I'm not supposed to have smoked until I got in the army.

**Then, on your health form is it?**

Yes, oh, yes, well. One of our blokes, now, Lloyd Allan, it was, they lived next door to us. Lloyd was a brother of

27:00 the one that lived next door, but a much younger brother, and he was in the same unit as me, and he won the MM [Military Medal] and that, you know. Good soldier, and everything. And he put in for a pension, and they said to him "Did you smoke before the war?' and he said "Yes." He only had to say "No." and he's got the pension. His wife abused the hell out of him. "What did you do that for?"

27:30 Well, he never got his pension. They should have given him one for being truthful, shouldn't they? Because most of them, they'd wake up, you know.

**Did most boys smoke by say, 15 you'd say?**

Oh yeah, in those days, everybody tried it, yeah?

**So, why do you think your dad went off to Sydney?**

Oh well, she,

28:00 this woman that, she came from there, she liked it. But he didn't sell the house, and actually we put in for the house, like all our, like, ever since we started working. Well, I earned before, when I went to work, when I was going to school, because I delivered papers in the morning, I sold them of a night, and I delivered fruit of a Saturday morning, on my bike. And I used to get four shillings for

28:30 delivering the fruit, I had a wooden box on the handle bars, used to get four schillings, and this woman always gave us a box of vegies and fruit to take home, so that was worth a hell of a lot.

**So what happened to the house?**

He rented it out. He lived, came back and lived there again after the war.

**Did you continue to see him, or have any contact with him?**

Oh, I did see him after the war, yes.

29:00 Not much good, not, you know, I saw him. My brother wouldn't, my brother wouldn't have anything to do with him. He didn't do anything to my brother, but he just wouldn't have anything to do with him.

**Pretty few rough years, before the war then you worked awfully hard.**

Yeah, they were rough. But just the same for everybody, everybody had those conditions.

29:30 **When did you leave your auntie's and go up fruit picking?**

39, 39. Oh, well, after the court case with my uncle, my aunty had a nervous breakdown, and when the war was declared, that topped it off. She was very nervous after the, I'd never seen her smoke in my life, and then she'd, at the court case, she started smoking after the court case, and I couldn't

30:00 work it out. But I woke up then she was very nervous. And then when war was declared, because her brother was killed in 1918 just before the Armistice was signed. And she just went to pieces when the war was declared. So, see, uncle there, he was there, and we just lived there together, just the two of us.

**What happened to your aunty, did she?**

She was put in the asylum. At Kew,

30:30 Kew mental hospital. She was there for the whole war, because I went, my brother and I went to see her when we got, as soon as we got home. Yeah, she came good eventually, she came good, yeah. Not completely, but pretty good.

**Did she live the rest of her life there at the hospital?**

No, no. She was let out, and that, yes.

31:00 Another cousin of ours, see, there was three, my mother and two others came out here originally. That's about in the year 1900 or something, and they worked around Corowa, and that, they were housemaids. Because my grandfather, they had 14 kids. I've got a photo of the old man and his, all the family. And

31:30 then, Phoebe, this is the one in Richmond she came out, and then she brought the, the old man, old Peter, and her mother out, and they lived in Richmond. Now that house, originally, it was a three roomed house, and the walls, internal walls were hessian, timber studs with hessian on, and wallpaper over that. Now that's what the houses were built like in those days,

32:00 I tell you and that's what it was. While I was there, with my uncle, we've got, we've plastered the walls, and then another sister was married to a coalminer, and he got killed, so they all clubbed together, the other sisters out here, and brought the family out. It was two daughters and a son,

32:30 and my aunty, well, the sister. Now, Queenie, she married one of the, oh, what was their surname, good God.

**That's all right.**

They had the, they were big florists up in Boronia, market gardeners, grew,

33:00 grew flowers. Chandlers. She married Alf Chandler. Phil, his, her original name was Wheeler, her married name, so Phil Wheeler, he went under that name, until, and then the other one, what was her name, God, must be getting old.

**That's all right.**

Yeah,

33:30 Marge. Marge, she married a fellow from Richmond and she, she was a bit of a rough diamond, Marge. And then the mother married a bloke again, and he had a licensed grocers. His shop's still there in Swan Street, Richmond. But he, it's not in the family, Greeks have got it now. Right near where the Derwent

34:00 pictures is. And it was a licensed grocers, there were very few in those days, there was only two or three. And when my aunt Phoebe, the one that had the nervous breakdown, got out, she went and lived with Marge. Marge, she lived with Marge the rest of her life, practically. In their, in her own house, because the fellow she married didn't own the house, it was hers right from the start. He never owned it, well, he had nothing to do with it.

34:30 Of course, I didn't know, I was about nine when they got, when she got married. But yeah, interesting days.

**Before you went into the services, what were your expectations of the army and of war?**

Well, I knew you'd be, you'd have to drill and all that. I didn't have much idea of war. No idea. All you worry about

35:00 when you're going into action, is whether you are going to be able to cope with it or not. Everybody felt the same. If they say they were never frightened or anything, then they're mugs. You just wonder whether you're going to be able to cope with it, that's all. But you do. Because your mates are relying on you, and you're relying on them. You know, you've got to.

**You**

35:30 **obviously have a great inner strength to get through everything, can you tell me how you found that in yourself to cope with everything?**

Well, the worst moments of my life was when we, the day we got captured, right. When they, this Colonel Walker said "Well, I've got orders to capitulate the island." that was a big disappointment, you know. And the next time, was when Singapore fell, we were in Germany then,

36:00 and Singapore fell, we thought "Oh God." you know. But then apart from that, I never questioned that I would never get home, I always felt that I, you know, never worried me. But somebody that it did affect was the married men, they were the ones that had the hard time. Because they're worried all the time about their kids and everything. Especially when others are getting letters, especially the English. One in particular,

36:30 he gets a letter from the Salvation Army, saying not to worry about their children, we're looking after them. Of course, he wanted to know why. And his wife's run off with some American. But, you know, that's when they start to worry. So they had a hard time when they had that sort of thing started to happen, and it happened more than once. It happened a lot.

# Tape 7

00:30 **We might just get you to just explain what you were saying in the break, that it was, you reckon it was harder for married fellows.**

Oh, much harder.

**Can you explain that a bit more?**

Oh, they were worrying about their families, and then they'd get letters or, that their wives had taken off with, Yanks, usually. And of course, if they had children, they would get letters from the Salvation Army or someone saying, to tell them not to worry about their kids, they were looking after them. And that's when they did worry, you know,

01:00 because. I know one bloke he swore if he got out, he'd kill his wife and the Yank for doing that to his kid. I don't doubt that he would have. And another one, where, one fellow, by the time the war finished, he'd been engaged to a girl for 16 years, a regular army, right? Was out in India, they used to do a four year stint in India. So

01:30 he's in India, they do their four years, they're supposed to go home, his unit had played up, caused a bit of trouble. So they're punished with another four years in India. So they're going home, and on the way home, they cause trouble on the boat, so they're dumped in Egypt and do another four years in Egypt. Then he goes home, he's arranged to get married, and the war breaks out, and they shipped him over to France. He's still not married. So

02:00 then he's got another five years there. I said to him "Do you think you'll ever get married?' he said "I don't think I'm meant to be married."

**Did you have a sweetheart during the war?**

No.

**How did that affect you and your strength?**

No, it didn't worry me, didn't worry me, no.

**You were saying to me during the break, you thought you had less**

02:30 **worries in a way, because you didn't have family.**

Yeah, well I wasn't worried about the family, because my brother was in the army, and my sister was married, she got married in 41, so her husband was in New Guinea. But, he got sent home because he got up there, he didn't have a spleen, he had his spleen removed when he was a kid and if he got malaria, he was dead in no time, he couldn't survive it. So they sent him back here. So he was a bit lucky in one way.

03:00 **So you were saying you had more energy to focus on survival yourself.**

Oh yes, you could worry about survival, that was the only thing I had to worry about. And you looked after yourself. We made, most of them managed.

**You must have been a bit wide eyed, it was your first trip overseas, when you got to the Middle East. Can you describe what it was like seeing people from**

03:30 **different countries and different languages?**

Yeah, well, it was just amazing, really, seeing in the, we got off El Kantara, and we trained down, well, it pulled out, pulled up at Beergergia [?]. But on the way, you're going through all these oranges, and big oranges. Beautiful oranges, I couldn't believe it in the desert, you know. And the Arabs, you know, their clothes and that, that was

04:00 a bit of a shock to see. And you'd see the, you'd see the Arab riding a donkey, and his wife walking along with all the, loaded up with everything on her shoulders. That's the way it ought to be, shouldn't it.

**Did any of the**

04:30 **troops ever say anything to the Arabs that they saw in, have conversations?**

Oh, we used to speak to them all the time. "Syeder." which is "G'day." "Humdyeber." "Glory be to." "Allah achbah." "Glory be to Allah." you know. No they didn't talk to you much the Arabs. I think I'd better get a drink of water.

**Sure. Pick up with what we were just saying in the break, about**

05:00 **when you were in a work camp, POW work camp, the main complaint that got attention was your teeth.**

Teeth, yeah. So, you were in a little village or just on a, anywhere, somewhere small, there'd be no dentist there, so you'd have to go to a town. Well then, we made sure, even though you didn't have any, we used to get goose fat to slick your hair down, and put on your boots, and make them, you know, polish them up a bit. And we used

05:30 to sleep on our trousers, lay them underneath, so that they'd put a crease in them. And we'd look, we'd be as smart as we possibly could, to show them up. Like, their soldiers their uniforms, looked nothing compared to us in our British battle dress. We made a point to everybody that you went anywhere, near the towns or anything, you looked as smart as you possibly could. And it worked, because you could see

them

looking at them, and then they'd look at you. You could see by their expressions that they "Oh, they're better dressed than what ours are." So I went to one dentist, I forget the name of the town now, and the guard took me in there, and the dentist, he just said to him "Have you got any shopping to do?' and he said "Why?' he said "Well, I'll be a couple of hours, with him, so if you've got any shopping to do,

you can go and do it. I'll make sure he doesn't run away or anything." So, off he went, as soon as he's gone, bloke brings out a bottle of pre-war pilsener beer, and lifts it up, have a drink, and starts telling me all the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] news. So, yeah, then he said, he said to the guard, "You better bring him back in a fortnight." because all my back teeth were breaking. You know, probably the food we

were eating. So, I lost most of my back teeth there. So I had two or three or four trips, it happened every time I'd go there, that was the routine, he told me the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] news and what was going on. So, he was, how many others, you wouldn't know. But they had to be careful, because even the kids going to kindergarten, they had to pimp on their parents, if they. They used to question them, ask if "Does your

daddy look at the, or watch, listen to the radio?' All that sort of thing. Nice country to live in.

**This dentist fellow, he spoke to you in English?**

Yes, oh, yes, he spoke good English, yes. All lot of them did. A lot of Germans did.

**You mentioned kindergarteners being interrogated about their parents. When did you know about the holocaust, about what was going on with**

**the Jewish people, when did you find out?**

I would have known in 1943.

**How did you learn that information?**

Well, a guard told me. He had been near there, and he said "You could smell them, smell it. You could smell it in the air." He'd been near Auschwitz. We weren't far from Auschwitz, not close enough to smell it or anything. We didn't know specifically, but we

knew. But nobody had ever told us specifically except the one guard, who told me that they were killing the Jews.

**Do you remember how he said it to you, how he phrased that?**

He just said "It's sickening." you know, he said "They're killing all the Jews." Wasn't only Jews. It was Poles,

gypsies, anybody they thought was beneath them.. As they, you know, they thought they were a superior race. The Poles were underneath, beneath them they were second class to them, you know. The only thing, they considered that we were more or less their equal, the British, yes.

**So did, when you met the Jewish girls,**

**when you were working with them, was there anything exchanged then that you, each of you knew was going on?**

No, you knew what they were, because they wore the yellow star with the "Jude" on it, you know. But they weren't in a camp, those ones weren't in a camp, or they wouldn't have had that star on, they would have been in the striped pyjamas.

**They were living in certain sections of town, a ghetto or**

I don't know where they lived, I have no idea where they lived. They were there loading these

pit supports on, you know, for the mine.

**Later in the war, when finally, the war was over or nearly over, did you hear more about what had happened?**

Well, in Prague, from Treblinka [actually was Theresienstadt], they all came in with their, still with their striped pyjamas on, came into Prague from

Treblinka [Theresienstadt], which was a concentration camp in Czechoslovakia. Oh, we knew about it all right, yes.

**Can you describe to me what you saw when you saw those particular released concentration camp victims?**

Yeah, well, they were walking skeletons, mainly, that was all. I never went to a camp and saw anything else that was left of it or anything. No, there was quite a few of them come into Prague.

11:00 **Do you know what happened with their care, or their follow up experiences?**

No, I don't know what, (UNCLEAR) looked after them, but I don't. Well actually, I don't know what really happened to them there, because I don't think the Russians were too worried about them. They were wandering around the streets, that's the only time I saw them.

11:30 So I don't know, no, I've got no idea what happened to them there, after that. A bloke from the other camp, Belsen, and that, where British and that got in, they were looked after properly. But then you had so many displaced persons all over Europe. Hundreds of thousands, millions, all the Poles and everything, the Russians,

12:00 could have been forced labour. They didn't want to go back home, they didn't want to go back to what they had been in. They wanted to go somewhere else. That's why we got so many, Estonians and that, how do we know what we got? The Latvians, thousands of them in the German army. And they were all put in the SS. Thousands of

12:30 Ukrainians. Millions, hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians, they're all those, Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, in the German army, and they were put all in the SS. They didn't want to go back home. We got a lot, Canada got a lot, America got them, now we're finding that we've got a few that shouldn't have been here. There are probably dozens more that we, shouldn't have been here. We wouldn't know what they were, because they weren't screened properly.

13:00 How could you screen them, at any rate? The only way you could have screened them was by taking them back to their own country, and people that had known them there earlier. So God knows how many there are still around. Not too many I suppose, they'd nearly all died by now.

**But you are saying that there may have been quite a few of them that were criminals, war criminals?**

Oh yes, I'm sure.

13:30 **What was Prague like in those days at the end of the war? Can you describe what it was like in the streets?**

Well, the German tanks had roamed around causing a bit of havoc, they got, some shocking atrocities. We won't talk about them, though. And then Prague, I don't know if you've ever seen Prague at all. The old town is down on the flat where the river is, down

14:00 where there was a river. And the new town is up on the hill. There's a photo of that. What they called it, it wasn't a (UNCLEAR), it was something else, and that's down on the flat, and the

14:30 castle is up on the hill. And that's all the new suburbs are all up on the top of the hill. That's the castle up on the hill there.

**Beautiful, isn't it? Architecture.**

Yes, now that's where they put all the German POWs they captured in Prague. They put them in that castle.

**People were wandering around.**

Oh,

15:00 all the Czechs, the first ones that came in there were Czechs and Poles in Russian tanks and that. And then the others come in later then. All the ordinary troops came in later. But apart from them there was all the ex-POWs trying to get out and there was the

15:30 concentration camp victims trying to get out. And it was just ordinary people. And us. I used to have a cup of coffee with a Russian major every now and again, and after a few weeks, he said to me "You better go home" and I said "Why?' he said "You might be fighting us before long." That was when they were having a bit of trouble with the Russians, and it looked like it could happen. So that was decided, the, that

16:00 Kiwi fellow that I was talking about that had the permit from the Russians, he was still there.

**The Maori fellow?**

Yeah, I tried to get my hat off him, he said "No, that hat's going home with me." So I wonder if he did take it home.

**You saw him for quite a number of days there, quite a few weeks.**

Oh yeah, every day, he was going down to Pilsen and back again. He was down in the old part of the town, he used to stay there, and I was up on the,

16:30 up near the castle in the newer suburbs.

**What was it like obtaining food and that, it must have been a break in some of the services**

**and**

Oh, yes.

**How did you?**

I didn't have to worry about that, because the Lansky family looked after me.

**So you were, you stayed with them, obviously, when you were in Prague.**

Yes.

**Did you stay overnight at**

17:00 **Pilsen some, as well, or did you always went back?**

No, we came back. In and out on the one trip, yeah.

**You got some supplies, though, down there?**

Oh yes, off the Americans, yeah. We'd get cigarettes, coffee, K rations and stuff like that. Never had any trouble getting that. And down there, there was all these, what they used to call Blutsdeutsche [ethnic Germans] which

17:30 had been shipped up to Poland and that and taken over the farms. That, where that fellow that owns that badge, the saw mill and flour mill there. That wasn't owned by him before the war, it was Polish. But they put him in it because he was a farming man. We hardly ever saw him, he never worried us at all, except his sister came down there, and she didn't like Australians.

18:00 I said "Why not?' she reckons she was raped by an Australian in 1919, in the army of occupation. I didn't know we had any Australians there. That's what she said, I don't know whether it was true or not. Yeah, 1918 or 1919.

**When you first saw English soil after the war, what did you do,**

18:30 **when you first saw?**

Well, I'll tell you what we first saw. I told you there was 28 of us in a Lancaster bomber, and we just get out over the Channel and one of the fellows said to the pilot, "Is that the Channel down there?' and he said "Yes, do you want a closer look?" Dived down. So that was the first sight. Yeah. Much different countryside to ours.

19:00 Never seen anything so green as England. Do you know, we were in, asked when we got there, "Have you got anybody you want to put in for bad treatment or that?" Not one of our fellows put anybody in. And yet in the Lamsdorf, in the cells, the fellow that, the

19:30 German that controlled the cells, his nickname was "Scarface." he had a big scar here, on his cheek here. Scarface. Now, they've got a little peephole in the door. He'd just open that and yell out "Rouse" first thing in the morning. Go down the length of the cells, then he would come back with a bucket of water. And all you had was a, like a platform, and one blanket, and that's what you slept on.

20:00 Now, if you weren't standing at the end of the platform with your blanket folded when he came back, he'd just open the door and throw a bucket of water over you. And you'd stand there all day. If it was winter, you'd be freezing. Nobody complained about him, nobody said "Well, we want to put him in because he [?] stuff or anything like that, nobody did. They just forgot it, "Oh, forget it, let's get on with life."

**Why do you think they had that attitude?**

20:30 Well, they're just that glad to get out of it, I suppose. But that was the attitude, "Let's get on with life, forget it." Later on, they might think about it, but at the time, they didn't do anything about it. I know with Paddy Flynn, he could have, because, he was the fellow I got out of the draft compound with. He had a big scar there, where the guard had hit him with the butt of a rifle and split his head open, and wouldn't give him any, wouldn't take him anywhere to get treatment. So he had a

21:00 shocking scar down there. Paddy Flynn, broad Scots as you could get. Come from the Gorbels in Glasgow, which is probably the toughest place in the world you could be brought up in, being a Catholic, Irish Catholic in Scotland. He was tough. Not a big man, by God he was tough. And a good staunch, I don't know if I would like him as a friend in civilian life, but over there, you couldn't get anybody

21:30 better. And when we went back to Greece in 91, we got on a plane here, and went to Sydney, and the blokes got it in Sydney. And this big fellow got in, and the seat, that was his seat, and he opened the locker, and it was full. So he just pulled it out and dumped it on the floor, and said "Whose ever this is, you better put it in your own locker." It was the doctor who was coming with us, from

22:00 the DVA in South Australia. It was his gear. And I thought, "By God, I know that bloke." And he looked at me and he said "Don't I know you?' and I said "I think I met you somewhere." and he said "Did you

know Scotland Forever?" I said "You mean big Paddy Flynn?' he said "Yeah" "That's where I met you in Jagendorf, in the jail." That's where I'd met him. Fellow by the name of Ray Prant, from the 1st Battalion, or

22:30 the ack-ack or something. Hadn't seen him since, well, about 1944.

**And this was in. So this was, this happened, you saw this fellow, Roy, again on a reunion trip?**

Yes, it was 91.

**91.**

The 50th anniversary of the Battle of Crete. Something interesting in that happened in Greece, when we were retreating it wasn't one of

23:00 ours, it was from another battalion, at a place called Farina, right up in the North. He took the Greek flag down from the school, and brought it home with him. He took it with him. And he got out of Greece, and he got home. Forty years later, he went back there, and gave them back their flag. Now, they go there every, about every five or ten years, and they go to the

23:30 school, and the kids love it, because they get a half day holiday. But that's a fact, 40 years later he presented them back with their own flag that he'd taken in 1941.

**Quite a bond there.**

Oh yes, yes. That was a great trip there, and I reckon there's a place called Norblen

24:00 in Greece, it's the prettiest place in the world. Beautiful harbour, and everything. Great place. We went all around Greece, cost us quite a bit, but still, it was well worth it.

**I was wondering, oh, sorry.**

Yeah, go on.

**I was wondering, when you arrived back in England off the Lancaster, what you had, what your personal possessions were at that time.**

What we stood up in and what we had in the, what we nicked off the Americans in our kit bags

24:30 that they gave us. That was what we stood up in.

**Well, can you describe all that?**

Yeah, it was, we had American trousers and shirt and windcheater, that was it. And boots.

**And in your little pack?**

No, only that kit bag. No little pack, nothing else, nothing at all.

**What had you had with you, at various stages that you then lost? Like had you had, at some stage, I think a**

25:00 **pay book, and other things that got lost.**

Well, I brought my original pay book home, but it's been lost since. I don't know where it's gone to, and a lot, some photos have disappeared, too, I don't know where they've gone. Because we had a, did a lot of alteration, so it probably got lost then. Got, somebody might have thrown them out or something. The old pay book, it was all tattered and torn, and I had addresses written in it, from Prague and that. Different people.

25:30 Because the son and daughter of the Lanksys they were both university students, and of course, as soon as the Russians come in, all their unity, all their friends are there, and they've all got together. And all they wanted me to teach them was how to do the Foxtrot. And they had a fellow used to play the piano, Johnny Holmgren, his name was, a Czech, he was a very terrific jazz pianist and that. And we used to have

26:00 quite a ball, you know, good fun, nothing. There was no booze or anything like that, they didn't have any, but it was good fun.

**Did you save any letters that you'd received?**

Yeah, I've still got heaps of them. There's one there, one of the first ones I ever got, I think. In there somewhere. It was here.

26:30 **That's all right, we can look at that in the break if you'd like, or**

Yeah. I can't remember what was in it now.

**That's 45, that's after your wedding.**

27:00 This was 46.

**I was wondering if you had any from the war, but maybe you don't. Were you able to keep any from the actual period during the war when you were in camps that you received, or was it too hard to?**

No, I was taken off, you couldn't take any of those things with you.

**Yeah**

27:30 Yeah, well.

**Do you want to read**

28:00 **a little bit of this one? If you could just remind us who that letter is from Don.**

Oh yes.

**Is that from the Lanksys or from?**

This is from the Lansky family in Prague, on the 3rd of the 3rd, 1946. "We all thank you for your very nice letter. We are glad to hear that you are safely at home again, and that you are having such a fine time. It is only a pity,

28:30 that your wife is still not with you, perhaps she has arrived in the meantime." She arrived the following month, in April. "You are very kind to take such a care of us. The food situation is a little better, but no comparison to what it used to be. In spite of it, we do not want to bother you with sending anything to us, as we are hope, as we hope sincerely that by the, by and by, real peacetimes will come again.

29:00 We are only sorry that we could not give you what we would have liked to. But anyway, we all do hope that sometime, you will come together with your wife. I need not mention how glad we would be to meet her, or could you perhaps send us pictures, send us her picture to Czechoslovakia, so that we might see, send us her picture, so that she might see our country in peace and good order." Now, how would

29:30 **I noticed that when I read it.**

A bit confused there. "We are curious what occupation you have chosen, for I must confess, we forgot all about your plans. There certainly is a great possibility finding some in Australia, or in a situation similar to that of the United States. That would really interest us and so in case you have the

30:00 intention of writing to us, could you please write something about it. All of us are sincerely interested in your fine country. And we almost envy everybody who can live there, far from the quarrelling Europe. We had quite a mild winter here, and brother and I went skiing to our Giants Mountain. It was wonderful, for during the

30:30 occupation, we were not allowed to got there. We had about three metres of snow, and I can tell you, it was a pleasure to fall down. Next week, our parents will go skiing." Yeah. And then she says "Otherwise, there is nothing new here that would be of interest to you. I would only like to know whether you got those two or three big photographs, which I sent to you through Charlie." Now, Charlie was an English bloke from Dover, and she was sweet

31:00 on him. So these were photos that were taken in their backyard, and she had them enlarged, and sent to him to send to. Never ever got them. Never. Never heard a word from him.

**Why do you think that is?**

I've got no idea. Never heard a word from him. "I asked him to forward them to you, but I never got an answer from him. In case you haven't got them, please tell me in your

31:30 letter, and we will have copies made for you." Yeah. "Yours sincerely, family Lansky." Well, that was written by the daughter, Beeler. Beder the boy, Beeler the girl.

**She was the really beautiful one.**

She was, yes, very nice. Very nice looking girl.

**Well, we'll just have you take your glasses off, if that's okay.**

Yes, sure. Sorry.

32:00 **It's no worries, but it just makes it more like the other tapes.**

Oh, right.

**Okay, we just have a few minutes left on this tape, but I'll just ask you another question. Broadly speaking, how did you feel the British officers viewed Australian troops?**

32:30 Not very well. Not too good at all. We would have been far better off under our own command. I'm quite

certain. Yeah, now, how long ago would it be? About two years ago, a General Campbell died in New South Wales, right? Now,

33:00 he was the one that organised the attack on Bardia. It was his plans, and he was a major then, no, he wasn't. And it was very successful, even though we had the, we were still under the English and we had the 7th Armoured Division, they were with us. And that was very successful, and he went on to become the commanding officer of the 2/1st Battalion at Retimo.

33:30 Now, at Retimo, they had, you know, on Crete. They had 500 prisoners, German prisoners. They cleaned them up, practically. But then, where Maleme, was, which was under the, that was mainly Freyberg, the New Zealanders, and the 7th Battalion were in that. They had taken control of the aerodrome, and they started withdrawing and they were gone. And they had all these prisoners and everything.

34:00 And he was a prisoner of war, a colonel, he was a colonel. And now, for us to get married, I had to go and see him, and his wife was there, she'd gone over to England, and we had to go before them to get permission to marry. Everybody had to go to him, because he was our CO [commanding officer] over there, we had to get his permission to get married. They had to, (UNCLEAR) you to see if the wife was suitable, mainly,

34:30 that's what it was.

**So you did go to him in**

Oh yeah, we had to go to him all right.

**What sort of things did he ask?**

Oh, no, he just asked a few questions, you know. "What her parents did? Where she worked and what, you know?" And they had to give their permission. So, worked out all right. But, he was a very nice guy. He was a general by the time he died a couple of years ago, or he

35:00 was a general well before that. Yeah. We, these are the things that. We've got a bloke at the bowlers club, anything about the war in The Age, he cuts it out and gives it to me. "Did you know this fellow?" We, our battalion, two of our officers were in Colditz. Where, we were the only Australians that had two officers in Colditz. Jack Champ from Geelong, and Johnny Lawson. He's dead now.

35:30 I don't know about Champ, but Johnny Lawson's dead. He finished up losing both legs, probably through smoking. At the last time we saw him for the reunion, he used to row for the Banks rowing club and we had a reunion after the march in the Banks rowing club through him. And the last time we were there, we carried him up the stairs in his wheelchair, with both his legs off. Great little bloke he was.

36:00 **We'll just swap tapes now, if that's okay.**

# Tape 8

00:30 Right, when we were retreating out of Greece, and we got to the Corinth Canal, well, they had two companies of ours there. And there was also the Scotch Greys, English, you know, they had tents and everything there, you know. And one of my mates is at Nyora in Gippsland. He was over at the water point filling up all his mates' water bottles when the paratroops arrived. And the Scotch Greys came out of their tents in the pyjamas,

01:00 all their officers. Our blokes never even had their boots off. They came out in their pyjamas out of their tents. He couldn't get over it. So.

**He reckoned they were living in luxury, compared to**

Oh yes. Tents, good God.

**I was asking before about the interactions with British troops and British command**

01:30 **and Australian troops in Europe. Can you tell me more about the way in which British troops treated or looked upon Australian troops?**

Oh, we got on well with them. We got on all right, although, in Palestine, we used to have a lot of fights with them. That was all about money, though. Because they got two bob a day, we got five. We hadn't been there a fortnight, when the prices of everything went up

02:00 right? And they couldn't afford it. They couldn't afford it, and they used to get very annoyed about it. So then they, Hitler used that as propaganda, too. Because they put it over, Lord Orville put it over that the colonial troops were fighting with the British troops in Palestine. They knew what was going on, because head Mukhtar, the

02:30 chief Muslim of Palestine, he wanted, he was pro-Nazi. And they knew everything that was going on. So

then they, we weren't allowed to go on leave when the Poms had leave. We had to go on our own. Well then, once the boys had had a few beers, the 17th Brigade was from Victoria, 16th Brigade was New South Wales.

03:00 If they were both on leave at the same time. Same thing happened. After having a few beers, there were a bit fisticuffs flying around, nothing serious, but then, they had to stop it, though. If your battalion went on leave, no other battalion went on leave for the day. It was only a day's leave, you know. But nothing much, but they used to blow it up as something big. We didn't

03:30 used to take any notice of the British officers. Never. How they got on with each other, the officers, I wouldn't know. We didn't think much of them. For instance on Crete, they had Hyde tanks there, this was 25 tonners, never used them.

04:00 They should have had them at the aerodrome when they first landed and used them straight away. They didn't. Don't ask me why.

**Did you know at the time that they had them?**

Yeah. We'd seen them, but, we weren't up at the aerodrome, but I was told that they never used them there, by people who were.

**So you got on well with individual British troops, but not a lot of respect for the British command.**

04:30 No, not a lot of respect for the British officers.

**Why?**

Well, they acted as if their soldiers were beneath them, you know. Ours didn't, if they did, they didn't get on very well with their troops, you know. We never had anybody like that. For instance, our colonel, our company, it was our turn to go on leave in Tel Aviv for a day, now

05:00 there was supposed to be 30 to go. Nobody was going. He wanted to know why. It was the week before pay day. We didn't have any money. So he said "Oh, well, I'll lend you all a pound each, as long as you repay it." Everybody repaid him. I couldn't imagine an English officer doing that. When, I told you before about Joe Gullet, when he took us into the

05:30 officers only hotel, now this bloke, Bluey, oh God, big fellow, Bluey, real tough character. He went up to this air force officer, English air force officer, and he said "Could you lend us a quid mate?' and this bloke looked at him and he said "Lend you a pound? I don't know you"

06:00 He said "Ask anybody in the AIF, they all know Bluey Hickey." I tell you what he did, he got wounded at Bardia and he got invalided home, and of course, everybody's going "Oh well, see you later, Blue." you know "Good luck" and a lot of our people come from the western districts our fellows, and "Give us your address, and I'll go and see your people, let them know how you are getting on and that."

06:30 "Oh, right oh." They all give him his address. Then they start getting letters "Oh, Mr Hickey called in to see us, and he was a bit short, we lent him 20 pounds." God knows how much he got. They had no hope of getting it back, I can tell you.

**He went round to the families of all his mates.**

07:00 **He's cheeky, isn't he?**

He was a good bloke, old Blue, though, you know.

**Sorry, that is just so cheeky, I can't believe it.**

Oh, that's right, don't worry.

07:30 Most of these, a lot of these blokes had carried their swag all round the country in the Depression. They had to live by their wits. It's funny how things hit you though, when we went over in the boat, they had dice games and everything, you know, and we used to have a bit of a gamble. And this bloke, he was a real dark, oh he was a vicious looking bloke.

08:00 We used to call him "Angel." because he was just the opposite, Angel Hobson, his name was. And up at Mildura in 1990, a fellow from South Australia, he lived here, and then moved over young Bubba Henshaw, said to me "What ever happened to Angel Hobson?" I said "He still owes me three quid, he borrowed off me on the boat, and I never ever got it back." What 40 years later, 50 years later it hit me, he still owes me three quid.

08:30 **Did gambling go on in the POW camps?**

No, they used to play cards, and well, now in the officers' camp it did, and I know one of ours, and they reckon that it was supposed to be fair dinkum, he would have been bankrupt. And he never ever paid, because he couldn't afford to pay it. And they did gamble there, we, there was nothing to gamble with.

09:00 Haven't got any money, no. We used to have a game of cards, now and again, if somebody had a pack of cards, you know. They were pretty scarce though.

**What else did you do for, to lighten the mood, a bit of morale boosting or recreation? You mentioned that you did make some grog at one point.**

Oh yes, yes,

09:30 made that more than once, but that used to lighten the situation, I can tell you. But, oh, no, we used to well, at that place, we didn't do much apart from that, there was as much as you could do. Oh, no, they used to sing, talk, tell, you'd be talking about different things yeah.

**A lot of story telling, of what had**

10:00 **happened to you and what had happened to this other person.**

Oh yes, that went on, all the time. Story telling. Some were very tall stories, too, no doubt. But, oh no, the days passed quick enough. In the, when I was in the camp in Bavaria, before I went up to (UNCLEAR) to go and see my brother. We played sport, because you did nothing, I used to go and have boxing lessons and everything. It was an English bloke,

10:30 Jimmy Sprint, came from Liverpool, he was an old boxing coach, we had a team just there, him teaching us. And we used to train hard too. We didn't get much to eat, but by God, he used to have us fit. It, tunnel, ball, you know the big old heavy medicine balls? He'd have us there, throwing from one to another for hours at a time, you know. And boxing and everything, he was very good. You know, we'd spend a morning, two or three mornings a week.

11:00 And then they had a rugby competition, Australia playing England, Wales, Scotland, South Africa, and all this. And, oh, and soccer. Our team played off in the soccer, and they were nearly all Australian Rules players, and we got beaten by an own goal. You know what happened, this is in the

11:30 final, for the whole lot, they would have won it. The full back, he used to play for Subiaco, he was the goalie, and he got the ball and he kicked it out, and he hit the half back right in the middle of the back, and it shot back in past him and got a goal. That's how they got beaten. Our, Waymount that used to play for Collingwood, Ronny Waymount. His father was a prisoner of war. Dicky Waymount, played for Footscray, and nobody could get over how he could kick a ball. He played in the rugby side and everything.

12:00 He'd kick a field goal from 60 yards out, you know, drop kick it. Everybody was amazed at him. And they won that, they won the rugby competition, and they were, half of them were Aussie Rules players, there were a few, the New South Wales players were rugby league players, rugby players. I had a couple of games, I said "Where am I going to play?" They said "You're full back" because I could kick a ball. They dumped me after a while. They were all on one side of the ground

12:30 right, and the ball comes up to, "I'll get that." I race down and kick it out the other side, then they all abuse me "You bloody, fool, we've got to go over there, now." I didn't know anything about the rugby rules. But that, and they had an escape committee there, that they used to mess around, but right outside the wire was a hill like that. Where are they going to go with a tunnel? Nowhere, they had no hope. Oh, and they had,

13:00 they used to put on plays and that, they had an actor's school and all, you know, actors and that. And they used to have schools sort of thing, you know, coaching them in different subjects and that.

**Which camp was this, where you had the more opportunities? This one here, that you had sport**

Yeah.

**Which camp was that?**

That was in Bavaria, that was a NCOs, you know, camp. Oh, and they used to have concerts and that in Lamsdorf,

13:30 too, in 8B, they used to have concerts and that in there, they had escape committees, and all that, but they never did good to them. You know, they're working their butt off and getting nowhere. It was better to get out in a working party, and away, you could always get away from that if you had a bit of brains.

**So in the camp, a few guys would get together, and they'd make this escape committee.**

Yeah. And they'd try and dig tunnels and plan, they'd spend days on it, doing it, and nothing ever eventuated.

14:00 **But you went out on work party, and you could get away.**

Yeah, we always managed to get away. There wasn't one that I was on that I didn't get away from. I think you had, the best effort was getting out of the draft compound, with Paddy Flynn, just because he was wide awake, had his eyes open. Nobody else would have even bothered to look. I wouldn't have.

14:30 **Any of those escape committees that you knew about, were they ever successful?**

None that I knew of. None that I knew of. Some in the officers camps were, they got out, but, no, there was a few got back to England. One of our officers got out of a prison camp in Italy, and got to Switzerland. Actually, there was 400 odd Australians who got into Switzerland,

15:00 mainly from Italy when they, when the Italians turned it in, and, you know, they took off out of the show. A lot of them stayed there, though a lot of them wouldn't go. There was 400 odd Australians that got into Switzerland from POW camps. And the officer of our crowd that did it, he was actually a South African out here when the war broke out and joined the army.

15:30 **I was wondering how, with so much movement around, if there was anybody that you got really attached to, or anybody that you'd hoped to see again, and you tried to find out moves about that person or any relationships?**

Oh, you tried to find out about it yeah, but, once I was put in this draft compound, one of the blokes who was on the working party where I escaped from, and finished up there, he came in, and he was outside the wire, and he

16:00 was talking to me, and I asked him different things, "Oh" he said "I haven't got time to tell you now, I'm off." Never saw him again. There were some very strange people there, I can tell you.

**How did you find out information about people that you maybe befriended in a different camp, and**

Well you, somebody said "I was at such and such a camp." "Well, did you know so and so, did you run into him?' you know. And if they had they'd tell you, but apart from that, you couldn't find out much.

16:30 **Did news travel very well, or very quickly?**

Yes, different news did, yes. That travelled pretty quick. Of course, most camps had a wireless. As I said before, you could always get something in if you wanted to. Providing you got the right guard.

**By get something in you mean?**

Bring in what, that you shouldn't have, in your gear.

**What kinds of goods?**

17:00 **Could be alcohol, could be what else?**

Not, they didn't worry about that, because they could always make it. See the, oh, they got fruit, you know, dried fruit and everything, put that in the tub, filled it up with water and sugar and all that. And that all, put it down for two or three days and then they topped all up and strained it. It was alcoholic, all right. But then,

17:30 one bloke, he said he wanted more, so what he did, he put some more water in, got into, strained it through a sock, oh. And the Scotsman, we talked to the guard in on one place, we talked him in, we knew these Scotsmen in the camp not far away, they were working in this village. So we said "What about taking us over to see him?' so he said "All right." so he marched us all

18:00 over there, and we got over there, and this bloke said "Do you want a drink?' and we said "What have you got?' he said "Oh, it's alcoholic." So "Oh yeah." so I sniffed it and said "What's that?" "Oh." he said "Methylated spirits and milk." Oh my God. It felt like you had a quarter of an inch thick scum on your teeth. And they made it out of boot black, boot polish and everything. And don't forget, half of these Scotsmen used to live near

18:30 distilleries and they used to get in and get the barrels, that the, and fill it up with water and leave it and then they'd get all the alcohol out of the wood. Wood alcohol. They used to kill themselves with it, some of them. Wood alcohol.

**I was going to ask you if anybody ever killed themselves with these various forms….?**

Not there, but that's what they used to do in Scotland.

**Oh, right**

Before they went in the army, in Scotland.

**Any of the POWs do that, hurt themselves with this, that stuff?**

Oh yeah.

19:00 Not too many, I heard of a few though, not too many. But you've got to be desperate for that.

**You mentioned there were quite a few weird people that you met. Do you think there were people who lost their wits?**

Oh, yes. Oh, God yes. We had one, we used to call him "The Admiral." He was in our battalion, he was, went right off. As a matter of fact, I ran into him on a building site

19:30 after the war, and these blokes were picking at him, you know, on the job, and they hadn't been in the army, and of course, I had to stick up for him. You know, you couldn't help it. I abused these blokes I tell you "You ought to go through what he's been through, mate, you wouldn't be picking on him." But they were.

**Did that shut them up?**

Oh yeah they shut up. Well, while I was there, they did, but what happened afterwards, I wouldn't know.

**This**

20:00 **fellow that you called "The Admiral." why did you call him that?**

I don't know how it started, but everybody, we all called him "The Admiral." I've no idea how it started. All of a sudden he's "The Admiral." Another bloke we called Sloper, Sloper Smith from the 7th Battalion. He was a Dutchman in Munich, he used to get a lot of gear, I don't know where he got it from, but he

20:30 that was his job, going around with a garden (UNCLEAR) in Munich. And when he came home, he came home in the same boat as me, and he had a haversack full of watches.

**What were some of the other nicknames that you had for one another?**

Well, I was just "Stevo." that was mine. "Stevo" or "Steve."

21:00 Most Welsh blokes were "Taffy." the Irish were "Mick." the Scotties were "Jock." apart from that if they had another nickname, well you, "Bugs" Moran, he was that because he was bugs. And he was a nut for sure.

**Any particular nicknames for officers or guards?**

Yeah, we had a bloke named Gosling for a while,

21:30 that was his name, Gosling. So he was immediately nicknamed the "Galloping Goose." Big, tall fellow he was. I think he got wounded at Bardia too, so we never saw him again after that. I never know, how he went. Rowan, he was a captain and then he was a major, he was named "Apple Jack." "Apple Jack Rowan." I don't know how he got that name.

22:00 **Did you nickname the guards, the German guards?**

Oh, some of them had nicknames, yes. Different sort of nicknames. We had, one of our blokes, Cameron his name was, he come from Geelong, he was "Cocky Cameron." He finished up a major, he started off as a private, and when we were in Helwan, we got guard duty. And Cocky was a corporal then, and I was in his section. So, I'm on guard duty on the, our

22:30 tent, which was the battalion jail. There's nobody in it. So at that time, we had a major called Wrigley, so he was "PK" and

**From the chewing gum.**

Yes, and I was on guard there, so the Arabs, the gypos [slang word for Egyptians] used to come in with papers and things, The Egyptians Mail,

23:00 and another one The Egyptian Post, and The Egyptian Mail. So we'd if you were on guard, we used to tell them which officer's name to call out. And it would be "So and so's got the pox [venereal disease]." or something like that, this major or whoever it was. Pretty crude but that's what they. And they'd go around the camp yelling this out. And I'm on guard duty, and I've got The Egyptian Mail off him, so I undid my webbing, got the rifle there, up against the barb wire

23:30 and I'm reading the paper. And I'm reading away, and all of a sudden I saw a bloke walk past, and he's in a dressing gown, I just saw him, he'd walked past, and just, but he's on his way back, he'd been and had a shower. And it was this Major Wrigley, and poor old Cocky Cameron got hauled over, he never said a word to me. Cocky Cameron, he was in charge of the guard, and he got hauled of the coals, so I got abused from Cocky. Cocky was a good fellow, but he said "You

24:00 bloody near cost me my third stripe." "Yeah." And he was in the, in New Guinea, and General Wootten, I think it was, Major General Wootten was there, and our colonel, a man whose name was Fred Woods, and Cocky was out, and he's directing the artillery, because they're under heavy attack, you know, where he wanted the artillery landed. And of course, the language was pretty ripe, and

24:30 Wootten said to our colonel "He's very explicit with that language, isn't he?"

**You mentioned that you had nicknames for some of the German guards?**

Yeah.

**What were some of those?**

Oh, they had all sorts of name. "The Grope." and how he got that name I don't know, he just, just

something that annoyed you and somebody said “Oh, yeah, it’s ‘The Grope’ out there.” and different names,

25:00 you know. “The Weasel.” little weasel, you know, like a, and “The Ferret.” we had some real names for them. I’ve never seen a weasel, what are they like, I wouldn’t have a clue, it was the Poms who nicknamed him “The Weasel.” so

**Were there any times when there were, what you might call a friendship struck up with the guards?**

Only once, that I, where I was concerned,

25:30 and that was the bloke that, he came from Baden-Baden. Now, he didn’t want to be in the army, he didn’t want anything to do with it. So somebody told him that if you took saltpetre, that showed up on your heart.” right, but it didn’t do any damage. Well, he took enough that it did do damage, so he was, he didn’t get sent to Russia. He was a guard. Now, he was

26:00 good bloke, a real good bloke. He just treated us as if we were his friends, he didn’t want to lock us up at all. If he’d had it his way, he wouldn’t have. So you couldn’t do anything against him.

**Which camp was this guard?**

He was on the, where we, on the saw mill and the flour mill, he was a guard there. But others, no.

26:30 But I must tell you, when we left from that camp, we escaped from there, and this Taffy Price, or Posh Price was his nickname, because he was always neat, very neat, everything had to be just right. And he was called “Posh” by all his mates. He was in the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, he was Posh. And we had it worked that, when our blokes took the trousers and boots up, they dropped

27:00 some chocolate and a cake of soap in the guard’s gear, right? So when we’ve gone, the first thing he’s got is report us, so he’s off to his control. So down comes the officer, “How did they get out?” and they told him how we got our arm through and opened the lock and re-locked it and went, so we’d save the window for them, where the bar was cut out. So they checked the bar and everything, and never found anything, and they said to him

27:30 when he came there, they said to him “We want to report him.” they said “What for?” “Oh.” he said, “He’s been taking bribes, and now he won’t do what we want him to.” So they searched all his gear and found the chocolates, so he got sent to the Russian front. So they got rid of him. So they, don’t worry, they had ways of getting rid of them. Now this.

**You plant the chocolate before or after you escaped?**

This is a bit crude, but I’ll tell you this

28:00 because it’s the absolute truth. In the villages and that in the country, the doctors and the Germans were pretty ignorant of VD [venereal disease], right, so this old Pommy regular army bloke, been in India and everywhere, so he wanted to get off this working party. So in a Red Cross parcel, you got a tin of condensed milk, and you also got a big tin of klim, Michael Klim,

28:30 klim was the name of it, it was milk in reverse, right? That’s what I always associate Klim, with being a POW. Michael Klim, the swimmer? Right? And he was Polish in any case, Michael Klim. Any rate, so, he wanted to get off, so he got this, a bandage and your condensed milk. Wrapped his, the appendage in that.

29:00 He went to the doctor, he said “I want to go to the doctor .” they said “What’s wrong?” He said “I’ve got VD.” So they take him to the doctor, and the doctor’s, he wasn’t going to look, just squeezed and out dripped the condensed milk and “Oh.” threw his hands up in the air “Get him away, get him away.” That’s the absolute truth. Wasn’t a bad one, was it?

**Where did they send him?**

Sent him back to the main camp, and he’s to be treated

29:30 by their own doctors, they didn’t, well, they wouldn’t touch him. Nothing wrong with him at all, he just didn’t want to work there any more.

**Was there much VD about?**

No, not that I know of, no. No, I never heard of it. Not in the prison camps, no.

**Was there an opportunity for relationships?**

I told you about the gardener.

**You can tell us about that if you like, because**

30:00 **the tape wasn’t on.**

Wasn’t it? Oh, well, one, Malcolm McDonald, the Scotsman, I think he came from Edinburgh, he used to

do the gardens, right? That was his job. And the colonel got him to do his garden, where his wife was. Anyway, he was there for months doing the garden and everything. And then one day the colonel arrived home early and caught him with this wife. He was

30:30 in the draft compound for sabotage, that was called sabotage. I tell you, early, in the early part, they used to give us a sheet of all that the prisoners had been charged with. And this Frenchman was charged with sabotage, do you know what he did? He fed razor blades to a cow. Working on a farm. Pretty shocking thing to do. I couldn't see

31:00 anything about sabotage in that. I must tell you about that, we, on the farm, you're ploughing with, two milking cows, a single furrow plough, two milking cows and one rein. And at that time, we had those things that the, like I told you on Schindler's List. The dirt would build up on them, you'd be that much higher, and all of a sudden it would fall off you, and you'd nearly break your ankle. So, it was shocking, oh bloody terrible. So it was quite a, quite an interesting

31:30 experience, ploughing with one rein and two milking cows, and then they'd, you'd milk them at night. Well, I wouldn't, but the woman would. And we cut hay, you cut that, and wheat, cut it with a scythe. The women, very grateful, you know, just get into a rhythm. And learned a lot of things there, no use to me, but still I've done it. And I also thrashed wheat with a flail, you know,

32:00 in the Bible, it shows you thrashing wheat, getting the grain with a flail? On the ground on a sheet with all the wheat and they're belting it with this flail.

**Can you describe that in more detail?**

The flail, it's like a handle with leather thongs on and a piece about that long on the end, and that moved, and then you could, you know, just belt it with the flail.

**Take the wheat off, takes the wheat off?**

Yes, knocked all the hearts off and everything, yeah.

32:30 Then put it through a sieve.

**Separating the wheat from the chaff?**

Yes, separating the wheat, getting grain from the chaff, yes. That's right.

**What do you reckon was the most, you said you didn't use those skills, what did you take away from it that was useful?**

Oh, that was useful. Well, I learned a lot about character.

33:00 I learned how to judge people pretty quickly. First sight, first impression, pretty right too. That's my occupation of it, anyway. You could usually pick somebody who was a real smoothie [a charming person], and you'd think "Well, there's something wrong with him, surely." Yes, you're very wary of them, but no, you learned to pick them pretty quick.

**Did that extend to be able, being able to pick who you could trust?**

Yes.

33:30 **Who might be on the allied side, who might not, before you?**

Yes.

**Can you describe that sort of judgement?**

Oh well, yeah. Well for instance, in Jagendorf, when we were in the jail there, something happened, I forget exactly what it was that happened, but somebody was dobbed in to the Germans

34:00 and he was a, he was a Palestinian Jew, who was at, was in the engineers, British army. He got the blame for it, and I said, "You've got the wrong bloke, he's had nothing to do with that, it wasn't him at all." Turned out, it was right, it was a Pom that had dobbed him in. Was their own. But out of

34:30 anybody, including the Americans and everything, I'd sooner the Pom alongside me than anybody else, apart from the Kiwis, because they're, we just classed them as the same as us. But sooner the Pom than anybody else.

**And why was that?**

I don't know, they just seemed stauncher, you know. They're, well, they're well disciplined, but I mean, there were, a lot of them were,

35:00 if they didn't have somebody to tell them what to do, they were lost, you know. A bit like the Germans that way, they were the same.

**What were your thoughts about the Americans? The American troops, perceptions of them?**

Well, I didn't have anything to do with them as troops, but where I struck them in Germany,

35:30 not much. When they first arrived in Lamsdorf, the first thing they said, because the Poms had all the rackets in the world going, oh, you've got no idea. And these Yanks come in and said "God almighty, Al Capone would starve in this joint." Some of the Poms, there was a lot of ingenious blokes, you know, there was no windows in half of these places, they'd been,

36:00 the glass had been broken, they'd ripped out all the timber to burn it, because you had no fires or anything, you know. And they made blowers out of these milk, big milk tins, and they had made little pulleys and a bit of string, and they used to, that used to cause a draught, and they'd have few chips of wood in there, and they'd put a Billy on there, and they'd boil the billy with a few chips of wood, with this blower. Create immense heat to

36:30 boil a billy in those times, you know. Very ingenious, you've got no idea the things they made.

**Did you reckon the Yanks weren't as clever, weren't as resourceful?**

I don't think they were resourceful, no I don't, they had everything. See, we used to get 50 cigarettes a week, in the Red Cross parcel, if you got it. Once the Yanks got in there, and they, they used to get a thousand a month from their regiment.

37:00 A thousand a month from the Red Cross, and their parents, people could send them a thousand a month. Now, they could buy half of Germany with those cigarettes, and everything was laid on for them. And I never got over them when we were, I told you, we were in the camp at Munich after we'd escaped, and they're over the wire, and they wouldn't even talk to us. I don't know what they thought, because we were in civilian clothes, I suppose, I thought they were, I don't know what was on their mind.

37:30 Wouldn't even talk to us, and what's worse, we walked past one going in, and we said to him, working, doing the border along the road, a garden sort of thing, we said to him "How are you Yank?' no answer, he just looked at us, and didn't answer, couldn't understand it.

**That was one of my questions, as to why they behaved like that?**

I've got no idea. No idea whatsoever. And, I met good ones too,

38:00 don't worry, a lot of good ones. But the general impression was that, not so hot. Most of our fellows felt the same. Hoggy, Jimmy Hogg, as I told you, he'd struck them in the prison camp and he wouldn't have a piece of them.

**Thought they were a bit spoiled or selfish, or**

Both.

38:30 Did you ever go up to the gold museum? Ballarat.

**Oh, Ballarat.**

Well, the gold museum is across from Sovereign Hill, right. Now, at the back of that, friends from Queensland came down, so I took them up there, and they reckoned it was marvellous, it was one of the best things they'd ever seen, the way it was done. And in the back of the place, they had this big photo of a bloke from Ballarat, named Bull Murray, Bull Allan, he got the

39:00 Silver Star [decoration] from the Yanks. He was in the, he was a mate of my brothers, right, originally, and he got the Silver Star in New Guinea, off the Yanks, for saving about five of their blokes. They were wounded, and they're crying out for help. And their Yanks, they wouldn't got and help them, he went and carried them in one after the other. And they wouldn't even move. And all

39:30 the time, he's carrying these blokes out, he's abusing the others. You could imagine the language he used. "Weak so and so." you know. And that's the sort of thing that our blokes, sort of didn't go for them much. And they couldn't move without their ice cream. That's what I was told by a bloke that had a lot to do with them in the, in New Guinea and that.

# Tape 9

00:30 **Again, that experience of being on the Dutch ship, I think it was called the Costa Rica?**

Costa Rica, yes.

**That was attacked and you were evacuated. Can you walk me through that experience again?**

Oh well, the bombs, it was a high level bomber that they'd missed and nobody had seen it. And the navy had just told us, you know, that the, we are out of danger now, and they reckon we'd sunk five, shot down five planes, credited us with five planes and all the rest of

01:00 that. And then, woof, great spouts of water shot up and three bombs, stick of bombs had landed right

alongside the boat, and blown, sprung the boiler plates, the plates alongside the engine room. And of course, the first thing we knew, is that the crew's off in the boats, rowing for their lives. Course, we found out later from the navy blokes, they were expecting the boilers

01:30 to blow up. That would have been the whole ship go up. And anyway, it was listing, sinking, and they brought the destroyers in, and the first one came along on the side where he shouldn't have done. By the time he's loaded up with men, the ship's laying on top of him and they had to smash all the pom pom guns on the side there, which was the fast firing ack-ack. They had to smash them off to get away. The ship was leaning. But

02:00 no, I thought it was, our blokes were perfectly behaved. They, no panic whatsoever. Of course, they helped by putting guards on the companion way straight away, so they could get them off the bottom deck first, the next deck and so on. And we were on the top, we just walked off, by the time we got off, we just walked onto the deck of the destroyer, so she was pretty low by that time. And I believe one of the destroyers put a torpedo in it

02:30 to sink it, it was in case it didn't go down before dusk. And there's other ships came along, they could run into it or anything, you know. So I believe that's what happened. I didn't see that.

**About how long did it take to sink for that whole process, got off?**

Oh God, would have been, I suppose we would have been the best part of an hour before we got off. Three quarters of an hour to an hour. It was just keeling over slowly,

03:00 getting lower and lower. I, no, I haven't got one, but I have seen a photo of it, when it was pretty low in the water. That would have been after we got off. And we, they were all off by that time.

**What were you doing when the bomb, first bomb struck?**

Well, we were just relaxing, we were just taking it easy, you know. We'd had enough, you know, as I said, the noise from the, all the shells,

03:30 from the cartridges hitting the deck, God you've never heard anything like it. And the ones underneath reckoned it was worse, on the deck underneath, because they're right on top of them. And the chatter of the guns all the time, and so by that time, we, everything's quiet we were just relaxing.

**You thought you've got probably four planes, four or five planes before, then.**

Oh, it was more than that, they come over in waves.

**But**

04:00 **shot down, though, four or five shot down.**

Oh yes.

**And then a bit of a gap. Thought everything was all right, and then boom**

Everything was quiet, and then boom. It was a bit of a shock, because where'd that come from. I don't know where he'd been, he was a high level bomber that had been up high, and nobody had spotted him.

**What was that feeling like, of being strafed like that on the day?**

Of being strafed, well, it's worse than being on the land. At least

04:30 on the land, they're going for somebody else, they could be going for anybody else, but when you are on the boat, they're going for you. Nobody else to go for. That's worse. That's worse. We had one fellow though, he came from Footscray, bloke named, Alan, oh, can't think of his name, now, he was a reinforcement. Now, all through Greece and everything, he was laying on his back photographing the bomb crews and the Stukas as they dive bombed us

05:00 we got that, I tell you, we got that used to it, but they used to come down pretty low. And we'd see it leave, and we knew within 20 or 30 feet where that bomb was going to land. We got used to the angle they came down on and everything. And if it was coming a bit close, you could move, but on a boat, you can't. You can't move very far.

**Did you have a plan in your mind what you would do, if it**

05:30 **came, worse came to worst?**

On the boat? No. Just hope for the best.

**Were you a good swimmer?**

I was then, yeah, I used to do a lot of swimming, I used to swim at the Dive, Zoe Park swimming club. You know the Dive, have you ever hear of it? It was an old brick quarry, and it flooded, it was about 80 feet deep, and that was 110 yards across. In 1932, the

06:00 Japanese Olympic swimming team came out there, and put a show on there, I can remember it clearly.

And the biggest crowd I'd ever seen at that stage, was turned up at the Dive to watch that. The Japanese Olympic team swimming there. And Matt Welsh, the backstroker, he belongs to the Zoe Park Swimming Club, and we had girls there, they were in the, some of them, a couple of them were in the Empire Games, in those days you know. A pretty strong club. We used to go up there, swimming all the time.

06:30 So

**You would have been a young tyke, then about 10, 10 or 11?**

Yes. No, I was swimming there, yeah. I'll tell you what we did once, one of the kids at school, Normy Scott was a bit slow. Nothing wrong with him, just a bit slow, so me and this other fellow, Robby Fletcher from Box Hill, we went up the Dive at lunch time with Normy Scott, and they had a

07:00 pontoon. They used to, they had swimming lanes across there, 110 yards, right. They used to anchor this pontoon in the middle, tie it onto the swimming lanes, it was on 44 gallon drums, and that, proper deck and everything on it. So, in the winter, or when the swimming season was over, they used to tie it up at the landing at the end. So we went up there, and we got some bits of wood, and we got on there, paddled it out into the middle. And the swimming lanes are gone by that time, you know, they're all taken up,

07:30 so we paddled it out to the middle, we were about 11 then, and him and I dived up and swam ashore, left Normy Scott there, he couldn't swim. And he was yelling out to help him and a couple of council workers heard him, and they had to get a boat, get down there and rescue him. God, do you think we got into strife about that.

**Kids can be cruel.**

Can't they. The cruellest people in the

08:00 world are kids. They are.

**Now you said you just walked onto this destroyer, like because it was so low at that stage.**

That's right, yes.

**That destroyer took you to Crete.**

Yes.

**Do you know what the name of it?**

I think it was the Heroward, there was the Hero, the Heroward, the Hotspur, they were all named after, Hero class they were.

08:30 I'm pretty sure it was the Heroward. I know the Hero was involved in it as well, but I'm sure the one we were on was the Heroward. And it was all shored up with lumps of timber and mattresses, it used to leak like a sieve. That, so they had mattresses to stop the leaks coming in and timber, holding it hard against the plates.

**That didn't make you feel too good.**

Oh, no, they were all, they had all been punished. I tell you what, they

09:00 can say what they like about the Poms, but the British Navy, nothing could beat them. Nothing could touch them.

**You must have felt awfully grateful to see that destroyer.**

Oh yeah, I'd have sooner got on the one at Crete, though. Although, we used to belong to the Master Plumber's Association, and we had a conference down at Rosebud Country Club,

09:30 and we went over on the boat across to Port Arlington and back again, you know, just for a days out, and this other plumber's wife is talking to me, and she's telling me that her father was a prisoner of the Italians. And I said "Where'd get caught?' she said "He got sunk coming out of Crete, he got picked up by an Italian submarine." Now they lost quite a few destroyers there got sunk by the, destroyers getting out of Crete,

10:00 the ones of our mob that got on destroyers, they didn't, but some did. And she hated Italians. Simply because the way he was treated in an Italian prison camp.

**About that experience on Crete, I just wanted to revisit that. That must have been incredibly upsetting, as you were going into the water**

10:30 **to get onto the destroyer, you were pushed aside, pushed down.**

No, we were pushed into the water, we got hit from behind. And Eddie Wilton was alongside of me, and he got pushed onto the barge, and I got pushed into the water, and one fellow, Alec Tolper, we used to call him Pluto, he had a bit of a hair lip and we called him Pluto, Alec Tolper he comes from South Melbourne. He was pushed onto the barge, and then they asked people to get off to make way for

walking

11:00 wounded. Now those blokes were pretty cluey, if you wrap a bandage around your head, how do they know if you're wounded or not. Anyway, he got off to let them on, and that was the last barge. If he had of known that, I'm sure he wouldn't. People have said, I've had people say over the years "Did Pluto really get off the barge and let them on?' I said "Yes he did." I'm sure he wouldn't have if he had of known, I'm sure I wouldn't

11:30 anyway.

**But they were shoving you from behind, and some went on and some went off to the side.**

Yes.

**And it was to allow who to get through, who to get through?**

No, it was just these blokes panicked and rushed down.

**They were British troops.**

British troops, yes. They were, I reckon they were a crowd of ack-acks they were dumped on Crete, they never seen any action before that, they were dumped on Crete. They were white, lily white they were, their skin was lily white, they hadn't been there long, so

12:00 I reckon they were just dumped there, and they panicked. That's all it was, they panicked. Now people say, "Well what would you do in this circumstance, any circumstance, what would you do?" You can never answer, because unless you are in that circumstance yourself, you've got no idea what you would do. That's my opinion of it. Did I ever think I'd escape and take the risks I did? No way, I never thought I'd do

12:30 that. Never thought of it. Still, you just did it, that was all. You just decided you were going to do something, and you did it. Never thought about the consequences. That's being young.

**You didn't think about getting shot when you escaped so many times?**

No, I knew I could get, but I never thought about it, never worried about it, no.

13:00 If you got shot, you got shot, that was it.

**What was it that motivated you to try to escape so many times?**

Well, we had a, we used to talk a lot, you know, now, some blokes would say, "Well, this will do me, I'll sit here till the war's ended." and others would say "Well, you're still in the army, you're still a member of the army,

13:30 and it's up to you to cause as much trouble as you can." which is what we did. See they had, the jails were full, the jails were always full. The cells were always full of well, English and us, and Kiwis, and Scotties and that. In Lamsdorf, they had one little Kiwi bloke, they had him there for about three years. He wasn't in the cells, he was hidden in the camp. They used to,

14:00 in the ablution block they had a copper. And they used to lift it, they lifted that out and dug a hole underneath, and whenever the camp was going to get searched, he'd shoot in there, and they'd lift the top out and stick him down there. He was there for about three years, they never got him. He was supposed to be up for sabotage, they, he did actually sabotage some (UNCLEAR), you know. And they got him in there.

14:30 **So for some, there was an obligation to either escape or to cause trouble for the Axis**

To cause trouble, yeah. There was plenty of fellows that were quite willing to cause a bit of trouble. And they used to, well, they used to say to me, they used to say, "He's an agitator." That was me, I was an agitator.

**They called you that.**

Yes. We were marked, see, why we

15:00 swapped over and took different names, they had a list and they KV, marked KV, which was "Kommando Verboten." not allowed out on working parties, and the only way to get out was to have a different name and number. And luckily, we were never photographed. Others were, but we, you know, went to Hammelburg originally, were never photographed. And they still never did it. So I was under a lot of different names at different times.

15:30 **So once they realised you were an escapee, you got KV, and then that's how you got?**

Yeah, once you caused a bit of trouble and that, and you know, two or three times, you were marked KV. So, oh, not too, every Spring, they used to say, "Oh the Spring handicap's on." you know,

16:00 people would be taking off right and left in the Spring, soon as it's thawed out a bit. Actually, originally, they used to look for you, in the end they didn't bother, they just waited for you to turn up. They knew

you would be very lucky to get out of Germany, so they just waited for you to turn up somewhere. Didn't bother about chasing out to look for you much. You still caused them trouble, that was the main thing.

**In spring people**

16:30 **reckoned they had a better chance of travel.**

Oh, well, you wouldn't go in the middle of winter. It was no good sleeping out in the middle of winter.

**What was your opinion on your obligation to escape or cause trouble?**

Well, you do what you could. I only went up there, and went out on these working parties to try and escape. I know one Australian, he was an air force bloke, he escaped. He got up

17:00 into Stettin, and got over to Switzerland, not Switzerland, he got over to Sweden and they got him back to England. Fellow named Reid. I know he got away from there, but he had swapped over with an army bloke, because the air force pilots, they weren't allowed out on working parties, they were kept them in camps where they couldn't get out. They wouldn't have that going on. But he swapped over with some

17:30 English bloke, and he, that's where he finished up. So everybody wanted to emulate him, you know, to see if we could escape. We got pretty close once, that was all.

**What do you reckon was your closest to getting away for good?**

Well, when we got down to Munich, to, from up there. Well, it took us 36 hours, that took us, and that was a long way, the way we had to go, and this conductress,

18:00 she gave us all the times of trains went and everything, and laid it out for us, where we had to go.

**She wanted to help, didn't she?**

I don't know that she wanted to help but she, no, she knew us because we used to load the timber on the train, and she was the conductress on it, and she used to talk to us. Of course, some, a couple of them tried to get sweet with her, but she wasn't having a bar, a piece of that. They were pretty blunt. She said "Yes, all you

18:30 want to do is leave me with a baby, that's all." So they're not silly.

**What was your hopes, had you, you'd made it to Munich, what was your hopes of where you'd go from there, were you'd get?**

Well, we, there was a town about 35 kilometres, that was where we were trying to get to. Well, then we could walk that. We reckoned we could get across there, get into Switzerland.

**Pretty steep there, in the Alps.**

19:00 Yeah, but oh well, we'd have tried. We'd have tried.

**Other things or ways you could motivate yourself to keep trying?**

Didn't need much motivation, you know. Just get out and get trying, that was all. And things would happen, and you'd say "I've had enough of this, and I'm off."

19:30 See, when we refused to work, I wasn't going to start it, they all had a meeting, the 50 of us, said "Well, we're all going to jack up and not going to go to work." so all right. But if you are going to do it, you might as well stick to your guns, so we did. I was a bit surprised when the London Jew, the big London Jew said he'd stay there. But they never touched them, there was quite a lot of Jews in the British army and air force, they never touched them.

20:00 **I was going to ask you about that**

No, never, never did anything to them.

**Even when they had become POWs**

No. I know one, he was a little Polish Jew, and he never, this, I told you about Archie Horne, trader Horne, we called him, he had him under his wing. He was only young, and I don't know that he was in the air force, I think he might have been a civilian. That's what I think.

20:30 And the funny thing, I got on the Tube train in London, after we got to London and who's there, this Archie and this, what was his name, this little Jew, he was with him still. So he probably got him back to New Zealand I'll bet. Oh, I wouldn't be surprised, he could get around, Archie, he could get anything.

21:00 **Why such a bond between those two?**

I don't know, I couldn't work it out. Nothing sexual or anything like that. Nothing at all. Never struck that at all.

**Well, that was another of my questions.**

No, oh, there was, on one working party, there was one, who was a little fairy [homosexual], and he was, he had his boyfriend, that was all.

**Within the working party.**

Yeah.

21:30 That's the only time I saw it. Oh, one of ours, a bloke from Sydney, when I was in the hospital, he was too. He was a fairy for sure, I'd say. Nothing went on there, but that's the only.

**That was the hospital in the Middle East when you were**

No, the hospital in Germany. Ebelsbach. That was the only time, the only two I ever saw of it. Apart from one when we had a concert at Beit Jirja, and he was in

22:00 the medical corp, and they used to call him "Sadie." That was his nickname, "Sadie." everybody.

**How did that affect?**

The funny thing about it, he was dressed up as a woman in tight shorts on this show they had a concert, and nurses and everything were there, and he got a bit excited. And one of these wags of ours yelled out, "Have a look." he said "Sadie's cracked it."

22:30 Of course, the place was in uproar, and the nurses were killing themselves.

**How did he get a bit over excited?**

I don't know how he did, but he did. I've never thought of that for,

23:00 from years, and then you ask a question about that, and that's what popped into my head, straight away.

**In the entertainment, I guess there must have been a number of men had to dress up as women for plays and that.**

Plays, yes. For plays and that, there was quite a lot, yes. But you only saw that when you were in the main camp.

**The plays, the entertainment was only in the main camp.**

Only in the main camp, yes.

**And that NCO camp, that had plays?**

Yes,

23:30 they had plays and that, yes.

**How did men treat the other men who they reckoned were, well, they use the term gay now, they didn't use that in that way then, but**

No.

**How did they treat?**

No they didn't, nothing, they didn't take any notice of them. Didn't interfere with them. As long as they didn't interfere with them, they didn't interfere with them. But they, that's the only incident I can think of

24:00 where I struck it at all. Which, these days would be very surprising, wouldn't it? But then it wasn't.

**How did the men cope with the lack of women for that many years in their lives?**

Just had to. Oh, there was a few, there was all the Polish women, Polish girls working. If they were working together,

24:30 well, it quite often happened.

**On a work camp, or something like that, or**

Yeah, they would be working in different factories and that. When I was at the place where they were using the Bamberg silk we were doing that, they were all Greek sheilas doing it there, working there. So they must have, I didn't know that they'd ever carted Greeks up there, but they did. I'd never heard of them about, the Greek slave

25:00 labour, but apparently they did, because that's where they were, and that was near, at the end of the war, where I saw that.

**Some blokes got girlfriends that way, through the factory or what?**

Oh, you've asked me now, this fellow that lives up the country, now he joined when he was 16. He was in Gippsland, and he got captured at the Corinth Canal, I won't tell you his name, he got captured at the Corinth Canal and he went to Austria. And he got put on a farm,

25:30 well his first experience was with the wife of this bloke who was up in Russia. That was his first experience, and what did it do? Produced a son. And he came home badly wounded and was no good and all, and he was quite happy about it, because he had a son, the husband. He went back, didn't tell his wife about it for 20 years and he went back to see his son, and he told her. God,

26:00 what a fool. Of course, she hit the roof. No, I won't tell you his name.

**But the Russian fellow wasn't upset, because he had a son.**

No, he was an Austrian, but he was a soldier in Russia.

**Oh, sorry, in Russia. But he came back.**

Yeah, but he was no good anymore, he couldn't have had children. And he was quite happy that she had the son. Luckily it turned out that way, wasn't it? So that was his first experience.

**And he ended up telling his wife later on.**

Yes.

26:30 **That didn't go too well?**

No, it didn't go too well at all. And she, when we went back, he came with us on the 50th anniversary, she wouldn't go with him, his wife. She wouldn't go, wouldn't go with him at all. And he told everybody on the trip about it. I thought I was, up until then, I was the only one he ever told. Apart from the ones who were with him, you know.

27:00 So, yes, you see, it can happen. And I'm sure a lot of the farms, has happened quite a lot. I know one, another one, he came from the west, Western Australia, and he was in his thirties, and we'd been there about two months, and he said, "Well, I'm quite happy here, I'll sit here until the end of the war." She was, he was only about 30, and her husband was in the army. He was quite happy to stay there.

27:30 No, I don't suppose you could blame him, really.

**I'm a bit lost for words there. I was wondering, if you could describe that scene when you arrived in Greece, I believe it was, and you saw your brother.**

28:00 That was Crete.

**Crete, that was Crete, after you got back on the destroyer, the destroyer brought you back to Crete, and you saw your brother, can you describe that?**

Yeah, well, he was standing there. "God." I said "How'd you get here?" He said "I come in yesterday." He was just down the wharf to see who was coming ashore.

**Your brother was, where had your brother been?**

He'd been in Greece,

28:30 but he got out on a destroyer and taken to Crete. He was dumped there early, earlier before us.

**Just a day or so.**

Just a day, yes, well, they were trying to get out for days, and we were one of the last to get out. Right down the bottom. A lot of them, at Norpeant they were taking a boat out round the headlands, and they got sunk and quite a few of our blokes got drowned there. Different

29:00 battalions. We lost two companies at Corinth Canal, we had, oh, our battalion book's got it all in, we lost about, we had the heaviest casualties in the first push up in the desert. And we had the heaviest casualties in Greece. Not on Crete, because there was only a hundred soldiers there.

**What was it like, seeing your brother's face, when you stepped onto the jetty?**

Well,

29:30 just like seeing anybody else, because we used to fight like cat and dog, when we were kids. And we still fought afterwards. We'd just come home from the war, and you saw my, their mob outfit me, nice pale green trousers, and a green chequered jacket and that. And he wanted to go to the races down at Mentone, they were, so I went down the races,

30:00 and my brother-in-law's sister, was going with this bookmaker and she said "If you're going to the races, go and see Lou, he's bound to have something, and give you a tip." so I said "Right oh." So I went saw Lou, and he said "Oh well, come and see me before the last race." so I did, and he said "Right, back this, go and back it with another bookie." he said, "That's about 12 to one." So, "Oh, all right." and I run into my brother, he's drunk, he's been drinking, and he's drunk, and he's

30:30 wanting to, he's got a hundred quid, and he's wanting to put it on some donkey that's got no hope. And I'm going crook, and I finished up, I didn't get a bet on. And the horse duly won. I was going to have a tenner [ten pounds] on, I would have got 120 quid [pounds]. Got nothing. Anyway, we were going back to our, to this sister's in Oakland, so caught, the Ventura bus up Warragul Road and walking up North Road then, it was only a narrow road, and it was all muddy along the side,

31:00 it had been graded. And I'm walking along, and the next minute, woof, I'm hit in the back, and I'm down in the mud, he's jumped into my back. So I said "You don't want to do that again." anyway, we get up a bit further and bang, so we're up on the corner of Golf Links Avenue now, the Ventura bus used to go to Box Hill from there from the Golf Links Avenue and North Road corner. And the woman that lived in the corner house was Mrs Burchell, I knew her, and anyway,

31:30 we got up there, and he put me in and I said "Right, that's it." whack, so we're having a fight outside this Mrs Burchell's place, and she come out and she said to me "Stop hitting him, you'll kill him." and I said "What if I do, he's my bloody brother." whack, there. There's blood pouring out of his nose and everything, the bus comes along, and he jumps on the bus, so I said "Have you got enough money for the fare?' he said "Bugger you, I won't have anything to do with you."

32:00 So he's gone home on the bus, and he rang up the next morning, and he said "What happened? Did we get into a fight?" He didn't even know.

**Did he carry on like that for a number of years?**

Yeah, he went into a pub in town, in Flinders Street, and finished up in the Melbourne Hospital, got belted up there. I think he used to go off his brain, there's a point, he was supposed to be the goody goody of the

32:30 family, I was, anything happened, I always got the blame for it. No, he wouldn't do it. Not much.

**Did your brother end up**

33:00 **in okay health, or did he, you know, as you went on?**

No, he, I reckoned, he drank himself to death. I hope his relatives, his kids don't see that. He, no, he drank a lot, never stopped drinking and smoking, and he, finished up, he couldn't drive and his then daughter would take him up to Box Hill RSL at 11 o'clock in the morning, and pick

33:30 him up at seven o'clock at night, right, and then he'd go to bed blind as a bat. And he had a beautiful dog, a big black lab and he'd say to him "Get my cigarettes." just like that, the dog would go and get his cigarettes and bring them back "Oh you fool, you forgot the lighter." back he'd go and get the lighter. Throw something on the floor "Put that in the rubbish bin." he'd pick it up and go and open the cupboard door and stick it in the rubbish bin in the kitchen cupboard. And he used to sleep alongside his bed,

34:00 now at the end, he had to have oxygen. So at any rate, he got out of bed to get the oxygen and fell on the floor, and he died on the floor, and they could never work out why the dog didn't let them know. I reckoned the dog reckoned he was due, it was time to go, because the dog wouldn't, you know. He'd say to him "Get me an orange." and he'd be in bed "Get me an orange." and the dog would run out to the kitchen and come back with an

34:30 orange for him. He was unbelievable that dog, he was a beautiful dog. And yet, he dropped on the floor alongside the dog, and the dog didn't wake anybody up, but his daughter lived there, lived in the house. Just didn't do anything, could never work it out why he didn't. So I reckon the dog just thought it was time he went, that's what I reckoned, anyway.

**Do you think the war affected this stretch in his life?**

Oh, yeah, it affected him, all

35:00 right. He was on nerve tablets for years. He got a, yeah, he was on nerve tablets and everything for years.

**When you say, nerve tablets, do you know what was in them?**

No, I don't know what they were, what they gave him. But he used to get them all the time.

**Was he sort of an anxious person?**

Oh, then he was, yeah, he finished, he got a, he was a TPI [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated Pension]

35:30 and he'd been battling for it for years. When he got it, in those days, they had to pay a back pay from when they first applied for it, so he got a lump sum of twenty thousand. They cut that out pretty smartly, so yeah. He couldn't drive, he lost his licence because he was drink driving and that. No future in it, yeah,

36:00 I was just doing a job over near there and he rang me up and I said "I'm working over your way."

“Where are you working.” “Oh. I’ll see you up the Blackburn pub at lunchtime.” I never used to go to the Blackburn pub at lunchtime and drink, couldn’t do any work if there was drinking at lunchtime. All I wanted to do was go to sleep. He was there all right.

**You obviously had, it was hard when you came back, but you coped**

36:30 **much better, can you help me understand that?**

Well, when we first come back, brought back a lot, I did, because all the crowd from Box Hill, when I was younger, I was in the Box Hill bike club, right, amateur cycling club. And of course, they’re all in the army, and we all met after the war, most of us, I think one had been killed out of that lot, that’s all. And of course, you’d meet at the weekend, and then, the Saturday,

37:00 there was a team of us that used to go to the, because, you’ve got to remember, on the, at the weekend, in those days, right after the war, the Beaconsfield pub would have the beer on for two hours in the afternoon, then you’d down the one at Little Park, that’d be on for two hours. So the Beaconsfield one, was one till three, so you’d have a few beers there, then we’d got to the one in Little Park, have a couple there, then we’d go to the pier at North,

37:30 Port Melbourne, which was open for another hour. By the time you finished there, you’d had enough. One day, we were down there and this Albie Bengerfield was be in the navy, and this Arthur Allen who used to live next door to me, and he’d had a broken elbow, and he always used to get anything up to his mouth like this. He did that as a kid. Fell out of a tree in the street, and they never set it properly, you know, in those days,

38:00 but, anyway, we said “Come on, there’s a bus there, we’ll get the bus into town” and he said “All right, wait till I finish my beer.” and he got this pot, drinks it up, puts it down, whoosh, all the beer comes out all over, so he flies out the door, and we’re on the back of the bus, right. He makes a flying leap for the bus, and misses and he lands on the road, and when we look round, he’s lying on his back with his feet

38:30 and arse up in the air like a dead dog, and Albie Bengerfield said to me “Have a look at him, he looks like a bloody dead dog.” and this woman on the bus said “You horrible beast.” and started belting him with the umbrella. She said, “He could have killed himself.” well, we were killing ourselves laughing. And he married, Bengerfield married a girl from Perth, and he lived with his mother, like until she came over there, so at any rate, he said

39:00 “I’m going to have a party at mum’s place.” and this is the week before his wife arrives. So all his mates are there with their wives and what have you, and of course, they’ve got home brew and everything and the, smashed it over, the bottles were exploding and everything. Beer everywhere. Any rate, this Arthur Allan, he was a motor mechanic then, in South Melbourne, and if somebody put a car in

39:30 to get fixed up, something mechanical wrong with, it on the weekend, if he needed a car he’d say “Oh, I won’t be able fix it for you until Monday. I’ll have it ready for you Monday.” so he’d have a car for the weekend. And he had this Dodge Cooper and Bengy said “Now there’s a party on round such and such a street.” down the road a bit. So, four of them in the front, and five of us standing up in the dicky seat. And we’ve got a bag full of beer and

40:00 wine and everything else, going to this party. And went down Station Street, Box Hill, and a car come out of a side street, so he dodged that all right, he shot round this other street, forgot about us in the back, and we all shot out of the dicky seat, and crashed on the road, five of us. One of them Andy Cain, he had a dairy in Mont Albert, and of course, my brother’s broken his arm.

40:30 I’ve got all my head scraped off all down here, skidded along the road, and the other fellow Joey Jennings, he was a roof tiler, he’s got all his teeth broken, and his nose broken, teeth gone. And we’re all sick and sorry, so “Come on we’ll go up.” and of course this Arthur Allan comes back, and he looks, and he’s standing there, and we’re all laying round, all the crowd are coming out of the pictures at this time, coming down Station Street, going home, and Arthur

41:00 Allan looks at us and says “Jesus Christ,” he said “It looks like Napoleon’s retreat from Moscow.” and burst out laughing. And of course, Andy Cain wanted to fight him, oh God.

# Tape 10

00:30 **I just wondered if you could tell us again, about the amount of weight you lost being a prisoner of war?**

Oh, it all depends on where you were. Working on the farms, you didn’t lose any weight there, you gained weight because we were scarecrows when we went there, because we’d been starved for three or four months. And you put on weight there because you ate the same as the family that you were working for, you ate exactly the same as them, with them actually.

01:00 I mean some nights it was just a heap of potatoes, and a handful of salt on the table, and you helped yourself, but I mean it fills us up, fills your stomach. But towards the end, when you weren’t getting Red

Cross parcels and everything like that, and you were getting very little to eat, you lost a fair bit of weight then. Overall, it's not too bad, when the Red Cross parcels, while you got them you were okay, because, and you got stuff that sustained you, milk,

01:30 powdered milk, you could always mix that up, and condensed milk. And chocolate, and meat, you could fish, yeah, herrings in tomato sauce, and bully beef, and cigarettes, and they'd fill a hole. A cigarette always filled a hole if you're still a bit hungry. A lot of blokes used to sell their food for cigarettes in Salonika, including my brother, he

02:00 used to sell his bread for cigarettes. I used to like a smoke, but I didn't do that.

**How else did it physically affect you?**

Physically?

**Being a prisoner of war.**

Nothing, really, I had my foot busted up and my knee, but apart from that, nothing. Oh, and asthma, I got asthma there, so that must have affected me. Apart from that

02:30 nothing.

**Do you remember what the food was like with the Czech family who took you?**

It's funny you ask that, I know they, she used to make cakes, a few cakes, I think the term for cakes was bockchi, I think it was, I'm not certain of that. That was a tongue twister language to try and speak, Czech, I was trying hard, but I couldn't get my tongue around it, their words.

03:00 Nothing specific I can mention. Nothing. It wasn't a, you never got a, never had a big feed there or anything, because they didn't have it. But they shared whatever they had, and that was all you wanted, you know, to share.

**When the men in the camps were hungry, how did they show their desperation, was there much stealing**

03:30 **going on or anything like that, or?**

Not a lot, some of the old soldiers used to try and pinch it off the Indians and that, they used to try and take it off them in other words. We used to have a bit of trouble there, we used to have try, our blokes are funny, because they used to try and stop it. Never tried to join them or anything, they always tried to stop it. An Indian's another person,

04:00 he's not a, he's nothing different. But I remember one case, there, they had a football match in Lamsdorf, and these Indians brought a floor mat from their barracks, and they're all standing on it. And all these Scotsmen come along, regular soldiers, "Come on you black so and so's, get off there, we're taking that." We didn't let them. So anyway, that sort of thing happened but

04:30 not every day, it was only isolated instances.

**Were there any other signs of desperation in the camp?**

Well, I'll tell you a sign of one in Salonika, he was hungry, so he's stripped to the waist, and he's got "Beer" under this one, "Milk" under that one, and right across his stomach is "Empty." Got it tattooed on there at Salonika, a Pom he was.

05:00 **Did many of the men have tattoos?**

Oh, not like that, but a lot of them had had tattoos yes. And they got them on in there, too, they used to tattoo one another, you know.

**In terms of escaping, did some people get quite desperate and do foolish things?**

No, there was a, there were a couple of instances where they'd try to charge the wire. But you got over the trip wire, there was a trip wire about

05:30 six or eight fee out from the main wire. If you got over that, you took a good chance of getting shot. If you went past that trip wire, which was up about this high, you know. And, yeah, one bloke chased a soccer ball in there, and he went in there to get it back. And they fired at him, they didn't hit him. The only time I looked like getting shot was when a Russian fighter plane come over. He was probably shooting at the guards in the towers, but the bullets were getting

06:00 too close to us. We were all getting it "Good on you Joe." they called Stalin, uncle Joe, "Good on you Joe." and the next minute, and the next minute, they're abusing him. Bad enough having the Germans strafing you, without them.

**You mentioned before, one of the guards was sent to the Russian front?**

Yes.

**What did you know of the Russian front at that stage?**

Beg pardon?

**What did you know about the fighting that was going on there?**

Oh, we knew what was going on there. It used to be printed in their papers. And you

06:30 just assumed that they were a long way closer than what you'd, what they said. And when we were in Bavaria, when Stalingrad happened, when they lost their army at Stalingrad, 90% of them were Bavarians, and that's when they changed their mind, they changed overnight. Much easier to get on with overnight, after that happened. There was about, what, a million men, or something, no, two hundred and fifty thousand or something they lost at

07:00 Stalingrad. That's a lot of men.

**Could you find it in yourself to feel sorry for those?**

Beg pardon?

**Did you feel sorry for those families?**

Oh, yes, you could, you're not heartless, God. Yeah, you could feel sorry for them. But not as sorry for them as your own, but you could feel sorry for them, yeah, of course.

**And what did you know of what was going on in Australia and the Pacific?**

Very little. Very little.

07:30 We knew about Singapore, because they made a big, made certain we did know. And they used to put over in the main camps, and in the hospital, they used to put over the "Sondermeldung." which is a special announcement "65,000 tons of shipping sunk today." you know, this is every day and "Singapore's fallen, they've lost that" and "All the Australians have been captured" and everything, they put that over and made sure that

08:00 we heard it. And every day, you got this, and all these totals, they used to tot up every day how much shipping was sunk. I used to say "My God they're building them faster than they could sink them." they reckoned that, it was absolutely ridiculous the amount of shipping they reckoned they'd sunk. They used to try it on.

**Did you have a rule, did you half the figures or?**

Yes, well, just cut it in half, yeah. Yeah.

**Did you get an**

08:30 **impression of what the Germans thought of the Japanese?**

No, no. We got a lot of questions from them towards the end of the war, because we used to, the women, if you were working with them and that, they'd say "Oh, I hope the Americans come here before the Russians." we used to say "You don't want to speak too soon to that, they're all Negroes, they're going to bring in."

09:00 And they were, of course, half of them had never seen a black fellow, never. But, we had a, Jacky Green was an Aborigine, right? And they used to come for miles to see him, Jacky. He died in the hospital there at Ebelsbach there, he had stomach cancer. This Russian surgeon opened him up and he said "Oh." didn't do anything, just stitched him up again, he said

09:30 "He'll be dead in three months, but then he'll come good for about a month, and he'll be dead in three months." Sure enough, he was, but he started to get better, of course, he thought he was getting better, but we knew what was going to happen, because the Russian had told us.

**And no-one told him?**

No, no, nobody told him, he thought he was going to come, coming good. Yeah, they used to come for miles to see him. Jacky Green.

**How did he take**

10:00 **that?**

He didn't mind, he was, no he was a good little bloke, you know. But the Russian reckoned it was the diet he had all his life, and the wine he used to drink, that caused the cancer. Whether he was right or wrong, I wouldn't know.

**So you were saying before they wished the Americans would get there before the Russians. What did they know about the Russian troops? Were they afraid of them?**

Oh yes. Well, they knew what they'd done to the Russians they captured.

10:30 They treated them like dirt. And they had no Red Cross parcels or anything like that to help them out. And they, the first camp we were in, Stalag 13C, the Russians were in there as well, and they had typhus, and they were dying like, it was nothing, 600 a week they were burying. They just loaded them in to a wagon and drive them down into a bulldozer pit and tip them in, fill it in.

11:00 But if they were in a barrack, and their mate died, they wouldn't put him out, they'd keep him there to get his rations. And of course, they're all getting the typhus off them. They were all dying like flies, hundreds of them.

**Did you see those trucks and the bulldozing or?**

Oh, you'd see them, they'd come down in a horse drawn wagon, all the bodies. There was no ceremony or any decency about it. They'd strip their uniforms off them, and load them in there. And dig a pit and put them in.

11:30 Pretty gruesome.

**I think you mentioned before you were involved with a burial party in the Middle East or in Greece or something?**

Yeah, in Crete, yeah.

**That was after the fighting there?**

Yeah. After we were prisoners, yeah, we had to go out and bury them. We didn't have to but, if you could dodge it, you didn't. You got nabbed, you went. Not a very pleasant job.

12:00 Still, better to do that, than leave them laying in the open, wasn't it.

**That was important?**

Oh yes.

**Was it one to a grave or?**

Yes, one to a grave, yes. Too right. They were all dug up later and transferred to Suda Bay. I was looking, I've got a book from when we went back on the 50th, I'll show you that, the cemetery at Suda Bay.

12:30 They put them all in Suda Bay now. See, they were scattered. The 4th Battalion was at Heraklion and we were at Georgeopolous, the 1st and the 11th were at Retimo, the 7th and the Kiwis were at Maleme, the 7th and the Kiwis, no, the other Kiwis and the Poms were at oh, Galatas, Galatas, Galatas. They were spread out and not enough in one position, if they had have

13:00 concentrated on the aerodrome at Maleme, they wouldn't have, wouldn't have been able to take it. But our opinion was, that they didn't really want it, because it was too close to Greece, to where our bases. They'd be barred, bombed all the time. That was our opinion, that they didn't want to hold Crete.

**That's what you thought at the time, or….?**

That's what we thought at the time. Because they've got Greece, it's only couple of hours

13:30 away from us. They've got to come over from the Middle East, and at that time, by then, the Germans are pushing down in the desert again, right. So only the planes in Tobruk could get over there. So they wouldn't have been, they'd have a tough job supplying it, because they had to come round the island to unload ships into Suda Bay. So they're on the North side, close to Greece. So that was our opinion, that they didn't want to keep it.

14:00 **I think you said before, your worst moment was being caught in Crete. One of your worst moments**

Yeah, one of the worst moments.

**What did you expect life would be like as a POW?**

Well, we just thought we'd go to a prison camp, and that was it. That's all that I thought, but it's just a feeling that you get. I'll tell you what most prisoners, I think if you spoke to most prisoners of war, they'll all tell you, even though they could do nothing

14:30 about it, they felt as if they'd let the side down. That's the feeling. You know you couldn't do anything about it, but that's the feeling you get. It takes you a long time to get rid of it.

**Is that where the compulsion to escape comes from as well?**

Possibly. Possibly, I would say that was right. We're strange beasts, aren't we, people?

15:00 But that's right, I think you'll find most of the POWs in Singapore feel the same way, even though they know they've done their best. They'd feel as if they'd let the team down. that's the way I felt, I know.

**Was that the same on recapture on your escape attempts?**

No, didn't feel it then. No.

**What was that more like?**

Oh, well, just bad luck you got caught again, you know, oh well, better luck next time.

15:30 **There must have been some pretty hairy moments during those periods when you escaped as well, you probably didn't have much food or anything.**

We used to carry, we used to save what you got out of the Red Cross parcels to take with us, so you had food for quite a few days, and you could always pinch some apples off trees and things like that. [UNCLEAR] and potatoes and different things, you know. We used to manage all right.

16:00 **There was one period where you were 10 days, and no shelter?**

Yes, the first time we escaped, we were out for 10 days. We were pretty hungry by the time we got caught. That was where the guard got his wife to make us some scones, because he'd been at Crete, he'd been wounded on Crete, and discharged from the army.

**And did your experience with your**

16:30 **German captors live up to expectations, do you think? What did you expect of them?**

Well, the front line, see, the paratroopers and that, they were all right, they marched along, they treated you all right, they didn't belt you up or anything like that. When we got to Salonika, and they were B grade blokes, not fit for front line duty, they were totally the opposite. They were pigs. They were.

17:00 They're filming us marching into this compound in Salonika, and they parade you out in the barracks there. They're filming us, and our blokes are going like this, and carrying on, and they're belting them with rifle butts and everything. They were filming them to be shown in Germany. So we're, all our blokes are doing everything to upset them. They didn't appreciate that, too good.

17:30 They were no good, no, they could leave them at home.

**You mentioned one man who killed a lot of people on the train**

Yes.

**How else were you mistreated by those people, those B graders?**

Oh, just their attitude, you know, their attitude. You were starving, and the food was bloody shocking, it was nothing, you know, you were really starving, yes. And oh,

18:00 I won't no, I'll tell you, but I shouldn't, better not to wipe it off. When we went back there for the 50th anniversary, we went back to that camp. How it happened, a fellow from Portland, he's dead now, he died a couple of years ago, and we were going to a different place, Johnny McKern comes from Portland, and he decided he wouldn't go, and he went into a

18:30 hardware store in Salonika. And he said, "Can you tell me where the old barracks are, the old Turkish barracks, where they had POWs in 1941?' and this fellow, spoke a bit of English, he said "I'll get my son." so he got his son, he said "Get the car, and take him up to the barracks and show him, take him wherever he wants to go." So the kid gets the Mercedes out, right, takes him up there,

19:00 introduces him to the colonel of the barracks, the Greek colonel, and tells him that "There's 300 of us, and a lot of them were POWs in that camp." and they, "Would he mind if we come and have a look at it?" So, he said "No, by all means." so the next day, we're all in the buses and went up there. And one bloke was arguing, because it's altered, where the toilet block used to be, it wasn't there, where the guard, where this guard shot

19:30 these blokes, but I could pick out where I used to sleep, no worries, and knew exactly where the toilet block was from that. And I knew exactly where the drain was, that they used to go, that they ruined, and one fellow there was arguing with me, so I said "No, this is right, I could peg it out for you." it was that vivid in my mind, you know. But this doctor that was with us, he, the argument went on and on, and I said "Well,

20:00 that's where it was, you don't believe me, tough luck, but that's where it was." Anyway, later on, this doctor said to me, "I checked that with the camp commandant, and the toilet block was exactly where you said it was." and they said, there was a Kiwi with us, and he's looking for this drain, so I said "It's not over there, it's here." and I walked up there and scraped the dirt off, I said "There it is." And I was dead right too, there it was. And had that

20:30 vivid in my mind, that's why I got out of the joint, that's why I went to Germany, I thought "I'll die in this bloody place" and I thought I would.

**Do you think your war time experiences are some of the strongest memories you have?**

Oh, of course they are, but I think everybody would be the same, have to be. Have to be. You couldn't

experience that in civilian life, no way.

21:00 **I was going to ask also, about the proportion of prisoners of war, who decided not to escape, but to help, to aid escape? Was there much in the way of that?**

Oh, yeah, oh yeah, they'd help, oh sure. Of course, in a lot of places, they got the consequences, right? If they were having an

21:30 easy time, if you escaped from that working party, they got a tougher time afterwards. So they had to suffer some of the consequences, yeah. Oh yeah there was nobody, I never struck anybody that was against it, they might have said "Oh, you're bloody mad." or something like that, but they weren't against it, trying to do it, you know.

**Would they aid you directly in your escape attempts?**

Oh yes. Our, some of them did,

22:00 would give you some of their food and everything, you know, Red Cross parcel to go with you. So you would eek it out longer, you know.

**Did you keep your escape ideas to yourself, or, if you had an idea to escape, did you basically keep it to yourself?**

Yes, unless there was somebody going with me, and that was it. Only

22:30 once, did I escape on my own, always had somebody else. They, most of them wanted to escape, but they weren't game to go on their own, so I'd say, "Well, I'm going, if you want to come with me, you can." You feel better when you're in company. Bit tough on your own, yeah.

**But outside your little, the group**

23:00 **of people who were going to leave, did you, would you make it, not obviously public knowledge that. Who would know that you were about to?**

Well, if there was a big working party, wouldn't tell too many, no, we never knew, but you wouldn't broadcast it. If there were only a few of you, mind you, like, there was a lot of small working parties, and then you can, well, you have to trust them, because they're seeing you doing it, because you're in such a closed

23:30 area. I wouldn't mind going back to that place where we cut the window out, I reckon if it's still, the building's still there, it would still be there the same. If their control officer rattled the bar, and still didn't wake up that it was cut.

**Worth seeing wouldn't it?**

Huh?

**Worth seeing?**

Yeah, all we had to do was get this bit of wood, spring it, pull the bar out and hop out, and when I come back I'd get a stone,

24:00 throw it up on the window, and Bill Evans used to sleep up there, and he'd just open the window, stick the bit of timber in and pull the bar out, and I'd climb up and get in. Yeah, that's how we got the medicine for when he's cut it off his whatsername, out the window, in to his garage, in the cage, we had a flat cut in the barbed wire, and we just used to hook it up. Simple, we'd undo it, crawl

24:30 out, put it back, undo it when we come back, fix it up. They never woke up, or if they did, they didn't say anything.

**Do you think about how often you were lucky or unlucky?**

Yes. I reckon I was lucky a lot. I reckon I was lucky when we got hit by the bike, because I was sure he was going to shoot us there. He was a nasty bit of wood, goods, that bloke. That was at, the SD [Sicherheitsdienst or Intelligence Department of the SS],

25:00 with the brown shirts, that was his bully boys originally, when he first started, they were his main thugs, and they were still the same. Most of them were big thugs.

**Did you get tagged as a repeat escapee, did they know that you'd?**

Yeah. Well, you got marked KV, your cards got marked KV, which was "Kommando

25:30 Verboten." Not allowed out on a working party, and that's why everybody swapped over. We were lucky, as I said before, because we'd never been photographed, or I'd never been photographed. So I could just quite happily change over with somebody else. Take a different name and number, and away you'd go.

**Did they do anything else, knowing that you were, did they keep an extra eye on you or?**

No, not in the main camp no, they couldn't

26:00 really, too many. There was, like thousands in the main camp, two or three thousand. So they couldn't keep too close a watch on you.

**I'm just going to check my notes for a second. Oh, I was wondering also, about the deferred pay you got when you got back to England?**

No, well, we had our normal pay. We'd had our pay

26:30 that we should have had, over the four years, that was all sitting in our pay books and the deferred pay, we didn't get for years after. A couple of years after.

**So there's a difference between the pay that had accumulated, and deferred pay?**

Was, I think it was two bob a week, two bob a day, I think, for all the time you'd been in the army.

27:00 **Was it strange to enter the real world, and have money to be able to go in shops, and go to pubs and things like that?**

Yeah, big change, bit strange for a while. Didn't take long, though, to get rid of the money. No.

**You didn't have any difficulty getting used to having resources, after being so resourceful for so long?**

No, wasn't difficult, you get used to it.

27:30 **What was the most difficult thing about being free?**

The most difficult thing was meeting my relations and everything again. I couldn't hack it. When they all come to my sister's for, you know, all I wanted to do was get out. Strange, I suppose, but, I know, that's all I wanted to do. Couldn't hack it at all, I just wanted to get out of there.

28:00 Well you still wanted to be with your mates. Took a long time to, took quite awhile to settle down. That Albie Bengerfield, you know, he was the, oh, he was a womaniser, ugly looking bloke, sailor, womaniser, and everywhere he went, he had girlfriends. And yet, when he, he died with cancer eventually, and when he got sick,

28:30 he wouldn't have anybody go near him, except his old mates. All the new acquaintances, that's all he called them "They're acquaintances, they're not friends, only my old mates." the gang and that, who knocked around as kids. And he used to be a grocery deliver boy in Norman's Fruit and Grocers. They're not in existence now, I don't think Norman's Grocers. And he was a good drawer, and

29:00 he used to do a lot of caricatures and everything. Anyway, he went and did a rehab course at an art school after the war, and he had his own advertising business. He used to do a lot of drawings for Myers [department store], you know the window dresser there, what was his name? He was gay. Oh, I forget his

29:30 name, the window dresser. He was gay, he was a real gay, you know. Anyway, then at the meeting at the Carlton Hotel it was in Bourke Street, I think, or Collins Street, it was on. He had to meet him in this hotel to discuss some business he had to do for him. And he was telling Andy Cain, and Andy Cain was a bit of a rough diamond, you know, good bloke, but a bit rough. He had this (UNCLEAR) in Mont Albert. And he was telling Andy this, and Andy said "Well, I'm free, I'll come in and meet you, I'll

30:00 come in with you." he said "Oh no, I've got to meet him." "I'll see you there." he said, "All right." he said "Now you've got to be on your best behaviour." "That's all right, I'll be on my best behaviour." So he's, Freddy Rasmussen was his name, the window dresser, so he's talking with Freddy, and in walked Andy Cain, so "Been introduced?" "No." so he said, "This is Andy Cain" to Freddy Rasmussen, and he said "Andy, this is Freddy Rasmussen."

30:30 So Andy grabbed hold and said "Put it there, stuffer." That's his best behaviour.

**And what sort of stories, we haven't heard much about the Middle East as well, what did you get up to there?**

The Middle East?

**I think you could go into Cairo every night you said?**

No, well, we used to go into Cairo, not every night, but we could if we wanted to, yeah, we used to in

31:00 there a bit. Alexandria, we went, when were on AWL there, after we come back, and we went into this night club, Kit Kat's night club. And we'd had a bit to drink, and there was this big black Nubian, I didn't know he was a Nubian at the time, they were slaves of the Egyptians in the old days, you know, big, real black, and big fellows. Any rate,

31:30 I was carrying on a bit, I suppose, bit drunk and this big bloke he told me to take it easy, you know. And

I said “Oh, get out ya wog.” and he said “Me no wog, me Nubian.” And he weighed himself up, I thought I was going to get killed. I said “Oh, how are you?’ any rate, then on, he used to look after me. If I was out of line, he’d say,

32:00 and became good friends with him and he was, he was a Nubian, he had the tribal scars and everything. Big fellow though, good looking bloke, too, big, well built bloke. He was very proud, he said “Me no wog, me Nubian.” But it soon calms you down, at any rate, as you should be, at any rate, you shouldn’t be calling them wogs, should you? But we all did.

**What names did you have for the Arabs and the people you met in the Middle East?**

The Arabs?

32:30 were wogs. The Egyptians were wogs. the Libyans were wogs, the Greeks were “Greeks.” and the Cretans were “Great.” They were, they were terrific.

**You mentioned one big fight in the Middle East somewhere. Was there much fighting and drinking, you know that sort of reputation, was that?**

Oh, they used to happen. Oh, every now and again, there’d be

33:00 a big brawl erupt, and the Red Caps would be called in, the Pommy military police, you know, but they used to take to them, they didn’t like them, didn’t like them.

**Did you have much experience with them?**

No see, you’ve got to have a look, in the military police, there was a lot of sadists in it, oh, yeah too right. Blokes who had, there were a lot of blokes who got kicked out of the police

33:30 in it, because they were that way, sadists, they loved to belt people up and things like that. In one instance, one of our blokes, in Palestine, and he was in Jerusalem, and he was drunk and he went into a officer’s café, and this provo captain picked him up and threw him out in the street, made a mess of him, right? And of course he’s brought back to our battalion headquarters and charged

34:00 you know, and any rate, our colonel, saw the bloke and what a mess he was in and he asked him, what happened to the, to him and he said “I was drunk and I went in there and the next thing, I’m laying out in the street, I’m arrested and all the rest of it.” So he never even charged him, our colonel, and he wouldn’t even charge him, and he said to the provo “If I have trouble like this with you again, I’ll send my battalion in to fix you up.” That’s a fact.

34:30 **They were disliked by the officers as well.**

Yeah, he didn’t like them either. He didn’t like the provos [Provosts. Military Police], the colonel, oh, he knew they were necessary, but he didn’t like them.

**And did men go to brothels in the Middle East as well?**

Yes, oh a few would, a few would for sure. Oh, we went one night, but, it was, we didn’t do anything. What happened, this “Bluey” Hickey, “Bags” Caroll,

35:00 and there was six of us, and “Bluey” said, “Let’s have some fun” and I said “Well, what are you going to do?” and he said “We’ll go to this brothel, it’s upstairs.” he said, “We’ll get in there, and we’ll shut the door.” So we got in there and we shut the door, and they’re all trying to get in, so “Bluey” would open the door “You want to come in.” a bloke would come in, bang, out. So that was “Bluey’s” fun. That went on for about an hour,

35:30 and then they started fighting in the street and everything, you know, different ones that got. You know they burnt the street down in the First World War, the Aussies and the Kiwis, yeah. Well, what they, the street was called the “Burqua.” it was all bars and brothels, that’s all it was, and a brawl started then, and they burnt the street down. That’s why they didn’t want the Australians and New Zealanders in Egypt again.

**Did you feel you were part of a tradition**

36:00 **of the First World War?**

Yes. We’ve got one bloke who’s still trying to get it recognised that in Greece, we were the Anzac Corps. He’s flying a, flogging a dead horse, though, because that’s the only time we fought together the Australians and the New Zealanders again, and we were. But got no hope. He’s still trying to, he lives in Canberra, and he’s still pushing for it and all that.

36:30 And he’s trying to get a medal for Crete, a separate medal for Crete, which is, well, that just was part of the Africa Star, the Africa Corps, you never got anything for Greece and Crete. Except a medal from the Greek government.

**Do you feel like you’ve received enough recognition or due recognition?**

Yes, yes, I do. I think the army and the

37:00 DVA have been terrific in the last few years, particularly in the last 10 or so. Right after the war, they weren't the greatest.

**And was anything offered to you in an official level in repatriation for being a POW or**

After the war?

**Yeah.**

No, no. We never got counselling or anything, the Vietnamese, Vietnam blokes, they got counselling whenever they wanted and all the rest of it. We never got any of that. Even being a POW, they never got any of that.

37:30 Just got home, and then went through the motions, they checked your health and that, "Oh, well, you're okay, out you go." That was it. And then after a couple of years, everybody started to get crook again, and then they'd say "But you went out healthy, A1." But they, things catch up with you afterwards. But in the last, lately, they've been pretty good, I reckon they have, anyway.

**And on a personal level,**

38:00 **how were you helped when you got home, do you feel? Or who was the most help to you?**

Who was the most help? Well, my sister, actually. Lived with her for a while, we lived with her for a while, until she had another baby, and we got a place in Little Park.

38:30 Other than that, you'd just have to fend for yourself. Oh, the boss I worked for was pretty helpful, but if you didn't work hard, he wouldn't be helpful. You had to work, so. You had to make it yourself.

**Did you feel any concessions were made for people who had a particularly hard war, or served a long time?**

Well, now, you could do a six months course, as a plumber, well, I'd done a couple of years,

39:00 as I told you before. You could do a six months course, and that, you'd be able to get your licence then as a licensed plumber, if you passed all the exams and that. So, I applied to do that, I got knocked back. I wanted to know who knocked me back. The unions knocked me back. Why? "Oh, you weren't an apprentice." well I was an apprentice, it was my uncle

39:30 didn't apprentice me, and I had to, he had to go to court and get fined for it. And they knocked me back, and I had a blue with the secretary then Frank Corton, he was a Labor member of parliament afterwards, of course, the Labour government was in. And so I told him what I thought of him, so I had no hope of any help there again. And I never, oh, he got my back up, anyway. Then they had scheme in, I got a job all right

40:00 because when we got out, you had to go to Manpower. Manpower said, "Well, where do you live?" and everything. And they said "Oh what, were you a plumber? Well." and they gave me a grant to get tools, plumbing tools, you know, and Manpower said "Well, there's a place in Ormond, you live up in Oakley, is it easy to get to Ormond?" "Oh yeah, the bus runs down North Road." "Right oh, go and see him." this bloke, Gill Brant, it was, just the other side of the

# Tape 11

00:30 **We'll just pick up where you left off before, at the end of the last tape.**

Yeah, so they introduced a 60/40 scheme, so if you had learned a trade, they paid so much percent of your wages. So when I went, well that was after, I got a job with Gill Brant first, G Brant and Son, just over the line here, North Road. I think it's a car place now. And then they introduced this 60/40 scheme, so I said "Would you be

01:00 interested in that?' because I knew I wasn't a plumber, I knew a bit about it, but I wasn't a full grown plumber by then. And he put, he was putting up with me, so at any rate, I said "Would you be interested in that?" and he said "Yeah, that'd be good." So they paid 40% of my wages, and he paid 60, and it gradually decreased, you know, whatever. And went to night school, and finished up getting my licence, so, that was all right. Now, when I built my house, I said to him "Is it all right if

01:30 I book up the material, and I'll fix you up when the house is finished?' "Yeah." he said "That's all right." So all the plumbing material that I got off him, through him, and it was hard to get, because you'd wait six months to get a bath, or sink months to get a basin because they, everything was in short supply. You weren't allowed to have concrete paths, you couldn't build a brick front fence, because bricks were short, cement was short, everything was short. So he was a big help that way, and I paid for the bricks,

02:00 and I waited six months, and I never got them, and I was doing a job for another builder, and he said "How's your house going?" I said "I'm still waiting on my bricks." he said "Where are you getting them?" I said "Oakley." he said "Oakley Treem?" I said "I rang up yesterday." and he said "No, there won't be another kiln out for another couple of weeks." I said "Rubbish, they rang me up last night to go

up and see if the ones that have come out will suit me."

02:30 so he said "I'll see what I can do for you." So I come home that night and there's every brick that I'd ordered on this block. When I saw him, he said "You owe me a bottle of whiskey." That's what it was like to get things, so when the house was finished, and it was Christmas time, right, so I said to the boss "Have you got the bill for the materials?" He said "Don't worry about it." I said "What?' I said, "I owe you

03:00 for them." he said "Don't worry about it." And then, Christmas, he's handing out bonuses. The wages were ten quid a week, I got 500 quid for a bonus for the year, and he supplied me all the materials for my house. Admittedly, I worked hard for him, and he knew it. But that was just the sort of bloke he was. If I was half an hour late, I got docked, or if I was sick and had half a day off, I got docked. I never got any sick pay. If you didn't work half an hour, you got docked, but

03:30 on the other hand, he knew who worked hard and treated us very well.

**Do you think that was related to you having served?**

No, no, others, others were the same, he treated others the same. No I don't think it was that, I suppose he might have had a bit of that, but no. In some ways, he was a real tough old bird, in other ways, he was good. Terrific.

**We're nearly at the end of our interview,**

04:00 **I was just wondering, did you feel, did ever resent the time taken away from you while you were at war?**

Oh, no, I wouldn't say resent, no, I didn't resent it, no. No, actually I think it did me the world of good. Then, where I was in Richmond, and the way things were before the war, if I had carried on like that, and going from job to job, wherever you could get a job,

04:30 what would I have finished up like, who knows? Could have finished up like a lot of other people in Richmond, who turned out to be bloody criminals, which there was quite a few of them. Wouldn't know. And I don't think it did me any harm that way, I think it did me good. I think it did me a lot of good. Made me a lot more tolerant of everybody, I know that.

05:00 **And in terms of your story, do you think back and think "Gee I wish that thing then didn't happen, or made that choice at that point" or**

No, not really, no, not there, no. Nothing you could do about it, I didn't make any choices that I regretted, no.

**So no regrets?**

No, no regrets.

05:30 No regrets. I suppose, if I was young enough, and they come up again, I'd be silly enough to go again. If I was young enough. See we, I'll tell you a funny thing, we had a reunion, this is about five years ago, and there was four blokes there, sitting together, and I said to them, some, one of the other blokes "Do you know

06:00 those fellows?" he said "No." Nobody seemed to know them, so I went down there, and I asked them, I said "What company were you in?" This fellow said "We never got into a company." I said "What do you mean?" He said "We went over to Greece as reinforcements, and they dumped us at Daphne." that was where we were originally in Greece, and he said "They just left us there, and nobody told us anything, the first thing we knew was when the Germans come and rounded us up." and they'd taken them up

06:30 to Hungary, and they'd been in Hungary all the four years. And I said "How did you get home from Hungary?" He said "We went to Odessa, and come down through the Black Sea and back through the Middle East." They never even got a trip to England, we at least got at trip to England out of it. Those poor cows. I said "Well, what was it like in Russia?" He said "Bloody awful." They might have regretted it.

07:00 And the funny thing is, Jack MacDonald's his name, he's older than me, he's still working as a wool classer in Hamilton, he comes from Hamilton. Well last year he was still working as a wool classer. And he was there this day, he was in the intelligence section, actually, his family were friends of our colonel's and he joined the army the day before we sailed. What a coincidence it was, yeah. And I said to Jack, I said "Hey Jack." he said "What?' I said

07:30 "See those four fellows down there, they were reinforcements at Daphne, and they got rounded up by the Germans, nobody ever told them anything. Go down and ask them if that truck you sent down for them ever got there." And he said "Were you at Daphne?" They said "Yes." he said "Did that truck I sent down for you ever get there?" You can imagine the abuse, can't you?

**I have to ask, also have you seen The Great Escape?**

08:00 Yes.

**What did you think of it?**

Which one, with, oh that was a bit of bull.

**Yeah?**

Yeah, with Steve McQueen?

**Yeah.**

Yeah, a bit of bull

**What did they, did they get anything right, do you think, about camps?**

Oh, yeah, I don't know what camp he was in though, we never had any wooden cells, they were bloody concrete ones. And you had no heating, if you were in them in the winter, they were bloody cold, I could tell you. I used to drive them mad in the cells, because I'd

08:30 walk around the thing and I'd sing every song I'd ever known in my life, I'd walk around and sing it until I couldn't sing any more, and it'd drive them mad.

**To keep yourself warm, or....?**

Yeah, or to keep yourself occupied, with your, to keep your mind ticking over. You could go crazy in a cell all the time.

**What else did you do to keep sane?**

Nothing, just walk around and sing and yell out, and carry on.

**Any other films that you've seen that have tried to**

09:00 **portray your, things you've been experienced in, or?**

No, not really, not really. But, see, the funny thing, remember Hogan's Heroes? Now, in that, Stalag 13? Hammelburg? 13 C1 in Hammelburg, but there was no Yanks in there when we were there. Yes.

**I think even the story of The Great Escape, they just added Americans when they made the film. It was an American film.**

Yeah. There was no Americans in it, yes, that's quite right, quite

09:30 right.

**I know it's perhaps difficult, I was wondering if you could tell me about the Russian activity in Prague in that three days. Did you just hear stories about atrocities, or**

Plenty of stories about rapes.

**Rapes, yeah.**

Plenty of stories about rapes, all the time. It was the same in Berlin.

10:00 They told them in Berlin, "You've got three days, you can do what you like." So they did what they liked. Pretty crook, isn't it? So, yeah, what I couldn't get over, there were, within two or three days, there's three thousand of the top intelligence people in Prague had whizzed off. The Russians had rounded them up, they knew who they wanted

10:30 before they got there. Scientists and that, just rounded them up and gone.

**Were you afraid of the Russians when you were in Prague?**

No, no. No, I wasn't afraid of the Russians. Actually, one saved me, I wasn't going to tell you this, but this is a fact. They got all these German women and girls, kids, and where they'd built a barricade,

11:00 they made them pull the barricades down and rebuild the road. But, they're stripped naked, their hair's shaved off, they've got black Swastikas painted on their heads and on their backs and everything. And there's a big bloody Czech standing over them with a bloody whip. And he whacked this little kid, and I got a bit excited and a bit annoyed. Anyway, I jumped down to take the bloody whip off him, and he was going to shoot me for sure, and this Russian there with a Burp

11:30 gun, he "Nyet, nyet." I reckoned I was gone that day. Another thing I saw there, that I wasn't going to say anything about, because the Czechs did it, and they were, 13 conscripts, ordinary soldiers, and this is up on the high part, up above in the new

12:00 suburbs. A tram line was along there, and they had these 13 hanging by their feet from trees. They'd cut their tongues out, gouged their eyes out, disembowelled them, poured petrol in and set them on fire. That's the worst thing I saw, and I wouldn't want to see it again.

12:30 And I had a lot of time for the Czechs, but they were a bit excited with that, and I wasn't going to say

that, about that, but that's what happened.

**And these were Czech reprisals for the activities of the Germans?**

Yeah. That's what it was, yes, reprisals for sure. Because you know what they did to

13:00 Lidice, they wiped the place out, kids, everything, the whole town, there was only one kid got away. That's after they shot the bloke who was supposed to be running it for the Nazis, what was his name, oh, I've forgotten his name then. The underground there shot him. So that was a reprisal, wipe the whole area out.

13:30 So they took a few reprisals, the Czechs. No worries.

**Had you heard stories of the German's atrocities to the Czechs?**

Oh, yes, just before, when they were locked in there, they did quite a few, I know. And I never saw

14:00 this, but the person that told me, I would believe them. He said "They ran into this house, and rolled the whole family up in their carpets, and poured petrol on them, and set them on fire while they were still alive." Lots of those sort of stories. How many of them are true, you wouldn't know. I'm sure a lot of them got embellished quite a bit.

**It seems you've probably seen some of the**

14:30 **worst of mankind.**

I've seen a lot of the worst, yes. And some of the best.

**Did you have any sort of faith in anything, like fate, or God, or mates that kept you going?**

Yeah, the mates, yeah, friends kept you going, yeah. No, not religion, oh, there's

15:00 some superior being, I'm quite sure, but who it is, I wouldn't know. Nobody's ever proved anything to me yet. Although, when you go through Turkey, have you ever, if you ever get the chance to get to Turkey, you go there. The most interesting place in the world, I reckon. We went there, after we went back to Greece in 91. And it was a few of us from, a couple from New South Wales, and some Kiwis and that

15:30 with us, and there was another Kiwi and his wife. Now, at a place there was, it's got an old museum, there, and there's this statue, and this head of a Roman, he was an emperor or something, I've forgotten his name now. And this little Kiwi civilian that was there with us, stood him alongside, and it was him. Exactly him. You couldn't believe it.

16:00 Bruce, his name was, Bruce oh, just, well, I've written to him a few times there and we couldn't believe it, we stood him there and it was exactly him, the features exactly. And if you go, Ephesus, ever heard of Ephesus? That's, the whole street is marble, all these marble columns, they used to have a communal lavatory, that's all marble seats, everything's

16:30 marble. And running water in a trough along the front, and, the guide, a Turkish bloke, he reckoned the big struggle was first thing in the morning, everybody wanted the first, because they had the clean water, naturally. And it all drained into a drain, which was underneath the roads, and every 10 feet or something, there was a slab that could be lifted. And that was the sewer, and that all went down, ran down the

17:00 street, ran round like this, and about half a mile out to sea. And all this was all columns alongside, it was all covered and everything. It was absolutely marvellous, what was left of it, was just the columns. And those columns, they were fluted, and they twisted right round and the shape was perfect. How the hell did they carve them out? I've got no idea. No idea whatsoever how they could do it, with the tools they would have had.

**I think we're**

17:30 **pretty much running out of time. I was just wondering if there's anything that either Kristen or I haven't asked you about or you haven't mentioned that you would like to?**

No, I think you've asked me quite enough.

**Thanks very much, Don.**

Okay.