

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Kenneth Halden (Snow) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1475>

### Tape 1

00:36 **Great, right, we're recording now. So if you could just start by giving us that summary.**

Yes. My name is, my surname is Halden, and my given names are Kenneth Ross. I was born at Nathalia on the 25th of September, 1921.

01:00 I spent my childhood on the family farm at Yambuna, which is 12 miles north of Nathalia. The farm bordered on the Barmah Forests along the Murray River. I went to school at the Little Yambuna North State School. There was never more than 12 pupils there, mainly about 10 or so

01:30 and I left school at 13 years of age. I'd obtained my Merit Certificate at that stage, which was the standard leaving stage for school, normally 14, but I got there at 13. Immediately left school and went to work on the, on the family farm. Just whatever was doing. My first job

02:00 was carting wheat 10 mile into the, the Cullen siding, while my father stripped the wheat. We had mainly sheep and, and wheat, a few cows, that sort of thing. Ah, that was through, I left school in 1934 and that was right in the middle of the Depression, the Great Depression and work was almost impossible

02:30 to get. We just did whatever we could around the district there. There was fruit picking in the Shepparton area, and some local farmers needed assistance with, their harvest and that's all only work we had. That was mainly for about a pound or 30 bob [shillings] a week, something like that. And that took us through until the,

03:00 the war broke out, of course. I tried to join in 1941. My brother had already gone in and I was knocked back because I had to have an operation for a hernia. So I did that, had that done, cost me 25 pounds

03:30 which I didn't have. And that was in '41, early '42, I think it was in January '42 I received a call up notice under the system that was operating then. So I responded to that, and went into the army in, I think it was February 1942.

04:00 I was drafted then to an infantry battalion, and we went to the northern New South Wales area, where we, where a lot of the section of the coastline to defend, the Japs were threatening at that time. From there, they called for volunteers to

04:30 go on an unspecified job, whatever it was and when the required number responded to that, we went back to Melbourne and through all the necessary pre-embarkation proceeds there and went on a troop ship to the Middle East. We were aligned to the 2/43rd Infantry Battalion,

05:00 which was then serving at Alamein, and we went up there. After that was over, we came back to Australia, did jungle training at the training area in the Queensland Tablelands, amphibious trainings at Cairns, the centre of that was Trinity Beach which is now a

05:30 high rise area but then it was just bushland, nothing there. We did the amphibious landing at Lae and when that was completed, we, one brigade plus our battalion did the amphibious landing at Finschhafen. And of course, when that

06:00 was over we came back to Australia, another stint of training in the Tablelands and then we were, went to Morotai. We knew then that we were going to Borneo somewhere. I had transferred just a couple of months beforehand into the military police section,

06:30 and was allotted to the 26th Brigade and we did the amphibious landing at Tarakan, a little island off North Borneo and we were there nine months and came home. Marked time around Melbourne for a few weeks, and I applied to join

07:00 the Victorian police force. Went through all the preliminaries and was accepted which gave me an

accelerated discharge. I was discharged on the 1st of June, ah 30th of June rather, in 1946, and I went into the training in the police force on the 1st of July, so no transition period

07:30 there at all. Served 31 and a half years in the police force and was boarded out medically unfit in 1976. Actually I was officially discharged in '77, because I had accruelement of leave and sick leave, and all that sort of thing to cut out. And I finished in

08:00 early December 1977. We were living in Melbourne, had been living in Melbourne for the period from '46 to '77, and we continued to live there for 43 years in total. And then we came back up, retired, well I had been retired since '77, came back up to Shepparton and

08:30 to Newmarket, and have been living there up to the present date.

**Excellent, well done.**

That's about it.

**That's probably the hardest thing you'll do all day. Alright, well look. Now we'll go back to the beginning, and I'll ask you to, can you just tell us a little bit about your family?**

Well, I had four siblings other than myself.

09:00 I was the youngest, there was three other children who died before that but there were five of us survived. I was the youngest, I had three brothers and one sister all older than myself. Like me they worked, my three brothers worked around the district wherever they could get employment.

09:30 We all worked on the farm from time to time because there wasn't sufficient work on the farm for four of us. So when other work became available, local farmers, fruit picking whatever, we accepted whatever was available. Caught rabbits, foxes, whatever was going for pocket money.

10:00 As I say, the wages in those day were about a pound, 30 bob a week if you were lucky. If you could get a job with the local cocky you even got thirty bob a week and keep, you reckoned you were made. There wasn't much in the way of entertainment, bush dances that sort of thing. I clearly remember the first movie picture I saw

10:30 and I must have been about six I imagine. And the movie was The Gold Rush, Charlie Chaplin, silent movie.

**That's a great film.**

I was very impressed with Charlie when he was starting up in the, somewhere up in the Canada, north Canada I presume it was. And he boiled his boots and he ate his

11:00 boots and spitting the nails out, I reckoned that was, that was a pretty good scene. I remember the supporting film was a black and white cowboys and Indians, you know, puffs of smoke, and no sound on it sort of thing. It was quite good. That was the first film. The old film outfits in those days travelled around in an old truck and pulled up in the local

11:30 hall, the old motor running outside. It'd conk out every now and again and they'd crank it up again.

**Was there a music accompaniment?**

Oh yes there was a music accompaniment but didn't remember much about that.

**Did all the kids call out?**

Oh, I can't remember that, so. I think I was too fascinated to call out, you know. Moving films. Oh,

12:00 a few other things there. Childhood going to school. Back in those days if you saw an aeroplane it was quite an event. If we heard the engine, on an old aeroplane or an old Tiger Moth, school would adjourn and we'd all rush outside and watch this plane going over. And all log buggies also, there was a timber industry down there, log buggies used to roll past the school every now and again and the

12:30 school would adjourn and go out and watch them rumble by. It was all good fun I suppose where kids were concerned.

**Were you close to your brother?**

Yes to Eric, the chap you interviewed the other day, I was very close, we were always very close.

**Cause there's only two years between you, isn't there?**

Yes, yes. The other boys were older, and

13:00 they of course, they were probably away from home more than as far as I was concerned. They were working wherever they could get work and they weren't home that much when I was growing up. We all played football there in the local football team. I started when I was about 15, I think. At one stage, there was four of us playing in the one team.

13:30 **Tell us a bit about your parents?**

Well, my father was born in 1884, he lived til he was 88. My mother was born in 1890, I think it was, she died in early '70s, in her early '70s. My father in

14:00 his young days, well his father, my grandfather was one of the original settlers north of here along the Murray. And when they established their farm there the local Aboriginal tribe was more or less in a semi-wild state. They used to come and

14:30 camp near their homestead. Their homestead was built on slabs with galvanised roof, that sort of thing, but the Aboriginals used to camp on the creeks a short distance away from them and they were, he was fascinated as a kid, they'd light a fire at night, sit round the fire and sleep, sitting up. Circle the fire for warmth. They used to bring fish and they

15:00 traded fish for watermelons and that sort of thing from my grandparents and father. He used to, my father used to be carried around on the shoulders of the local tribe, king. They used to, in those days they always had a king, and they, they gave him a plaque which he wore on his chest, you know, "King So-and-so", I've forgotten the name that he wore. But he remembered being carried around on the

15:30 king's shoulders and back because he learnt quite a lot from them and, the arts of fishing and all that sort of thing. My father selected the farm where we were brought up, at Yellamong which was north of Nathalia and the original block of land he selected was only about 180 acres in virgin country, it had to be cleared.

16:00 And I can remember as a kid helping clear some of the, some of the country which hadn't been cleared. He had a very successful year in, I've forgotten the year, but he stripped about 700 bags of wheat in the one year, and that enabled them to buy the adjoining farm and all told it was about 500 acres then.

16:30 **Was it all wheat farming?**

Wheat and wool, and milked a few cows because we had our own WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and a few pigs there from time to time and that sort of thing. Killed our own meat from time to time. But we just, well there was always a shopping day once a week, originally it was in horse and gig and I think in 1926 we bought an old Rugby,

17:00 or new at the time. An old Rugby Tourer, you know and there was always a shopping once a week.

**It would have been quite unusual to have a, a car at that time?**

Oh not really, there was quite a few round. But there was, of course, more horse and gigs and even buggies at that stage. Actually my brother ran a mail contract for some years there by horse and gig

17:30 from Nathalia to the local post office. And that was, well we used to always help him out as kids if he was doing something else, we'd make the run for him with the horse and gig. Great fun in the middle of winter, wet. Middle of summer, the opposite, you know. Was looking back to the good old times, as they say, but it wasn't so good.

18:00 I suppose as kids we spent most of our time rabbiting, even when we were going to school we used to, that was our pocket money, rabbit skins and fox skins. When I say pocket money, later when the picture show used to come to the local, to the town hall, in the local town,

18:30 we scratched up enough money, I think it was two [shillings] and six [pence] or something like that, to go the pictures. And if we had enough for an ice cream afterwards we were doing pretty well.

**The local Aborigines who were living near the farm in your father's time, were they still around in your time?**

Not, not in that state. There was my, in my first memory there was a,

19:00 they'd been moved to a central settlement which is still in existence at Cameron Gangil, which is just over the river from the local township of Barmah there. They were, they had a village, a white person supervisor and they lived more or less as we did. The men worked on the local farms and shearing,

19:30 there was some good shearers amongst them. They lived, worked the same as we did, whatever they could pick up. They had a Cameron Gangil, or we had a Cameron Gangil football team playing in our association and they were, it was always an interesting day when we played them. Quite often finished up in an all in brawl. They, on a wet day, they'd play with no boots on, they'd take their boots

20:00 off, some of them didn't have boots anyway, they'd play in runners and all that sort of thing. But we had some very good footballers from there went onto League. Doug Nicholls and some of those other blokes, Atkinsons and they played league in Melbourne later on. But they were all pretty good footballers. Only trouble is that

20:30 if you knocked one of them down, you weren't in danger from him, you were in danger from his, well we used to call them gins in those days. Just as likely to pick up a stick and chase you. This was on their own ground, which was just outside the Cameron Gangil station. We had to go across the river by the

old punt, which was still there in existence but not being used, of course. There was a big bridge over the river

21:00 there then. It was always a pretty interesting exercise to go to the football match at Cameron Gangil. So much so that in latter years, they banned them from playing there and they shifted the ground across the river there to the Victorian side and that sort of quietened them down a bit.

**So they couldn't play on a home ground?**

No, there weren't so many of the spectators came over. The spectators were the worst in the,

21:30 the actual players, well we always had good fun with them, you know, but...

**So when you said the gins, did you mean the girlfriends?**

Yes, the girlfriends or wives, or... But in those days, it's so different now, but it was always the black fellows and the gins, you know, so. It was accepted in those days. It's not like it is nowadays, they

22:00 lived amongst us, worked amongst us, just as they were accepted, there was no discrimination as far as we were concerned, or they were concerned. They just, it was a way of life and that was it.

**Did any of them go to the school with you?**

Not at our school but they were all schooled as they used to attend the Ulupna School, come across on the punt, the Ulupna School. And I think they had a school teacher allotted to the settlement

22:30 at the time there, in the early days.

**Did you mix with any of the local Aborigines outside of school or football?**

No, no, that's it. There was no, apart from working like, they worked on the local farm but there was no social association except through some of the churches, they used to attend the church mainly at Ulupna

23:00 there, it was just across the river from the settlement. As far as dances and all that sort of thing, there was no mixing there.

**Did you go to the dances very often?**

Oh yes, well your standard was that when you were about 16, you learnt to dance. Went to the local dances, mainly old time, you know dances and every now and again there was a footballers ball,

23:30 there was the tennis ball and there was the cricketers ball and all that sort of thing. But apart from that, there was always, you know, agricultural balls and there was always a monthly dance, something like that in the local hall. Our local band, oh some of them were quite good bands, but sometimes they'd be the old local band, which was a piano and a violin, and perhaps an accordion at different times.

24:00 All good fun but we learnt to dance there. I wouldn't say we were good dancers but we had a lot of fun. We also had sports meetings, that sort of thing. That was one of the events of the year, the harvest home picnic, after harvest they always had a district picnic there with races, all sort of competitions, high jumps,

24:30 ladies as well, ladies in foot races and all sort of things, wheel and barrow and all the silly things that go on. I remember quite well the handicapper was originally an old fellow, he had a long white beard and after he passed on his two sons took it over and they were both bachelors, quite eccentric characters and our family was

25:00 all pretty good foot runners. And when we lined up for the races right from the time we were little nippers, you know, these characters would say, "Right, you're a Halden, you're way back behind scratch". They'd stick us way back, you know, behind the others. And the old original fellow with the white beard, we always held the picnic in the one area on the edge of the bush and there was a big log there and he used to get up on the log at the finish of the

25:30 proceedings and he'd have a tin of boiled lollies, square tin I can remember that. He'd stand up on the log, and he'd sing out "lolly, lolly, lolly" this sort of thing, and the kids would all gather round and he'd throw the lollies up in the air and half of them would fall in the dirt and there'd be an all in melee, gathering these lollies up. Didn't matter if there was a bit of dirt stuck to them, that was

26:00 great fun.

**Now you mentioned you used to hunt for rabbits,**

Yes, yes.

**And foxes. Now tell us a bit about that?**

Oh well, rabbits were in, literally in the millions in those days and you could go out and catch a rabbit whenever you wanted. But we used to catch them from May through til about the end of July which was

their full

26:30 fur season. Same with the foxes. We had rabbit traps, steel rabbit traps, which are now banned and....

**What sort of traps?**

Steel, just steel rabbit traps, they're now banned, you've got to have a special rabbit trap now if you want to use them that doesn't hurt the animal, you see. But in those days they weren't banned and right from the time we went to school, we were about eight, we used to, this was our pocket money.

27:00 We'd have about 30 or 40 traps and we'd go out after school and set these traps around the farm and adjoining farms and catch rabbits, skin them, dry the skins and send them off to Melbourne for the skin sales. Foxes, well we used to hunt the Barmah forest with shotguns and rifles and dogs. Always kept greyhounds and

27:30 we used to average about, oh, I suppose about 90, 100 foxes each in that period each year when they were in full fur. Sometimes you'd get up to 15 bob a skin but average around, oh about five or six, something like that.

**What sort of guns did you have? What sort of guns?**

Guns, oh well, 12 gauge shotguns, and point 22 rifles. As kids we grew up, cut our teeth more or less on a gun barrel and we were usually

28:00 shooting rabbits from about, oh nine or 10,, just ordinary old 22 rifles.

**Who was the better shot out of you and Eric?**

Oh, we were much, neck and neck, much the same. At one stage, we, my eldest brother decided he'd set up a business of sending the rabbit carcasses to Melbourne, boxed for the markets you see. So

28:30 he allotted us as shooters and he'd give us a box of bullets, 52 bullets in a box. And he wanted 52 rabbits in return, all shot through the head. So we managed it, but we had to throw a few out from time to time, that weren't shot through the head. He'd go crook if he didn't get his 52 rabbits for his 52 bullets. So all in all we

29:00 came pretty proficient in the use of firearms.

**And did you hunt the ducks as well?**

Yes, yes. Duck season was always a big, big day on the.... In those days, there was a permanent area down through Rooty Lake, through the Barmah Forest. There was Little Reedy, Big Reedy, Armours, then down to Memorial Lakes, which was permanent water, running water all year. The

29:30 gulf stream broke out of the Murray and ran through there all year but in later years, just after the war, they put a weir on the gulf and stopped the flow of the water down through the lakes, consequently they dried up and that's

30:00 more or less finished the duck hunting season. There used to be thousands of guns come from Melbourne, all over the state to that area for duck shooting. And one of the areas there was called Doctor's Point, it was the area between two of the lakes. And most of the doctors from Melbourne used to come up there, all the specialists, and they were shoulder to shoulder through this neck between the lakes where all the ducks had to

30:30 run the gauntlet. And to be there on opening morning, there'd be a ripple when a duck or a flight of ducks went through. That'd start at one end and go right through to the other, just like a ripple of gunfire and when a duck came down, there'd be about 20 voices "My bird, my bird". Whoever's dog got to it first, had the bird. Oh but, there was just a continual hail of falling

31:00 shots coming down, quite harmless you know, just pattering on your hat or whatever you were wearing. I don't know if my brother told you, but he's still carrying a grain of shot in his, just in his eye. Grabbed one, dug at me in the corner of his, just off the bridge of his nose.

**I don't think, no he didn't mention that.**

He didn't mention that?

**Was that from one of your shots?**

No, no, another bloke's shot.

31:30 We were, of course it was a hanging offence if you shot a duck on the water. You had to shoot in the air all the time. Safety reasons. But this bloke shot one on the water and my brother was in line and didn't duck quick enough. And he got the pellet of shot which went through and stopped at the bone but he's still got that in his face.

**So it was a direct shot, not a falling shot?**

32:00 Yeah, it was direct, ricocheted off the water you see. And up to about well, 1800 yards, they would penetrate you but if it was over that, quite often they'd hit your clothing, they wouldn't penetrate. That would be the 12 gauge shotgun. We came accustomed to the use of firearms you might say in that period of time.

**You might say. Eric mentioned that the, not**

32:30 **all of the duck shooting you did was entirely legal?**

Oh no, we didn't, didn't observe the rules and regulations in those days, I don't think anybody did really. In fact, I can tell you a story there about, just pre-war this was. The practice over the years was for big parties to come up from Melbourne and they used to set up their marquees down behind

33:00 Rooty Lake and it was quite a social event there, you know, there'd be a few barrels laid and that sort of thing. And anyway, this got a bit too large a gathering, some of the locals said "We'll have to do something about this" and they told the local policeman to go out and see what he could do about it, this particular year. And he went out and he

33:30 walked down to this big marquee and presented himself and who should welcome him with open arms, was Tom Blamey, the chief of police. So he backed out, wisely. But that's later, in regard to those days everybody, well it was reasonably reserved at opening time but apart from that we used to go shooting ducks but only for

34:00 something to eat, particularly in the season from, you know, November onwards when all the ducks were nice and young and tender to eat, and that was the reason why we shot them, just for.... Well in those days fresh meat, we had no refrigeration or anything like that at the farm and meat would only last a couple of days in the old cool guardie safe and our menu then was fish,

34:30 rabbits or ducks, whatever. It was a case of necessity.

**How did you cook the ducks?**

Well whatever, you could stew them. But we had the old wood stove on the farmhouse and I remember our oven dish, just to fit in the oven, was about

35:00 18 inches long or more, well it might have been about two feet, by about 15 inches wide. And I can remember that full of ducks being roasted in the oven. Rabbits the same, stuff them and roast them or stew them. I still appreciate a nice roast duck, or a roast rabbit as long as it's young and tender.

**Oh yeah, you're making me hungry.**

35:30 Don't get it very often nowadays. I sold my gun three or four years back. Had to admit that I was past it.

**Might just pause a moment while the garbage truck. Sorry, you, we are recording once again. Could I get you to tell us that story about the football team again?**

Well the Cameron

36:00 Gunga Football Team used to play in our competition and they were always a pretty good team, they were always good competition. And there was our team and a couple of other teams and Cameron were usually the top teams over a period of years. And all the finals were played in Pocola and the Cameron

36:30 Gunga team used to rely on transport from one of the local farmers to take his truck down to Barmah and load them up and take them to their football matches, but there was always a number of them who were working around the farms would start congregating at Pocola from mid-morning. So some of our supporters would go into Pocola and start plying

37:00 these Aborigines with red ned as it was, wine, cheap as possible brand of wine, usually out of a cask. And by the time the football match started, they'd be half full. So we had to put it to our advantage, and usually had a good advantage by half time when they started to sober up, it was too late. On another occasion, I remember we were playing

37:30 in a final at Pocola and some of their female supporters on the wing got a bit excited and they started taking to the field to take it out on some of our players. And the local policeman went round to see if he could do something about it. But there was so many of them there, that he and they, there was no respect for the law in those days, especially from the female supporters so he pulled a paling off a picket fence, about a

38:00 four foot paling, and he went round. And they all swarmed around him like a bunch of bees and he was swinging this four foot paling round at knee height and they were, they were like playing hopscotch over this thing to avoid it, they were jumping over it. And he quietened them down finally and the football proceeded.

**Was he actually hitting any of them?**

No, I don't think he actually hit any of them, he was just

- 38:30 you know, he was close to them, a few of them were jumping up in the air, he got a bit too close.
- Okay, now the 1930s were very tough for a lot of people and you mentioned that**
- 39:00 **you, there was a lot of fresh meat around for you. But was there ever a time when it was hard to find food and you guys were struggling, shall I say?**
- No, not as far as we were concerned. All the farms had their own well, killing meat, lambs, that sort of thing. We didn't kill that often because there was so much,
- 39:30 well, we went to town once a week. But apart from that as I say there was rabbits, fish, ducks all that sort of thing. We never wanted for food because we had our own eggs, we had our own milk, cream, meat. Mum baked all our own bread. Except for the day we went to town, we'd never buy fresh white bread which was quite a treat because you'd get sick of the
- 40:00 homemade bread. And one thing that we always really relished was, to have a pound of bought butter. Well our own butter was homemade, churned from the old churning cream and kept in our cool guardie safe. But to get a pound of butter and fresh white bread was, oh, as kids, it was a real treat. As was
- 40:30 our shopping day was usually Thursday and Thursday night's tea was always sausages and mash potato. And it's still one of my favourites. As far as food is concerned we always had plenty. And in those days, a continual stream of fellows looking for work on the farms, you used to get them every few days.
- 41:00 Come in looking for work and a meal.
- I'd better get you to pause there, we're just at the end of a tape.**

## Tape 2

- 00:33 **Okay Ken, my turn now. I'd like you, to ask you what you thought about the Empire, the British Empire, what did it mean to you before the war?**
- Well, the British Empire meant everything to us. I think it was history in school, the British Empire was, the main thrust of the education was the
- 01:00 British Empire, you know. The glorious history of the British Empire, their conquests and against all odds and that kind of thing. That was quite a big thing to us the British Empire, like the Royal Family in those days was all important. And
- 01:30 I suppose it distilled in us from a young age the importance of the Empire at that time. There was no question that, in any of our minds in that time, when England went to war, the Empire went to war and that was it. It was just accepted.
- 02:00 **You knew a little bit of the First World War?**
- Oh yes, I was always an avid reader of war history, and war, anything war articles and I had an uncle who, or two uncles who served in the '14-'18 war, not that they talked much about it. But I knew, you know, a little bit of what they went through, where they served
- 02:30 and that sort of thing and it was always of interest to me, the history of the First World War.
- Did they say anything about the experience at all, your uncles?**
- Oh well, only a little bit. One of them served at, was on Gallipoli and
- 03:00 he didn't like the hand to hand fighting much, he reckoned it was pretty horrific but he would never say actually what happened.
- How was Gallipoli seen to you before the war, what was iconic about that battle, that whole campaign?**
- Oh well it was,
- 03:30 it was put up to us even though it was a defeat for the Allies, the Australian soldiers were always put up to us as a very heroic episode in the history of that war. Even my parents, you know, they were of that same view,
- 04:00 that the Empire, the reputation of Australia and the Empire and England, was paramount. So much so that one of my brothers might realise his second name was Birdwood. Well General Birdwood was a general who served at the, I think was a general in charge of the English contingent at Anzac, landing at Anzac.
- 04:30 **Which brother's this, not Eric?**

Yes.

**He's a Birdy, is he?**

Birdwood.

**Was religion a major part of your childhood?**

No.

**In any way?**

No, it was only a minor part of my...my elder brother, older brothers and sisters went to church a bit and Sunday school. My mother was really strong in church but

05:00 when I came to light that I was last in the line there, and as a I say, things got tough and I had no teaching except that we always had the Bible and Mother and sisters would always read the bible a bit. But apart from that, I had no interest in the church.

05:30 **At school, what sort of traditions would they pass on to you, regarding, you know, Australian patriotism or material sort of patriotism?**

Well, that was always a put strongly, like we always had the flag raising on Monday morning, that was standard.

06:00 But the same thing, the teaching of history in the schools was always, that was an important part of teaching, the history lessons was always regarded as one of the major subjects.

**What about history? What did they teach you there?**

Well, the general history of the

06:30 colonisation of the world by the British. Not so much the world, we did America and the American Civil War and all that sort of thing. The British part in the early development of America. Well we touched throughout the world, South Africa and India, all countries.

07:00 Taught pretty generally, mainly in the campaigns, in those countries, Khartoum and South Africa and Boer War.

**Gordon of Khartoum.**

Gordon, yes.

**Were you someone who followed**

07:30 **the news, what was happening around the world? Did you read newspapers?**

Ah yes, we always had, the Argus was our standard paper in those days. Read from front to back more or less. We had an old Astor radio, battery operated. Had to have the battery recharged every now and again. Sometimes it'd be nearly flat and you'd cluster round the

08:00 radio to hear the news, listen to the test cricket, all that sort of thing back in the days when they used to tap the table with a pen to simulate the noise of the ball on the bat. Used to be quite a, well a thing with all the locals there. We'd often go to somebody else's

08:30 farm of a night, listen to the test when it was on. It was always, the news was always listened to. Dad and Dave, the serial Dad and Dave.

09:00 **Tell us, did you know much about the Spanish Civil War?**

Oh, I don't say that we knew much, it, it wasn't publicised over much here in Australia. Except the general perception of the two sides. Overall, I suppose we heard very little on that because there was no

09:30 television in those times. You'd hear it mentioned on the news, there wasn't much in the papers about it. It's only since that you've, you know, became aware of the main points of it.

**Do you know much about Nazism, before the war?**

Not up until the war came, we knew very little about it here.

10:00 We knew little about the rise of Nazism in Germany. But of course as soon as it, well just pre war, or when war broke out, it became big news. That's when we got the, well the line of it anyway.

**Were you expecting war to start in the months before?**

Oh yes, yes,

10:30 we guessed that it was inevitable. We'd talk about, you know especially in the few months preceding it,



especially us young fellows, whether we'd go or not and all that sort of thing. But generally speaking there wasn't that much, it didn't get that much publicity here

- 11:00 up until the time that it became imminent and actually occurred. And we didn't know much about, as I say, didn't know much about the rise of Nazism at all.

**What were you doing, the day war was declared?**

I wouldn't have a clue. But I remember, I remember distinctly clustering around the radio, all the reports

- 11:30 coming in on that particular day was that it was going to be on. And I remember the battery on the radio was running pretty flat and we had to get ear right up to it to hear it. And we listened to Chamberlain making the declaration that Britain was at war, and consequently Menzies announcing that Australia was at war, so that was it. But what I was doing at that

- 12:00 particular, I know we were on the farm but that's all. And then it was a question of who was going to enlist, and when.

**How did your father react to that, the war?**

Oh I can't remember much reaction. Of course we immediately, you know, we, my two elder brothers were married and

- 12:30 my brother Eric and myself, we were the youngest and we immediately discussed whether we'd be in it or not. It became a bit of a stalemate as far as we were concerned there for when the period of when they were just sitting looking at one another in France. And we were sort of coming to the opinion that there wasn't going to be much of a war.

- 13:00 Of course that soon changed when Germany moved. Then my brother enlisted and cause I was working on the farm and it became more important that I stay on the farm for the work to do there, you see. I was itching to go, of course but in those days,

- 13:30 you couldn't enlist for overseas, or legally you couldn't enlist for overseas until you were 21. Under 21, you had to have parental consent before you could be sent overseas, you see. And my parents weren't very keen at that stage, with one already in and they wanted me to stay on the farm and help out.

**How many brothers did you have altogether?**

Four.

**So Eric, who was the oldest?**

- 14:00 Clarry was the eldest, Ron, then my sister Lila, Eric and myself.

**You're the youngest?**

I'm the... well I had a younger brother, but he was drowned when he was a two year old.

**I remember Eric saying something about that.**

But actually, the two older children, too, had died in childhood. A girl and a boy.

**Clarry.**

There would have been

- 14:30 eight altogether in the family, but the surviving, of the surviving, Clarry, Ron, Lila, Eric and myself.

**Enough boys there to start a battalion up. Did you talk about this?**

We all played in the football team together, so the four of us.

**You must have been close.**

Oh we were, yes. I can actually, I can never remember us having a family fight or anything like that. We'd have arguments and that but we had more laughter than

- 15:00 anything else. Of course we were all working like slaves, as they say, in those days. There was no slacking, you always had jobs around the farm. You didn't have much time for fooling around. And then when we did have off time we were hunting or fishing or playing sports. We played tennis, cricket, football, whatever was going. Football was a religion.

**What about cricket?**

In the... I didn't play

- 15:30 so much, we didn't play so much cricket but quite a bit of tennis.

**Tennis.**

But, oh well, we weren't champions or anything but had just the old dirt court. We had a court on the farm, actually. We made a tennis court on the farm. We used to have a lot of people come there at various times to play a game of tennis of a weekend.

**So was there any discussion amongst your brothers and yourself about**

16:00 **the war and enlisting?**

Only between Eric and myself, the next brother. I can't remember, well my two older brothers were married and with families at that stage and it was more or less accepted that they shouldn't go and they didn't. So, I can't remember talking much about with the two older brothers.

16:30 But come the winter months of course, football was a religion, that was, that was it, everything stood aside for.

**Did you sign up with Eric?**

No, I tried to join in '40, '41. Would have been probably September, October,

17:00 some time like that but I was rejected as medically unfit because I had a hernia. No doubt caused by lugging bags of wheat around when I was a kid too soon. So I immediately saw the local doctor and had the operation done for hernia, cost me 25 quid which I didn't have. And while I was

17:30 recuperating from that, in those days it was a pretty lengthy, three months I think it was, I received a call up notice for military service, like, once you've reached 18 up to 21, then you went and enlisted and called up for military service. I received that after I had the operation and I responded

18:00 to that and that's when I was accepted into the militia forces which at that time weren't to be used for overseas service, only for Australian defence, you see. And it was later that, I'd been in that for, well I was 20, turning 21 in the September and

18:30 I swapped over to the AIF [Australian Imperial Forces], oh July or August of that year.

**September '42, '41.**

'40, August, about August '42.

**You swapped over from the militia to the AIF.**

I went in and started service in February of '42, and swapped over to, in, I'd say in July, late July.

**What was the militia battalion called?**

57/60th

19:00 Battalion, which...

**What was that?**

It was a militia battalion which had been a lot of the defence of the eastern coastline from Ballina up to Tweed Heads in northern New South Wales and we were sent up to Casino and from there we were,

19:30 that was our defence area. And there were six of us had been selected as a reconnaissance group, patrol reconnaissance group under a lieutenant and a sergeant and we were sent out to the actual coastline which was 30 mile or so from where the battalion was stationed

20:00 and it was our job to reconnoitre the coastline in that area, from Ballina to Tweed Heads. Map all the swamps, the probable impassable areas and areas of access in case of Japanese invasion. Most likely sight machine gun posts, and all that sort of thing. And we were on our own out there

20:30 living in a local farmer's house. We were supposed to be tented but when we got out there he came down, we were setting up on his land, and he came down and he said "Oh, don't put your tent up, there's an empty house up here on the farm, come up and use it", which we did.

**It's a bonus.**

And the locals all used to come in with food, we'd live on all the best of the locals,

21:00 you know. They'd bring down cakes and pies and all this sort of thing and the fellow where we were living in the house, we had an old ute, that we couldn't use it, an old Chevrolet we couldn't use it, generally, because a lot of the areas we had to walk, it was a lot of pretty wild sort of area then. A lot of swamp area. So he loaned us two horses so we

21:30 rode these. There was a fellow from Charlton off a farm and he and I rode the horses, did a lot of the, covered a lot of the area on the horses.

**Sure you weren't on a holiday or anything, it seems like?**

It was as good as a holiday, we had tennis parties after, the locals you know, "Oh come to the tennis at

Brunswick Heads" in the local town and they'd put on a dance and they'd come out and invite us in, you know. It was,

22:00 they used to say Menzies Tourists. It was a, we had a pretty good few weeks there. Of course then we moved back, we had a big battalion stunt there and walked from Casino about 30 miles out of the coast, right up as far as Murwillumbah then back round through Kyogle for

22:30 about a fortnight, a couple of battalions anyhow. You know, battalion exercises, war exercises, all that sort of thing. And then of course, I transferred into the AIF, they came around one night and said "We want 75 volunteers to transfer to the AIF". Wouldn't tell us where we were going. So I had to

23:00 write home post haste to get permission to transfer over. It was getting so near to my 21st birthday that I suppose Mum and Dad said "Well, we might as well sign it and send it back". And I was one of the 75 and they bugged us on a train down to Melbourne and went into preparing for overseas then.

#### **Where, which camp did you**

23:30 **go to in Melbourne?**

Well going back further, when I first went into the army, I went into the Caulfield Racecourse. The first night we slept in the horse stalls on a heap of straw. After that we went up into the stands, sleeping in the open air on the benches. We were there for about a week, nothing doing, milling round, nobody seemed to know what we were doing. But after about a week

24:00 we were all paraded out onto the flat and they had a number of posts, with a number on each post set out, I've forgotten how many. But the old sergeant major from the first war got up on the rostrum and he said "Right-o, all you so-and-so's" he says, "any of you want to be in the artillery, fall in at post so-and-so". And he went through a whole list, machine gunners, transports, group of us all, green

24:30 country blokes, as green as grass you know, wonder what that would be like, wonder what that would be like, see what comes up. After he had done about six calls, he said "Right-o, the rest of you so-and-so's, fall in at post number so-and-so, you're in the infantry", and that was it. That was how we were in the infantry. And that was when I, we transferred from there to Watsonia which was then just in the making and then to the 57th/60th and up to Casino. That brings us

25:00 up to that point. When came down to Melbourne we went back out to Watsonia and got all the necessary injections and they told us we were going overseas. We still didn't know where we were going. German measles broke out in the camp there and everybody, well nearly everybody got them but nobody went on sick parade in case we missed the draft.

25:30 We weren't going to miss where we were going.

#### **You guys were pretty keen?**

Oh just the big adventure, you know. Anyway, they took us down finally when the day came, and laid us on the the old SS Regalia, it was about 8000 tonnes, an old coal burner and they told us it was a horse transport in the '14-'18 war, that's how old it was.

26:00 They reckoned it could do about eight knots flat out and we loaded onboard that, Princess Pier, blowing a gale from the south west. And soon as we got onboard, it was about four o'clock or something in the afternoon, they gave us a big feed of real greasy stew and when we pulled out, I think we had 1200, about 1200 on board, and before we got out through the Heads I'll guarantee

26:30 that there was 1150 of us were hanging over the rails, seasick, and that situation remained from there to Fremantle. We called into Fremantle. The old ship was just the one deck, the main deck underneath, mess tables had been built in with hammocks slung over the mess tables for sleeping quarters. Fold them up of a daytime,

27:00 out of the road. So we soon gave that away, a group of us went up on deck, secured a sheltered corner up on deck. Decks were all white pine decks, beautiful white pine decks. We secured a corner there in beside the life jacket lockers and that's where we stayed for the whole of the voyage. That was our spot.

27:30 We called in at Fremantle to take on some more troops there, the total being 1200 from there onwards. We had a day's leave in Perth, which was more or less just a little village in those days, just one city square, and we sailed from Fremantle, headed off. I remember that day very

28:00 escort, and we headed up to Colombo as it was in those days, in Ceylon. We had a bit of a scare, might have been first, second day out of Colombo on the way up. The destroyer turned back past us at high speed and went pretty well out of sight well. A lot of people came down

28:30 to the wharf and they, as we were pulling out, they sang the Maori's Farewell. There were a few lumps in the throats that day. I can't remember how long across the Indian Ocean, but we had two troop carriers, ours and another ship, it was a little bit bigger, but much the same vintage, a destroyer and the Kanimbla, which was an armed merchant under

- 29:00 astern of us and the Kanimbla maintained station. And the destroyer dropped a couple of depth charges there, we could see the explosion and we didn't know what was going on. I don't know whether it was a fair dinkum scare or just you know, an alert and they picked up something, then she came back up past us and resumed station we had at Ceylon.
- 29:30 Ceylon, ah, Colombo Harbour was littered with sunken ships, they'd been raided by the Japs from Malaya or Burma somewhere, there were a lot of sunken ships in the harbour. We off-loaded there, I think we had two days in Colombo and they restocked with food and water. The food from
- 30:00 Fremantle only, as I say, we had two ice boxes, big rooms, one each side, midships on the deck and after a few days it was back to marmutack all the way over there, just hard tack. They restocked at Ceylon, water and food, we were ashore sampling the delights of Colombo and went back on board
- 30:30 and a funny instance happened there. We were watching them loading, they were loading some fresh carcasses of meat aboard. Everybody was saying, "Oh it looks like we're going to get some fresh lamb for a while", you see. But somebody went down and had a close look and they were little donkeys. So for a couple of days, or however long it lasted, we were eating donkey meat. We left there and we
- 31:00 went on to Aden, we called in at Aden, I think we took on water there just for an afternoon and left again. And up the Red Sea to Suez where we offloaded and spent I think one day in transit camp there, right beside the canal. That was quite an experience to see
- 31:30 the ships lay through the canal. From the distance we were back, just as if they were sailing over land, you know, just part of the ship and the upper structure over the land level. And then it was onboard a train which didn't seem to want to go anywhere. Back, forth
- 32:00 for hours on end and Arab hawkers with water, watermelons and all sorts coming aboard with their little cakes and what-not, and by train up to Jaffa in Palestine where we offloaded and went into established camp there.
- I'll stop you there for the moment. I want to ask you a few more questions about your voyage. Now, you said that the**
- 32:30 **ship was a pretty poor ship, so, I, I presume that the conditions wouldn't have been the best?**
- Oh it was shocking. In the early stage like when everybody was seasick if you were going upstairs and down below, you were just as likely to get sprayed by somebody letting go at the top, you know. And you had to watch for the way the wind was blowing if you were down the scuppers where there'd be long lines lying down, you know, heaving into the scuppers. If the wind was blowing you'd get a spray there.
- 33:00 Oh, it was shocking conditions, you know, the smell and that. No showers or anything like that for that whole voyage. You just had to have a wash with the hoses, sea water. You wanted to wash something, you tied a rope on it and threw it over the stern and plug it along in the sea water for a while, put it back on. If it was a shirt, it'd be as stiff as a poker. But no, no washing facilities at all on
- 33:30 that, just the heads you know for latrines and that.
- The latrines were pretty basic?**
- Oh well, just basic, they were maintained. Every morning, there was a Laskar crew and Dutch officers on the ship, but every morning the Laskars would line up forward in a line and they'd half coconut shells and they'd
- 34:00 start cleaning the deck, every morning without fail. They'd all work along the line, working these coconut shells on the deck, the wooden deck, a bloke behind with a hose, hosing through so the water was running ahead, and they'd go right down to the stern of the ship, cleaning the hoses. And of course every nick, nook up there was occupied by some of the troops who'd
- 34:30 taken possession and you'd have your gear, your blanket and what not up there. And they'd start yelling "wakey, wakey", as they came along, you see. And if you didn't get up onto the lockers, the lockers were about three feet high and about 10 or 12 feet long, get up there, or they'd turn the hose on you and they reckoned it was a great joke. Of course they got called lots of names and I don't know whether they understood what we were saying to them. We certainly didn't understand
- 35:00 what they were saying to us.
- Was it an Indian crew, I trust?**
- Laskars. They were all a happy lot, they thought it was a great joke if they caught us with the hose.
- Was that the first time you'd met Indians?**
- Oh well, no. Back on the farm we had Indian hawkers. In those days was, they quite regularly would come through and the old bloke who came round
- 35:30 to us, well in my time, was Punjab, and he had a horse and a cart. The cart was typical of the old, well it was a four wheeled sort of a wagonette and the special body built on it was dozens of drawers, sides,

back, front everywhere. And anything you wanted, you named it, he'd have it, he'd pull out a drawer which would be full of fruit, vegetables, clothing anything at all, sheets, you know,

36:00 boots. Hawkers and peddlers they were known as. He was the Indian hawker.

**What was his name?**

Punjab we used to call him, I don't know whether, what his name was. We used to always call him Punjab. But he'd get feed for his horse, he'd usually camp at a farmhouse somewhere around and feed for his horse, he'd make his way leisurely through the country calling at all the farmhouses.

**Was he well known around the....?**

Oh well known, yeah, yeah.

**It's very**

36:30 **interesting.**

It was said that he used to call at the Aboriginal settlement across the way and there were a few descendents there with Indian blood in them.

**Really?**

That's a fact, yes.

**Incredible.**

That's our first contact with Indians. There was no other contacts as far as, like in our area, it was all

37:00 Anglo Saxon right throughout, apart from the Aboriginals.

**Well what did you find different about the Indians you met, the Laskars on the ship?**

Well we didn't really have much to do with them, except for that contact on the deck. Apart from that, they'd just go about their jobs and we didn't really see much of them. We occupied the deck in the daytime and mainly the midships of the deck area on the ship, and well down below, and the bottom blokes would be writing

37:30 and sleeping and what not. We had exercises and, oh bits of contest on the wrestling, boxing. We had a piano midship under shelter there and we used to have a concert every night. Of course there was always the inevitable two-up game and that sort of thing going on pretty well all the time. Oh, we filled in the days quite well.

38:00 **When you got to Colombo, what was your impression of Ceylon before you arrived, what were you thinking of it?**

Well we weren't really thinking of anything. We knew about it, we knew where it was, we didn't know what it would be like, everything was new to us, we were rather shocked. The conditions there in 1942, as you can imagine, conditions were not very good, you know, as far as, shops or anything was concerned there. There was

38:30 more or less a British enclave in a certain area and there were colleges there, a couple of colleges with sporting fields and that sort of thing but as far as the village itself, the town itself, it was to us the conditions were very poor, very dirty, that sort of thing.

**So how long did you actually stay there for?**

Only two days, I think, we went to a, the

39:00 first day we were in the city part of it. On the second day, they took us out to a camp just on the outskirts of the city but we were still just wandering around at freedom doing what we liked.

**Was it a culture shock?**

A bit of a culture shock. Rickshaw races, you know, with rickshaw bloke up in the

39:30 rickshaw and the troops having races up and down the street.

**And they'd pay the guys to have races in the rickshaw?**

Not pay, well they'd give them a few mills or rupees or something and they'd have them up in the rickshaw and the troops in the charges, you know, races along the streets there, you know. They'd have their hob nail boots there clattering, you know, quite a sight.

40:00 But, oh we got on well with everybody.

**I heard that through people I've interviewed before, and a few relatives of mine who lived there at the time, that the Aussies had caused quite a bit of a stir.**

Oh well, I suppose, always, there was always an element that, if there was anything to be stirred, they'd

stir it. But there was always, you know, they'd, all the same, wherever they went, the Aussie would always stir the pots and then

40:30 did something. But there was nothing, oh, a few of them would get full and that. But there was no, as far as Ceylon was concerned, there was nothing outlandish there or anything I don't think. We weren't there long enough and there was anything really available for them to cause much havoc.

**Did Colombo have a red light district?**

Not that I'm aware of. I'm not blowing

41:00 my own trumpet but I didn't go to that sort of thing, you know. But well, from discussions, like in Perth now, there was a red light district there that we knew about, those that wanted it went to it. But you know we usually had a group that stuck together but I didn't hear anything about that. I suppose there was in Colombo but I didn't hear about it.

**We've run out of tape, so we'll change tapes. Great thanks.**

## Tape 3

00:33 **Alright, now I wanted to take you back a little bit and just ask you, before you left to go overseas, did you smoke or drink?**

No, never smoked, never drank.

**Not a drop?**

Not a drop, no.

**Not a puff?**

No, well, no, not a puff when I was a young fellow.

**Did you have a girlfriend?**

01:00 From the age of about 19, I suppose, I had my eye, you know, keen on some of the locals but the one and only from about 20 onwards.

**So that's before you went away?**

Yeah, yeah.

**Where did you meet Enid?**

I hope I'm right. We met at an old time dance in the local town parish hall. Used to be,

01:30 I think it was once a month there, an old time dance and she lived with her family on a local farm about ten miles from ours. And she at the time was working in the bank in Nathalia and I was still on the farm, of course. But we all used to turn out to these old time dances and that's where we met.

02:00 **And what sort of things would you do together?**

Oh well that was about it, go to the pictures perhaps, go to the dances wherever, and one of our local farmers had a car, a little bit before his time, he had an old Dodge 6, quite a good car and he used to take a load of us to dances around the district, you know, wherever the dance on. We'd go to

02:30 these dances, go to the pictures, whatever was on round the district. There wasn't that much in those days, there was no question of going out every night or anything. If you went to the pictures, it was once a week if you got there, more likely to be once a month, something like that. The dance, it wouldn't be very often with the dances, if we went to dances out of the way, we'd get home about three or four o'clock in the morning. Get home, go to bed and Dad would have you out of bed

03:00 just after daylight to go out on the team, all horse team work in those days. His motto was if you can go to a dance til three o'clock or four o'clock in the morning, you can get up and do the work.

**Now how long did you see Enid before you had to go away?**

Oh well, it wouldn't have been that long, I suppose, I can't really

03:30 remember. Probably six months, something like that.

**Now had you, prior to the war, had you ever travelled anywhere?**

The furthest I'd been was on a train trip to Shepparton which was 40 miles away. That's the first and only

- 04:00 time I'd been on a train. I had to have turned six, it was 1934, I remember it well. The Duke of Gloucester was coming to Shepparton for some function, I've forgotten what it was, and all the schools were invited to attend but you had to have two and six for your train fare to go down. So I had to scratch up two and six, which I did, to go on this train trip down to Shepparton.
- 04:30 **You raised the money yourself?**
- Well I've sort of forgotten that, it was probably rabbit money, or something. But I got there and only probably half a dozen of us went down on the train, our school teacher accompanied us. Weren't very much interested in the Duke of Gloucester, this was the first, well, biggish town we'd been in. Nathalia was only a little village in those days. But I
- 05:00 remember the day very well because I was 13 at the time, it must have been about September, October and our teacher went and saw the district inspector. In those days, the district inspector came round the schools every year to assess the works of the pupils, you see. He went to see the district inspector at the local school in Shepparton and he recommended
- 05:30 that I be given the Merit Certificate, which was the 8th Grade in the State Schools in those days. Usually at 14, that I'd be given without sitting for, you'd sit for an examination. He must have reckoned I was smart enough to warrant having it at 13, so he told me that day that I had my Merit Certificate without sitting. So I threw my hat in the air, and I never, well I went back to school for a
- 06:00 while after that, but that was all the schooling. He put me onto scholarship work, or tried to. The school teacher's idea was that in those days there was a scholarship class run at the Bendigo College and he wanted me to go there on a scholarship, but I had different ideas. I much preferred to stay on the farm, chase rabbits and foxes.
- 06:30 Goodness knows what would have happened if I'd gone onto Bendigo.
- Now seeing as, as you'd never travelled any further than, than Shepparton...**
- Never, never travelled.
- ...the war must have brought great excitement for you?**
- Oh, well as I say, it was a great adventure. This was it, we could go overseas.
- 07:00 The actual war part of it was, sort of, well back in your mind. You didn't start thinking about that til you got there really. It was, you know, something to look forward to. A lot of fun for us, you were usually grouped up in a group of like minds, you know, country blokes and all much the same, green as grass in those days. We all knew how to use guns and all that sort of thin, but
- 07:30 apart from that we were pretty green.
- The, Rahjulia, am I saying that correctly?**
- The Rahjula, Rahjula, I think it was r-a-h-j-u-l-a, I think, if I remember rightly.
- Okay. I thought it was, I'm getting it confused with a famous actor Raul Julia.**
- 08:00 **That was, it was not a large ship.**
- No, around about 8000 tonnes, might have been eight, eight five, something like that, quite a small ship as far as ships are concerned nowadays.
- Did it impress you, though?**
- Oh yes, was quite a big boat as far as we were concerned, you know. It wasn't very enjoyable til we left Fremantle. After that we started to enjoy it, across the Indian Ocean. The water was relatively calm and we started to enjoy the trip
- 08:30 then, we were tourists.
- Well tell us a bit more about the conditions on board, where you slept and what you ate?**
- Well for a few days out of Fremantle we had fresh food, fresh meat, vegetables, that sort of thing. I can't remember fruit but we may have had some fruit.
- 09:00 After that, of course, having only the iceboxes on for refrigeration, it was back to army rations. Bully beef, m & v, which is meat and vegetables in tins, mainly mutton. Goldfish as we called them, tinned fish which was tinned and I guarantee they tinned them, gut and all, they were horrible. They were edible, they used to make them in a, bake them in a big dish,
- 09:30 covered in potato, that sort of thing you know, sort of a fish pie but they were always known as a goldfish. Sleeping was, if we slept where we were supposed to sleep, it was in hammocks, slung over the tables, the mess tables down below. You were allotted a hammock and you stored your gear there and slung it when you wanted to go to bed in the hammock. As I said, we'd choose to go

- 10:00 upstairs and claim an area up on deck, upper deck in a secluded corner where it's sheltered from the weather, but the upper part of the bridge and that was sheltering us. We took our blankets and that up there and slept on the floor. There was no mattresses or anything in those days. Just slept on the floor there with our, slept always in our clothes, you know, no stripping off too, it was a
- 10:30 matter of keeping warm, you know, it was pretty cold up on deck. Blankets and we used our life jackets for pillows, locker with a life jackets, we didn't wear them all the time, you could get them anytime out of the lockers and put them back in the morning when we got up. When the Laskas came along and "wakey, wakey", and the hose we just pack up then and put our gear up on the lockers and that was it. That was

- 11:00 virtually the voyage right through to Suez, that's the routine apart from, as I say, what we were doing on deck. Lectures, all sorts of lectures, trying to educate us on what we were going to strike when we got there.

**Tell us about those lectures and if they were effective.**

Well, they were effective. We had lectures on, well, hygiene and,

- 11:30 and personal, you know, venereal disease, all that sort of thing, which was rife in the Middle East. We used to get plenty of warnings on that and make your hair stand on end. The general conditions that we were to expect when we got there, as far as Ceylon. We didn't know where we were going.
- 12:00 It was, there were all sorts of rumours flying around the ship, we were going to Java, all that sort of thing but in fact, we were heading for the Middle East. Afterwards when we left there, we had lectures on conditions in the Middle East, how to treat the locals, what not to do, what to do. What conditions we could expect, warnings on what to eat, what not to eat,
- 12:30 food, water, use of water, all that sort of thing.

**What did they tell you about the local customs and religion?**

Not a great deal on their customs. They were, well, we were warned about, you know, too much fraternisation with the Arabs there. There was always a cloud of Arab beggars and prostitutes and all

- 13:00 sorts, hanging around the camps, you know, and we were pre-warned on how to treat them. They set up as soon as we would enter camp, they used to have camp patrols on motorbikes around the outskirts keeping the Arabs out but they always seemed to infiltrate. So, you know, coming in trying to sell stuff and bargaining and all this sort of caper. They'd pinch anything, we always had to secure our arms
- 13:30 at night. In those training camps we had cane beds set up, I presume they came from India or somewhere, these cane beds and the centred poled tent, well we'd secure our rifles by chain to the centre pole of the tents at night otherwise, they'd walk. The Arabs used to pilfer them, they'd pinch anything.
- 14:00 And you couldn't leave anything round, lying round, you know you had to put everything under your bed and anything you valued under your pillow. But as I say, the patrols were patrolling the area but they weren't all that effective. But we'd been pre-warned, warned on all that, you know what to expect. It didn't alter the fact that we, as soon as we drank the water or ate the watermelons
- 14:30 or any of the food we had the trots for about a week there. It was shocking, it'd hit you anywhere, anytime.

**Now, just getting back to the lectures that you got on board and you mentioned VD [venereal disease]. Did they have, you said it was, it was hair-raising, did they have very graphic descriptions or did they show you pictures?**

Oh well, there was, there was no pictures, but the old salts, they'd be mainly old blokes from the

- 15:00 First World War that were, they were lecturing, they did have outsiders lecturing, they'd have ship commander and all that sort of thing, you know. We weren't, oh well, I suppose they were second to the army, it was only verbal information. As I say, it was so worded in the army vernacular, that it was pretty hair-raising. Much more, probably more graphic and driven home
- 15:30 in a better fashion than present day stuff is. Especially going to the Middle East, as I say, where it was rife.

**What did they, what did they recommend that you do to avoid getting VD?**

Well our bloke, his was very simple. He said any of you blokes that want to, want to dip the, dip the

- 16:00 wick or oil the lizard or whatever you like, as the terms were, he said I suggest that you put on, not only one French letter put on two or three and then go around the corner and do something, not go near the brothels.

**Put on three and then don't go near them?**



Yes, that was his description.

**Did they offer you any creams or lotions?**

16:30 No, no. Oh, it really, it only applied to only a few of the desperado types, our blokes it didn't apply to the general run of them. They probably weren't all as green as what we were, we had a lot of city blokes, some of them, there was only a handful that were so inclined.

**Now prior to arriving in the Middle East,**

17:00 **what was your knowledge, and what, what did you actually know of the state of the war at that time and who you would be fighting?**

Oh well we knew that we were going in as reinforcements to Alamein and I'd known from my brother being in Tobruk and Alamein, you know, had a pretty clear idea of what was going to happen, what was, what it was going to be like.

**So had you had news**

17:30 **from Eric?**

Yes, he wrote home regularly and we wrote back. I used to write to him and he'd write in return and they couldn't describe much in their letters, it was all censored, both ways, but you got the general trend and the news. News was as we know now, censored heavily, you know, on the radio and in the papers.

**But you knew where he was?**

Oh we developed a code

18:00 before he went. By using fictitious names in his letters we knew where he was going and we used that right through. Like if he was going to Alamein was, Uncle Alan, how's Uncle Alan, something like that you see. And we knew pretty well all the time where they were going, where they were.

**What were some of the other codes?**

Well usually the capital letter of where we were going, you see.

18:30 Well for instance going to Tarakan, you see, I'd use an uncle or an aunt starting with T. There'd be a paper, a bit in the paper that Allied troops had arrived in Tarakan and when they got my letter with a capital T, they'd know that I was, I'd say well I'd met Uncle Terry or something like that who didn't exist, and they'd know where I was. Same as New Guinea, and

19:00 and Lae and in Java. Just use that capital letter code, fictitious uncle, they could then match it up to reports in the paper. They'd never mention where any particular unit was going but you can find out through that.

**Now,**

19:30 **where did you first arrive in the Middle East did you come in to Port Tewfik?**

Ah, at Suez we were unloaded there, I don't know just where it is. But we unloaded out of, just off the end of the canal somewhere on the African side. It might have been the beginnings of the lakes, I've forgotten now just where it

20:00 was but I know it was on the African side. We then went by train to New Sarrat [?] which was a camp just outside Jaffa in Palestine. We did a bit of training there, they had a horrific assault course there which we all had to go through and then went by train through to Cairo, where we had, I think it was, one day's leave there where we saw the sights of the

20:30 Pyramids and the Sphinx and whatever. And then we went onto Alexandria, to a staging camp at Citibish, which was just outside of Alexandria, we didn't get any leave there. We arrived, I think we arrived in the, might have been in the night or the morning and we were going on up to the front. And come night, you couldn't go up. Oh well, we started off in the late afternoon

21:00 by truck. We went up and arrived, were offloaded in the, I think it might have been the early darkness and we had to walk into whichever areas we were going. Like we were split up into groups going to the various battalions for reinforcements but you had to move after dark and we went into our battalion, Company Headquarters,

21:30 and assembled there for distribution out to the various platoons and that, out to wherever they were located out on the front.

**Okay, let's just get back to Palestine for a moment. What was your first impressions of Palestine when you arrived?**

We didn't really get much time for impressions there, it was pretty, pretty hefty training schedule there we had. We went on route marches in the sand dunes and the sand to get us used

- 22:00 to handling the sand conditions and a couple of night manoeuvres, sort of, to get our orientation. Being in the northern hemisphere, everything was back to front. The only reference point we had at night was the North Star, that was the sole, your natural instinct came from the southern hemisphere where, you know,
- 22:30 south was south and north was north. But you had to quite often stop and refer at night time particularly, refer to the where's the North Star? Oh there it is, that's north, and then you, it'd come back to you then, you'd be right. But that North Star was used in all orientation patrol work in the desert, right through. Especially as I say, to troops coming in from the southern hemisphere, they were sort of back to front.
- 23:00 But as far as, there was no leave as I say, there was just the local, we weren't near a town or anything on that occasion. The locals would be trying to sell us stuff, hawkers and that sort of thing, but there was no real...the nearest we got was we were out on these route marches, sometimes we'd pass
- 23:30 an orange grove, which was thousands of acres of orange groves, Jaffa oranges in Palestine at that stage, mostly run by Arabs. And see, we'd be marching along these orange groves and by this time the owners, the employees were well aware that we'd raid their orange orchards, see. So they, when we used to appear, they'd,
- 24:00 half a dozen blokes with big long poles that were ten or twelve foot long, would follow the formation right along the barrier, the fence of the plantation, you see, but we had some good runners who used to lure the fellows off with their poles, they'd chase them in through, jump the fence and go in through the oranges see, and whilst they were chasing them somebody'd get in and get an orange each. The
- 24:30 trick was to, the Arabs, the hawkers used to follow these route marches along with donkeys laden with oranges. Poor little donkeys, about so high, with a big bag of oranges on either side and you only had to push the donkeys and they'd fall over and they'd spill all the oranges, you see. About a dozen blokes would swarm round, George was Arab and it was always George. "Oh George, I'll help you pick up your oranges," and there'd be
- 25:00 two or three of them helping them pick up his oranges, and put them back in his bag and the rest would be throwing oranges out to the troops fast. But all in all, as I say, the amount they used to pinch from us, I think we broke about even.

**The, when you got to...Oh sorry, tell me a little bit more about the training**

- 25:30 **that you were doing. Apart from orientation, what sort of training did you have?**
- Oh mainly weapons training there, like up to that stage we hadn't had that much training on, the Bren gun was relatively new at that stage, like the machine gun. Grenade work, grenade launchers which we attached to the end of our rifle in a special Bren force rifle
- 26:00 with a cup that you put on the end of a rifle and fired a blank. You put your grenade in the steel cup, pull the pin out, drop it i, so that the lever didn't fly off and ignite the fuse. And then you had to train in elevating and lowering your rifle to get a certain range and pull the trigger and that would
- 26:30 hurl the grenade up to 150 yards or so, whatever you wanted it and that sort of thing. Bren gun training, you had to strip that down, reassemble in the dark, blindfold and all that sort of thing, so that you could do it blindfold or in the dark. Essential weapon cleaning, in the deserts you always had to clean, pull out and cleaned, because dust, dust storms
- 27:00 were pretty frequent and horrific there. They'd just come in a wall and disappear in a wall. But you'd be chewing dust sometimes for all day, or a day and a half or something. My training of delousing mines, they had a mock minefield set up, always did it at night. They'd set you off on a line to
- 27:30 demine delousing. The German mine generally was a telemine was about the size of a dinner plate and a few sticks of gelly in it. The fuse was a side fuse which when the weight was put on the plate on the top it had a pressure plate on the top
- 28:00 if you walked on it or if a tanker or anything rolled onto it it'd depress, fire the fuse and set off the charge and you had to learn to take out that side fuse, to delouse the mine. It always had to be done at night time in the desert because if you went out in the daytime you'd get your head shot off. The bit of the sadist on that, he set up
- 28:30 a minor charge in the sand right beside you or just very close handy to you, and you'd be working on a delousing these mines, and he'd set this charge off, you know. And you'd think you were a goner. Shower you with sand and that. He'd think it was a great joke.

**Just a flash charge?**

Yes. We didn't. Enough to throw sand all over, you know. Some of the mines they had a trick fuse on underneath.

- 29:00 And a few blokes, well in the real thin, they got caught with that. Sappers, engineers that was usually

their job to delouse the mines. They deloused the, take the side fuses out, pick the mine up and throw it away. Or place it outside and bang, you'd have one underneath, hidden underneath. Not very often but that did happen. You were always, we had to always investigate

29:30 underneath the mine to be sure there was no trap fuse underneath but that was generally, that was it. We had to do an assault course which was up a steep, rocky hill which culminated in jumping off a ramp which you had to... there was no shirking on the course, you had to do the whole thing

30:00 and by the time you got to the top of the hill, you were buggered, to put it other words. But then you had to run up this ramp and you didn't know what was on the other side, you didn't, you had to do it not knowing what you had to do. But everything was as you went and when you got to the top, the jump to take off, the parapet eight foot wide, filled with barbed wire and you had to clear that with all the last second's decision. And

30:30 of course the idea of this, they always taught you to land properly when you're in battle gear with tin hats and gear on so you didn't do any damage with the roll. But you had no hope once you took off there, you had to clear the wire and you landed anyway, you know, it was all soft sand but you usually came up with a mouthful of sand. Tin hat would go one way and bits and pieces, you know, fully armed, carrying whatever you had to carry, rifles and...

31:00 **Did anyone get hurt?**

Oh not, not seriously. Some of them landed in the barbed wire, got a bit scratched. That also was part of our training, crash into wire as we used to call it. Wire was, defences were, wire defences everywhere in Alamein were three tiered, with two rolls and then one on top,

31:30 and barbed wire you see, in front of defensive positions and there was two ways of breaching it. One was to issue, was a surprise, was to crash the wire with two blokes - usually the tallest in the platoon or the section, whoever was doing it or the other was bangalore completo, which was a length of galvanised piping with explosive charge in,

32:00 which sappers or whoever would poke through the wire, usually two of them and blow the section out. But the crashing the wire was, the two tallest blokes had to charge the wire, the platoon would go down, you know, undercover behind the two who'd charged the wire, holding the rifle across your body and when you got to the wire you had to

32:30 jump on the wire using the rifle in your hands extended so that you sort of crashed through the whole three rolls of wire then the rest of the platoon, when you did that, that forced the wire down in that area. Then the rest of the section or platoon would run over the top of you. And they were supposed to be trained to run where they didn't hurt you much but it didn't always work and you'd get a boot, boot here there and everywhere, you know,

33:00 as they ran over the top of you. And then you had to untangle yourself from the wire and follow on as best you could. That was good fun that.

**Sounds like great fun.**

Oh yes, yes.

**So after, after Palestine you went through to Egypt.**

Yes.

**And you were staying at Alexandria, is that correct?**

We stayed, I think, overnight, one night there and the next day

33:30 we went on up to the front. We just moved into the cam, and it was all tented out, it wasn't a staging camp. And we had, we might have had tea there and breakfast. And I think it was next, mid-afternoon we started up, it was about 60 miles up to the front.

**You mentioned you had leave to go and see the Pyramids?**

That was going through, well it wasn't leave actually, it was a staging, was part of a day

34:00 when we were changing from train to track, from the, from the...From Cairo we went by truck to Alexandria, see. The trains, we got out and left the trains at Cairo and went on up by truck to Alexandria and in that period we were set free to have a look at whatever we wanted to look at, Pyramids and that sort of thing,

34:30 which we did and just had a bit of a wander around there and then back on to the area and got onto the truck.

**What was it like to see the Great Pyramids?**

Oh it was very interesting. Very dusty, of course, and dirty. I believe it's entirely changed now, a real tourist resort. But in those days, it wasn't much as far as tourists. There was nothing there, just, you

could walk along. A few

35:00 beggars and Arabs as usual, you know, that's all it was. There was no real organised tourist set-up, like it is now. We had a look there, that was about all, well we didn't have time to go into Cairo proper. We just wandered around the area. I've forgotten the set-up. I suppose there was a train siding not far from there and we transferred to the trucks and up to Alexandria.

35:30 **And you were only at Alexandria for a day or so?**

Just overnight I think it was. The next day, I think it was mid-afternoon when we went onto the trucks to go up, it was over 60, about 60 miles. It was slow going, it was

36:00 congested with all sorts of war paraphernalia, trucks and vehicles of every description, tanks and everything, anchoring over this one stretch of road. It was pretty slow going and we got up, I think it was just after dark when we arrived at the unloading point there and then after dark we walked into the,

36:30 I forgotten how far it was, it wasn't that far into our battalion area, where there was a few of the fellows from the battalion were there to meet us and greet us and show us to our various spots where we were going to the various companies and that's where we got caught in our first taste of war.

**This is at**

37:00 **Alamein?**

Yeah, at that loading point. We were 75 of us and a few of the blokes, the old blokes there to sort us out and we were only there a matter of perhaps half an hour and we got caught. A flight of German bombers came in, of course with guns firing and hell of a ding going on, and they came in with muffled motors

37:30 and they were quite low and they let go a stick of bombs right across. We had 20 casualties there, eight killed and 12 wounded, some of them were our blokes just coming in. They were there five minutes and they were dead. That was our

38:00 introduction to war. Of course, immediately it was "Right, find a hole and jump into it". Oh we had to go with our, we'd been sorted, more or less sorted out then. We were still in the group. Our guide then you had to stay on the tracks, you know, into your company position. When we got there, he said "Right, find yourself a slit trench and get in it", and that's what we did. But fortunately

38:30 for us, the breakthrough had occurred on that day, it had been consolidated on that day and apart from artillery fire and that sort of thing the air warfare that was going on overhead, we didn't receive any incoming stuff at all from there. But that was our contribution to Alamein, we were lucky. We

39:00 woke up the next morning, and you know, really started to think that this was going to be war, well, I suppose there was about 20 dead blokes within thirty or forty yards of our slit trenches, Germans who'd been killed. The air war was still going on, not intensely but we had a

39:30 what we termed the football team, right throughout Alamein. My brother might have mentioned it too. There was a football team of 18 bombers that used to go up, always 18, and they used to carpet bomb an area, they'd fly in tight formation, well not tight formation, in a certain formation and in a selected area, they'd, just all simultaneously

40:00 let their bombs go and that whole area might be half a mile long and a hundred, two or three hundred yards wide, it would just be obliterated with bombs. It was a sight to see. Ack-ack [anti-aircraft fire] going off with all round these bombers and then fighter escorts just carpet bombing. The football team, that was their nickname.

40:30 **That's quite an introduction.**

They were Ralbeen [?] bombers, mainly Mitchells and Boss or some British Halifax, that sort of thing. We did see one or a couple of aircraft come back, one a bomber, came back apparently damaged and they, the crew parachuted and they put it down in the sea just

41:00 out from it. Another Hurricane came back, it had been damaged apparently in a dog fight. He was just flying and that was all. Following the railway line back, we were right beside the railway line, and he was, as I say, he was just flying, engines buttering, he was just maintaining his altitude about 500 feet up, I suppose, and two Messerschmitts dropped on him

41:30 from out of the clouds. There were some clouds up above him, one behind the other. I suppose the flight leader whatever he was, was lining up, I think he was just about to knock this bloke down. There was a Beaufort down in the depression beside us and they told us afterwards, it was the first time electronic sights had been used on the Beauforts and they fired three shots, that as the

42:00 Beauforts were always...

## Tape 4

00:33 Well we can come in at, we went, I'd actually joined the company and we woke up the next morning and there was a hell of a scene there. The breakthrough, the main breakthrough had occurred then the...

### **This is the attack against Rommel's forces?**

Yes. The British and Indian and South African and New Zealanders,

01:00 were inland from us, the Australian 9th Division was on a sector along the Mediterranean coast and the main breakthrough had occurred inland from where we were. And the access, the German and Italians were in full retreat, more or less the Germans were in full retreat, because opposite our sector

01:30 had been mainly Italians but Germans had come into reinforce when we, our division had moved over to there because they had thought that was going to be the main attack. Being Australians, they were usually used as assault troops and instead of that they'd used them as the main breakthrough when, to the south. But

02:00 on this occasion we were, I think it was probably the next day or the day after, that this damaged plane came back, and two Messerschmitts dropped out of the clouds onto him and so they were almost ready to despatch him. And this Beaufort fired just three shots, one of them hit the leading Messerschmitt plum centre in the nose, blew him

02:30 to smithereens. The other one just stood on his tail and disappeared into the clouds. He wasn't going to chance it. The bloke went on, wobbling off along the, no a British Hurricane it was, I suppose he made it safely back. All we did there then, we maintained our position in case that there was any counter attack, the Italians in front of us. The Germans had

03:00 retreated and taken all their transport, Italian as well as their own, and left the Italians stranded there and they surrendered en masse. And they'd come in, in long lines with a white flag and just be despatched out to the holding centres.

### **This was the first time you saw Italians?**

Yes, yes.

### **Did you actually take part in any patrolling from your position?**

Well, yes we did patrol but they were more or less

03:30 training patrols, as far as we were concerned. There was no enemy action at the end of it. We were still clearing up the area, mopping it up, you might say but there was no actual combat there then.

### **There was just surrendering at that stage.**

Yes, yes. So that was on that line. We didn't, we weren't employed in the follow up of the retreating Germans and that. The

04:00 British had, the, remainder of the British 8th Army took up the pursuit there and followed them back along the coast. We remained there in position for a few days, as I say, just in case there was a counter attack or anything and then when all seemed clear, we moved over, right onto the beach and we did do a rest position for the old blokes there, giving them

04:30 a break, completing nothing. We just went on a bit with weapon training and more or less getting acquainted with the fellows we were moving in with. We remained there for, "Oh, I don't know how long, but it wouldn't have been long. This was, it would be getting late November then we were

05:00 transported by truck back through Alexandria and through Cairo proper, right through the city of Cairo.

### **So you got sent back from Alamein?**

Alamein, yes, back to Palestine.

### **Before you get onto that strand of your story, do you remember the artillery bombardment when the offensive started?**

No, no, we weren't there, then.

### **In Alamein. Oh so you came in the latter stages of...**

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

05:30 **What did you hear?**

We, we could see the, well we could see the evidence of it. The whole area and the area we were in, had been previously occupied by the Germans and Italians and the ground was pock marked every five or six feet with a shell hole or a bomb hole or a mortar hole, whatever. The place was just a mess of scrap

metal, wrecked trucks,

06:00 tanks, guns wherever you went. You couldn't go wandering around as well because of the mine fields. There was all tracks, you had to stick to the tracks unless you were in an area that was known, or you'd go over that moving into minefields, they were still all in place. The Germans had employed a very nasty one, what they called the Jumping Jacks. All it was, was a little cylinder,

06:30 about the, like a small thermos flask with three prongs on the top which they'd plant the mine in in the sand. And all that would be visible would be the tops of the prongs and if you stood on the top of that, the whole thing would jump up about hip height and explode.

**You've seen this?**

Well I haven't seen them, I've seen them in demonstrations and that was part of our training,

07:00 to watch where you were walking, like when you were going into a. if you were going into a German position, watch where you're putting your feet in case you stepped on one of these.

**They were called Jumping Jacks?**

Well that was our nickname, I don't know what they called them. But they used to just jump straight out of there. Some blokes had their feet blown off, they didn't realise they were on them, they stood on them and they'd lose a leg.

**What else were you told about the Germans and the Italians when you arrived there, or before that?**

Oh well, we knew then that the

07:30 Italians were a walkover, like they, they weren't a worry unless you gave them the opportunity to. They had good artillery but their infantry were, they'd certainly shoot until you were close with them and then they'd put up the white flag. There was one occasion with my brother's unit, where they went through a what they call a cutting in the railway line and the Italians all surrendered. There was quite a lot of them in there and they

08:00 all went on in their advance. And the Italians, they didn't disarm them and they shot some of our blokes in the back. So you had to watch for that sort of thing. But when we got there there was no troops, they'd all left their arms behind them and they all trudged in quite happily to be prisoners of war. A lot of them used to come in, not in our particular section, but with the troops, they'd come in by truck,

08:30 truckloads of them. Officers would have their suitcases and everything packed.

**They'd drive themselves to the front?**

Yeah, there was no need to supervise them. It was just a matter of once they come in, point them to where they had to go and they'd go, so.

**Sounds like an ideal enemy to fight against.**

Oh well, it had been proven, the 6th Division, you see, when they, in the early stages of the war, they swept through up to Libya and

09:00 there wasn't that much.. They'd shoot long range artillery and that, they were good artillery men but once the infantry closed, they'd throw in the sponge and there were occasions when they...in Tobruk, Eric was telling us about, he might have told you about a couple of times they got caught out in the desert. Once they went out to raid an Italian

09:30 post in a sandstorm. The sandstorm lifted and left them like sitting ducks and they had to run for it.

**I remember him telling me, yes.**

The old blokes saying the bullets were passing him.

**Did you, so you never saw any combat really?**

No, not infantry combat, no, not there, no.

**Did you see German POWs [prisoners of war]?**

10:00 A few of them on trucks going back. They were always escorted, the Germans, because they were different uniform to the,. But that part of the war, not that I partook in it, but it was reasonably civilised. Like if you were a prisoner of war, you were a prisoner of war, properly treated. The blockhouse there at Alamein was used by both sides for treatment of wounded.

10:30 There were German doctors and our doctors, Italian doctors, all working in the same building. And that was completely out-of-bounds, like no, nothing was fired, directed in that direction at all. And they'd have an unofficial truce to pick up wounded and that sort of thing. It was, well, as far as war was concerned, was properly

- 11:00 conducted. Quite a different matter to the Pacific one. But anyway, we remained there for, I've forgotten how long, might have been three weeks or so, then we went back to Palestine. We went through Cairo. it was. Everybody was having a good time
- 11:30 there, in Cairo even then there was traffic chaos, you know, bicycles mainly, bicycles and carts and all this sort of thing. Police on duty there, all wore red fezzes and as they were directing traffic as our trucks went by, somebody would lean out and pluck a fez off their head and they, the policemen would immediately leave their traffic point,
- 12:00 chasing the truck down the road, begging for his fez back, poor fellow, I suppose they're on a few, few mills a day, you know. So obviously we'd throw him back their fez, they'd be happy then. They'd head off back to their traffic point.

**Did the Australians have a bad reputation in Cairo, I suppose they already had it from the First World War?**

Well yes, yes. Well there was always that on, around. Alexandria itself

- 12:30 was a bit of a bad place. When we went through there, they warned us there.

**What did they warn you about?**

Well there was a congregation of troops all coming and going from the front there. There was every, New Zealanders, South African, New Zealanders, British, American, Australian, Indian, Gurkhas [Nepalese troops in British service], all over from the world there and they were passing through and it was just

- 13:00 thronged with troops the whole time. And most of the cafes and that there were, what do we term, blood houses, if the Australians and New Zealanders weren't fighting the Poms, they'd be fighting one another. Whoever was available, you know, they'd wreck a café there in no time.

**Did you see a lot of these things?**

Oh I saw one wreck there, the night we were there. Just chairs and everything flying in all directions, you know.

- 13:30 **Who was fighting this one?**

Oh just good natured fighting, they'd all be mates afterwards. Just raising hell, generally. A lot of them drunk, you know, that sort of thing. But you also had to watch your step. We were warned there, the Egyptians, a lot of them were working as spies for the Germans, a lot of the population there were pro-German and if they caught a drunk or a bloke on his own in the back streets there,

- 14:00 they'd roll him for his identification paperwork and whatnot, and they'd then sell that to the Germans. It was a well established German spy cell in Cairo which used to get a lot of information on units and all that sort of thing.

**So you are saying that basically these guys were getting mugged, killed?**

They'd get mugged, some of them even had their throats cut,

- 14:30 there murdered, just the odd cases.

**So was there sort of fear of the civilian population, from the Aussies? A kind of, sort of that distance, a kind of respectful fear or....?**

There was no, there was no respect at all, none at all. In all our dealings with the Arabs and Egyptians, they were all, well we just found them an inferior race, and they... All that we came in

- 15:00 contact it was, you know, it was a contact that was not general in general life, in general terms. There were areas in Cairo that we weren't allowed to go, it was out of bounds, you know. But the upper society of the Egyptians...

**You weren't allowed to go in that sector?**

Well we weren't supposed to, but there was always a few strays. Shepherd's Hotel was the headquarters of

- 15:30 the, one of the headquarters of all the upper structures of the army there.

**High command?**

Hmm.

**When you were in Egypt, I mean this would have been the first time I suppose, you would have seen so many different armies?**

Oh yes.

**Tell us about this, you know, how did it impact on you, seeing all these different soldiers from different cultures?**

Well we didn't have that much contact with, other than our own.

16:00 Like each, each unit, each country had its own sector on that front. You intermingled more or less on the road, you exchanged a bit of banter and sling off at one another on the road. If you were going up and you met the Poms, you'd tell them you were going the wrong way, or they'd tell you that you were, you know, it was all a bit of friendly banter. But we didn't have that. A division occupied a pretty wide front then, a big area and we,

16:30 you couldn't move outside that. Each division, each nationality occupied that area and until you got back into, if you were on leave in a town, then you'd come into contact with the other troops from the other nations. We didn't have that much to do with them really. At times the New Zealanders and Australians would get together and, as I say, they'd usually finish up having a fight or something in a café.

17:00 It was all, all good mates, you know.

**What were the Maoris like?**

Oh, they were wild fellows, they were the main, main instigators of trouble for the New Zealanders. If you ran into a mob of Maoris, it was look out. They'd, I don't know if you'd heard later on at the Battalion Command, they used to do the Haka at night. As close as they could get to the

17:30 German lines and they'd perform the Haka and hope that it would scare the Germans, that they were going to do an attack, you see. They reckon it was quite effective at times.

**Lucky they didn't get artillery or machine gun fire in return.**

Ah, we went back to, or before we went back to, we were still at Alamein, I went looking for my brother Eric.

18:00 I hadn't heard anything, I didn't know whether he'd come through it alright. The 26th Brigade, his battalion the 2/23rd hadn't been in a lot of the fighting and I went looking for his unit and it was quite a job to find them. You had to stick to the tracks, mind where you went. Anyway, I eventually found them and found that he'd been wounded for the second time and evacuated. Didn't know where he was, what

18:30 hospital. Like when they were wounded they were just evacuated and went to wherever they could place them and I didn't know til just before we came home that he was okay. I didn't know, none of his units really knew where he was or whether he was alright or not.

**Was he in Tobruk at this stage, or still at El Alamein?**

Not that was at Alamein.

**He was in the offensive there?**

Yeah, yeah. He was wounded twice there.

19:00 Once in July when they stopped them, attacked and he was wounded again in the breakthrough. We went back to Palestine and didn't do much there, then we were sent on leave, we were granted leave there. My mate and I went up towards Jerusalem,

19:30 a place just north of Tel Aviv, I think it was Nathania, it's been mentioned in the news lately, it's now a beach resort but in those days it was just a little village, nothing much doing there. We had tours available to Jerusalem, various other places. We had a look around Jerusalem and weren't very impressed with it,

20:00 it was dirty and dusty. The usual throng of Arabs, you know. So we jumped on an Arab bus that said it was going to Tel Aviv one night and we finished up in Tel Aviv. We had no accommodation there, we met up fortunately with a couple of our mates who were also on leave but they were billeted in, not billeted in, they were staying in a hotel in Allenby Road in

20:30 Tel Aviv. So we moved into their room in the hotel, the hotel didn't mind so long as we paid. I think we finished up with about eight blokes in the one room there. Whoever got the bed first had the bed, the rest slept on the floor. Oh while we were on leave we just did the town over, shopping and that sort of thing. They had an Australia Club on the beachfront there and you'd go

21:00 down for meals and drinks or whatever and a bit of entertainment. That passed and we wandered round, there was only one theatre there at Tel Aviv at the time. I remember I saw How Green Was My Valley there, an old film. Bit of shopping that sort of thing, bit of whatever you wanted to eat, you know you can order whatever you want to eat at the hotel, or one of the cafes and that.

21:30 Of course at that stage the Jews and the Palestines were at one another's throats, and the Jews were, which was still under British mandate, and the Jews were, had already started to move in from Europe generally, escaping through the European countries.



**Could you see tensions?**

Tensions?

**Yes.**

Oh yes, yes.

22:00 **Tell us about this.**

The British had, well, they had a big headquarters not far from where we were. I've forgotten the building, but it was a very substantial building and they had patrols all the time going out in armoured vehicles, patrolling the whole country, like round, that was only in our little area. British patrols in jeeps and what not in vehicles and they had

22:30 a underground working, a British underground working. There was a Jewish terrorist organisation working then. I think Ben-Gurion the first Prime Minister of Israel was the leader of the underground at that stage and they were bringing in ships, boatloads of Jews who were escaping from Europe through Cyprus and those other island countries. The British were trying to stop

23:00 them from landing. They used to have patrols on the beach and try to intercept the boats coming in and all that sort of thing and in tur [?], the Jews had the underground working in the British lines, which was quite, you know, a bit of, more or less a terrorist war on a small scale, going on between the British and the Jewish populace there then.

**So there was conflict**

23:30 **between the British armed forces and some aspects of the Jewish underground?**

Under the, any British, usually army men working underground who were captured, were usually disposed of. There was, the Jews who were captured were jailed but the other way round, like the Jewish terrorist group they were more ruthless than what the...

24:00 **I think I know, you're talking about the Stern gang.**

Well I don't know what they called them but I know Ben-Gurion was the leader of that. But one favourite thing they used, this might be getting a bit political...

**That's alright, you're most welcome to say whatever you like.**

They captured one of the British working underground. They'd extract information by torture and one of their favourite

24:30 methods was to hang him up in a olive tree, with a piano eye round his testicles and hang him by that and make him talk. That was one of their methods.

**Did you see much of this?**

No, we didn't see it.

**Not so much the interrogation, but the...**

No, we didn't see the interrogations but we were, you know, talking with the British troops who were there in the occupation there

25:00 and they were, they were telling us all about just what to do and what not to do. But not that it effected us much because we were more or less secure in our own position in the camps there. If we went on leave in Tel Aviv there was no problems. All they wanted was our money and our trade.

**Did this surprise you at the time, that the Jews were....?**

25:30 Not, not really surprised us because we knew what was going on. But we didn't know to what extent really until we were told when we went back to Palestine. The same thing applied to our camp. We had to have security patrols on day and night through the camps but not because of the Jews, they didn't bother us at all, they were always with the British. Because they were,

26:00 they were then well in the process of establishing the Jewish state of Israel and this is what they were waiting for.

**It's quite an interesting story.**

Yes.

**Was your battalion involved in the occupation duties in Syria?**

No, no. After we came out of Tobruk, I wasn't there then, they were, some of them were sent to Syria and

26:30 but not in this combat, more as a rest and they were pulled back and sent up to Alamein. But after I joined we only went back to Palestine. From Palestine we came home. That was in oh January, I think. It

might have been early February we boarded, I've just forgotten the dates.

- 27:00 But before we came home we had a divisional parade, the whole 9th Division parade on the Gaza airstrip and it was one of the most inspiring parades I've ever been on. You can imagine a whole division, probably 20-odd thousand men on parade and they covered such a vast area that they couldn't give verbal commands for the rifle
- 27:30 drill, sloping arms and that sort of thing. So they had a series of vans posted along the side of the airstrip with signallers on top with flags and as the command was given on the command post where it was, all the signals were given by flags. The whole division would slope arms, order arms, present arms and you could hear the rumble of the rifles hitting the tarmac and that you know,
- 28:00 going across the desert, it was really inspiring there. As we marched on there, our unit, this is where I met up with my brother again. As we marched on, he'd already marched, he was already in position, he knew that I was over there somewhere but he didn't know where. And as we marched on, he saw me marching on and he broke ranks and ran over.
- 28:30 It was then I found out he was alright. So from there we organised to come home. Going up from, as we left Cairo, going back up to Egypt we went up through the Sinai desert which was very interesting, just shifting sand all the way with a little narrow bitumen road
- 29:00 through it and the gangs where the shifting sands was, gangs of Arabs shovelling sand all the time, to keep it clear for the convoys going through. We went up through Beersheba and back around to Gaza, very interesting part of the trip there, through that desert. Coming back we went, came down too on the canal, cross at Ismalia, I think it was, down to Suez. We were
- 29:30 in a transit camp there for a couple of days and then we boarded the convoy to come home. We boarded the Queen Mary, the old Queen Mary, 12000 of us aboard that. And there was oh, four or five major ships, there was the Aquitania, City of Bermuda, Ile de France, another one I can't think of the name of, all you know
- 30:00 30,000, 50,000, 60,000 tonners and there was 12,000 of us onboard the Queen Mary, 9th Div blokes and the convoy general pulls out and we are on the way down through the Red Sea. We pulled in at port in North Africa, I think it might have been Macassa [?], some name like that to either
- 30:30 take on fuel or water or something and the rest of the convoy went down the Red Sea and when we pulled out, we travelled at I don't know whether it was full speed or high speed to catch them up, we were out into the Gulf of Aden before we caught them and that was quite an experience. You could stand on the stern of the ship and look over the horizon and the wake of the ship just disappeared, white wake
- 31:00 travelling at high speed down the Red Sea there. We joined the convoy the, coming out into the Indian Ocean, fairly heavy escort, I've just forgotten what there was, and we went down the Maldiv Islands in the Indian Ocean - that's just a circle of atolls with an opening and we, the whole convoy pulled in
- 31:30 through and anchored in the lagoon.

**Did you get a chance to get some leave?**

No, no, it was only just a refuelling. Well we don't know what the real purpose was but probably just refuelling. It was a big British base for the Pacific fleet, refuelling basin and whatever they did there. We just pulled out again, and then headed on for Australia. I've forgotten at what stage

- 32:00 but we were well out into the Indian Ocean from there when we received one afternoon that we were going to meet units of the British Eastern Fleet about four, three, four o'clock in the afternoon. They appeared over the horizon, we could just see their masts, see their structure, as they came over the horizon then they passed just astern of us. They were heading north, we were heading across to Australia,
- 32:30 battle ships, cruisers and destroyers, ploughing along. Quite a sight to see, signal lights flashing and flags flying. I suppose they were doing a sweep up north while our convoy was coming through. As far as I know they'd been operating out of South Africa, I thin, Cape Town or somewhere out there and then we came onto, some got dropped off at
- 33:00 Fremantle, some at South Australia and we went on round to Sydney and docked in Sydney and straight off the troop ship there and onto, everything was well organised, onto troop trains. Home on leave, down to Royal Park, pick up your pay and your leave pass and home on leave.

**How long were you on leave for?**

- 33:30 Oh, I've forgotten. It might have been 14 days or 21 days or something like that. Just standard leave, you were granted so many days for so much overseas service. If that was six months you got so many days leave, I've forgotten what it was. So off we went on leave, back to the enjoyments of civvy life for a few days and back
- 34:00 down to camp again. And oh we were in camp, we had to go back to camp at Puckapunyal and Seymour

and I got a dose of dermatitis on my face there. I was in hospital for a few days there. Then we were onto troops trains up to

34:30 the Tablelands up in Queensland for jungle training.

**Before you went there, did you actually meet any Americans, you must have seen a lot of Yanks around?**

Oh yes, towns were full of the Yanks, the Guadalcanal units were on, they circulated through Melbourne too, well all Sydney, but a lot of them in Melbourne and the big main hospital was

35:00 the Melbourne, the old Melbourne Hospital. That was taken over by Americans completely and that was their base hospital during the war.

**Campbell, isn't it, that's right.**

No, down at Royal Park, there.

**Yes.**

It's still in existence there, but it's been extended. But the old Royal Melbourne was the main part of that building that's there now and that was completely American controlled, that was their base hospital.

**Did you meet a lot of them, here in Melbourne?**

Oh quite a few. We used to talk with a lot of them.

35:30 **I was told the 9th Divvy [Division] had a bit of a problem with Yanks?**

Oh well, that happened everywhere, there was always friction, you know. The words, you'd go into a café or anything like that and the blokes half rug or something and you'd have a few words and have a box on. MPs [military policemen] would arrive and break it up and away they'd go. That would always happen everywhere and anywhere.

36:00 But it was mainly around the, as you have trouble round the nightclubs and that now, round the certain places that if you wanted to congregate there well you did. It wasn't general, though, it's exaggerated in a lot of cases.

**There was a fight at Flinders Street station outside?**

Oh yes, that was a, well when something started at a public place like Flinders Street it was like the football and back in those days, a football match, if a fight started, there'd be the whole outfit nearly would be into it you see.

36:30 And that fight started on the station there somewhere and every bloke in uniform would be into it, you see, nothing much too it.

**A good excuse.**

Any excuse is better than none.

**Were you there at the brawl at Flinders Street Station?**

No, no, I wasn't there. I used to sometimes walk around and laugh at them, you know. It got a bit more serious up north, worse relations,

37:00 Cairns and Brisbane. We had the Battle of Brisbane one of those days. I wasn't involved in it. I was there but firearms were used there. The Yanks had retreated into the Lennon's Hotel, they took over the Lennon's Hotel and our blokes, one of them had a field in the street and they'd all retreated there and they appeared on the top of the steps with tommy guns to quieten it down. It was called

37:30 the Battle of Brisbane. But as I say, papers and the publicity made much more than what it really was. It was nothing more than a fist fight at the football outer, really. None of us got killed or hurt much, they were just flexing their muscles.

**I thought there was a shoot-out or something at a train station actually that took place?**

No.

**Was kept secret?**

Must have been,

38:00 never heard anything about that. Oh we rubbed shoulders with them quite a lot. When we got to New Guinea, our supply battalion was 532nd Supply, was completely American, and they bought on nearly all our supplies for our New Guinea campaign. Relations as a whole were pretty good, as I say, it was only just those that happened anywhere. Congregation of a lot of troops, something would flare up and

38:30 be on for a while then they'd all go about their business.

**Did you have a girlfriend in Australia, Melbourne?**

Not in Melbourne, I had one here. No that didn't, well we never got much opportunity. Like as far as girlfriends in Goulburn, there were so many troops round there it'd be like a swarm of ants on a rug, you know.

39:00 About a thousand.

**You wouldn't know, you wouldn't know if she'd been propositioned by other men.**

No, oh there was areas, as I say, these, some of the areas around Melbourne you wouldn't normally go. In Brisbane there was Albert Street where the official brothels were, well there'd be queues of blokes queuing up there at four o'clock in the afternoon. It'd be a

39:30 case of join the queue, you see, and all that sort of thing. And the Valley in Brisbane was just a bloodhouse, if you went out there you were really looking for trouble.

**FortitudeValley?**

Yeah.

**That was a real hardcore place?**

Oh that was, that was, as I say, a real bloodhouse. You just wouldn't go there if you didn't want to be in a stoush or anything. We walked out through there one night and that was enough, you know, drunken girls, drunken sailors, drunken soldiers,

40:00 fighting and carrying on. They had sojourns and everything, low down entertainments, dives. It was the pits.

**A lot of Yanks there?**

Oh yes, a real mixture, all, well we also had Indonesian soldiers in Australia at that stage. They escaped from, some of the army escaped from Indonesian Timor and they were here in Australia training.

40:30 We had Indonesians and Americans and....

**Dutch? Dutch Indonesian soldiers?**

Yes, yes, the coloureds, there were none of these.

**Okay, great.**

Oh, Brisbane was segregated. The American negroes weren't allowed into the city proper. They were allowed only what they called Southside now, where the big

41:00 Southside establishment is. That area of the city was an industrial area and they were confined there. If they came over the bridge into the city proper, the patrols would swoop on them and into the jeeps and straight into the, back over the bridge usually with a few whacks, they used to carry big long wooden batons and they'd lay into them with these and throw them in the backs of

41:30 the trucks and transport them back across.

**Sounds harsh. I'm going to have to stop you there unfortunately, because we're running out of time.**

## Tape 5

00:37 **Alright. I'd just like to go back a little bit now. I want to ask you a little bit about your first experience at El Alamein. Now this was a fairly brutal attack, especially when you'd just arrived. Can you tell us a little bit more about it? Was it night time when you arrived?**

Yes,

01:00 it was about nine, ten o'clock at night time by the time we got in there. Somebody must have been showing lights or something for us to get caught as we were. Because like at night time if somebody showed lights it was always subject to an artillery observation or a plane and we were all tightly bunched, just in this close area, and because of the noise and that going on the

01:30 planes were...well in a bombing raid at low level, they came in at low level. You've only got seconds to do whatever you're going to do and they come down with the noise of an express plane and they went right across the middle of us, you know. There was dirt and dust flying everywhere. We just had that split second to, as I say, to go down. We knew what was, what was coming because we

02:00 could see the planes quite clearly overhead.

**There was no other warning?**

No warning at all. That's why we got caught. They had apparently muffled motors, they used to do that, they come in with muffled motors and then as they dropped the bombs they'd open the throttles and zoom off. And the noise of the motors, I don't know how many there were, the noise of the motors and the noise of the bombs coming down and then the explosions, the

02:30 chaos, it was as I say, it was a great introduction to war.

**Where did you manage to find shelter?**

I just, as I say, flopped into the sand and I think I was trying to dig into the sand if the truth was known, but it was funny a lot of reactions. One bloke, he often laughed over it later. He went down and there was

03:00 an old oil can standing near him somewhere and he didn't have his tin hat on and he grabbed the oil can and pulled it over his head and finished up with oil all over. Those sort of things happen and in the heat of the moment. But I went to ground hard, I tell you, and covered with dirt and dust and apparently I was just in that area where shrapnel went over head.

03:30 **You travelled over quite a long journey with all these blokes. Who were some of the blokes that got caught?**

None of my particular group. I don't know, there was 75 of us and from various companies. You don't get to know much, many outside your companies. I don't really know if I knew the names now. I might recognise some of the names but

04:00 I didn't really know any of the fellows that got caught personally because our little group, we stayed together, the six or eight of us and we didn't get, we were just off-centre a little bit.

**In the morning when it came time to clean up, I mean there must have been carnage?**

Oh well, it was,

04:30 the whole battlefield was just covered with, littered with debris. As I say, blown up trucks, tanks, everything. Fortificate like dug-outs and doomers and bodies and everything, it was just there'd been no time at that stage to do any burials or anything. I'd say there were about 20 odd bodies of Germans within

05:00 a few metres of us then.

**Had you ever seen a dead body before?**

Ah, not that I can remember, no. But hadn't thought of that. But it was, ah, pretty horrific, you know the various stages of...some of them had been dead two or three days. As I said it really made you think, well

05:30 this is it, there's a war on, the tourist days are over.

**There certainly was a sharp welcome, but I guess in some ways it might be better to get initiated quickly.**

Well, it probably is. We were, as I say that was a pretty violent sort of initiation. But then

06:00 when we went to New Guinea we had a fairly lucky period in the first campaign there when we only had minor clashes there in the jungle. But that particular one was, until we moved further into New Guinea, was the worst one, sort of introduction too.

**Now did you...were you involved in burials at all?**

No, that was usually a task for a special squad of

06:30 pioneers. They come along afterwards and buried, some were buried in a hell of a hurry. One very sad sort of a landmark that was used on tracks, you had to stay on the tracks when you were moving round and to get inland from where we were, we had to go back down along a track along the beach, til we come to a certain reference point and then

07:00 branch off on the track to go inland. And when I was looking for my brother, the directions were go back down along the track until you come to the dead Jerry, the dead German in other words, and then take that track to the right and head inland, you see. I didn't know what the dead Jerry was but I knew when I got there somebody had buried him in a hurry. He'd been killed in a

07:30 shallow grave, just covered with dust, his head was sticking out one end with still his tin hat on and his legs sticking out the other end with his leather boots still on. That was the dead Jerry, he'd been buried with his head out, sticking out one end and his legs sticking out the other. That was the marker everybody said, "Go down the track to the dead Jerry, take the...". That was how it was done.

08:00 **What had been as well such a vicious way to start, what effect do you think it had on you?**

Well, in a sense it makes you realise that it's wa, and you've got to do things even though it's against your principles and things. Of course, later

08:30 on before we went to New Guinea we had jungle training and we had lectures from blokes who'd been to New Guinea, fighting the Japs over there, Kokoda Trail and their words, their lectures all emphasised the points that it was complete brutality in New Guinea. No prisoners taken on either side, you lost or you won in a fight

09:00 that was all there was to it. If you, they said, if you're going to be taken prisoner, if you can't get out, well save a bullet for yourself because, see at Milne Bay, they captured a few Australians there in the Battle of Milne Bay and they tied them to trees and used them for bayonet practice. And with that, even the Kokoda Trail, look in our battalion records, Middle East records, plenty of prisoners of war

09:30 taken. New Guinea, Borneo, not one prisoner of war. It was, as I say, dead or alive, one or the other.

**I guess seeing such a high toll first up**

10:00 **did it bring home the possibility that you yourself might be killed?**

Oh yes, well, everybody knew that except it was, you knew if you went long enough sooner or later you were going to cop something.

**Do you think that had occurred to you on the voyage over or before you joined up?**

Oh perhaps fleetingly. You, as I say

10:30 you didn't think that much until you were confronted and the reality was there, "Well this is what it is". If you're lucky, you're lucky. And if you're unlucky, well, that's it. But you used to have fellows stating how they'd, if they were going to cop it how they'd like to cop it and our corporal who was from South Australia,

11:00 when we first went to New Guinea he used to always say "If I'm going to cop it, I want it right through the knee". Give me a nice stiff leg and a homer, see. Sure enough we had a firefight with the Japs at Finschhafen and he's let out a yell and I looked up and he's holding his knee up, blood running everywhere, he's copped it right through the knee. He's crawled on through the cue line

11:30 and I met him again years later at Chadstone Shopping Centre, he had a stiff leg and walking stick, that was the finish of his war. He's copped it right through the knee, shattered his knee.

**Did he want to get the stick leg so it would be clear that he'd been in the war?**

A homer. No, not for, not because he'd been in the war but he wanted a homer. Still live and get home, you see.

**Yeah.**

He'd

12:00 been through Tobruk and Alamein and he knew all about it. He won the MM [Military Medal] at Alamein and of cause he'd had enough. He was just there under sufferance, you might say. Well he'd say, "If I get one, I want the good stiff leg".

**Now, you stayed for a few days**

12:30 **at El Alamein. Oh no sorry, you, you were there for quite a few months, weren't you?**

Oh no, a few weeks at Alamein.

**It's either days, weeks or months, one or the other.**

November through til the beginning of, first half of December, or it might have been early December when we went back to Palestine. I can't remember the exact times now.

**Alright. Well tell me a**

13:00 **bit about your living conditions there.**

Oh well it was pretty much what you'd be in the front lines. One lot of water bottle of water a day. Meals there, we did get meals which were sent up from the Company Headquarters. They were usually dug in somewhere and just in the rear close handy and they'd, all the meals were cooked, whatever it was, meat or,

13:30 sometimes you'd get meat, mainly it could be army rations heated up, you know a few vegetables and that sort of thing. And they were sent out in hot boxes, square boxes they put in hot in big dixies and they came out to the units, you lined up with your own personal dixie and then ladled in whatever it was. That was the food, was reasonable food then. Even right through the campaign they,

14:00 unless they were in a forward position and couldn't get to them, they'd get those meals brought in at night time. It was one, strictly one water bottle a day, that was the only water. Couldn't wash or anything like that.

**Can you tell me a bit about your superior officers?**

Oh they were all good blokes. The infantry officer

14:30 wouldn't last if he wasn't a good bloke. He had to be one of the boys. In an infantry situation, you couldn't have, we struck one or two that weren't so good but generally they were a man amongst the men, you know. Usually good leaders, they'd look out for you, you know, you could talk to them. They mixed in with the blokes.

15:00 There was no problems there.

**Well, your brother struck a few snags?**

Yes, well you always struck one or two like that but, oh, as I say, we had one or two that we didn't get on very well with. But in New Guinea, we struck a couple we didn't particularly like because of what they did but that always happened.

**Okay.**

15:30 **Now tell us a bit more about the time when you finally saw your brother in the Middle East. I mean, it must have been a great relief to....**

Well, we only had, we only had very brief meeting because the parade was on. He got into trouble for breaking ranks to come across from his liet [?]. Officers went crook at him, he didn't know he was doing. Of course it was alright when he told him what he was doing but we were marching on and he just jogged alongside of me until we,

16:00 you know, exchanged greetings and that and that was it. Then we disappeared to one another again. I didn't seem him again until we got home. Even though we were in the same division, you were, you know, you couldn't visit one another or anything like that. Your units were always apart and it would be like looking for a needle in a haystack to go looking for one another and by the time the day was over, you didn't have time to anyway. So,

16:30 like you were always doing something, you were never really at leisure. You were in camp or training or something to do.

**Well Eric mentioned at an early stage there was a chance that he could have claimed you.**

Yeah.

**But he didn't want to because it could get you into danger.**

Well not so much danger, but they didn't like brothers serving together because of the distraction,

17:00 one trying to look after the other. There were occasions when it happened and sometimes both of you could get killed. Like if you claim him, if one brother claimed another and they went to a unit they'd probably finish up in the same section. And if they got into a situation where that section was wiped out or something there'd be the two brothers in the one swipe so it wasn't encouraged to claim him like that. Sometimes you went into the same unit

17:30 but into a different company but I didn't, well I wouldn't have gone anyway. I was with the group that I started with and we stayed together.

**Alright, I want to ask you now about some of the times when you were on leave and you spoke a lot about the**

18:00 **fight and the carrying on in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Are you sure that you never had a drink in all that time?**

No, I can truthfully say I never had a drink. My mother was a, a very gentle lady in every respect and when I was going in, she said "Now, I hope you don't start drinking". She asked me not to start drinking and I

18:30 said "Right, no", I never had, never had. In the whole family, we weren't drinkers, Dad would have a drink. Of all the four boys, they weren't drinkers. One of my brothers would have a drink but the other three of us at that stage were completely tee-total. Only one brother smoked, the rest were non-smokers. Oh we took our

19:00 sports pretty seriously, playing football and we used to do some foot running and that sort of thing. I never bothered with drink, I just didn't like it and I never, never bothered with it. You'd always strike a group like this, even in the army, they don't all drink. Like any other situation, you'll get a group of like minds who'll sort of stick together. The group that I was with, mainly in our section was mainly country blokes,

19:30 farmers and that, of like minds. They weren't raising hell anywhere, just get on with the job and do what had to be done and that was it. We weren't into playing up, or visiting places of ill-repute or anything like that.

**Do you think that was the same of most country blokes?**

Oh no, not necessarily. But, like you hear all sorts of things about army but

20:00 the biggest percentage were well behaved. They had some of them get drunk and that but they wouldn't bother anybody. Some would have a few drinks but wouldn't bother anybody. There was always just that minority, same as any society, the minority would cause trouble. Oh, some of them used to go a bit wild when they went on leave over there but I never saw anything outlandish in Tel Aviv,

20:30 depends where they went, like, the likes of Cairo and those places perhaps more so. But Tel Aviv was always well behaved.

**Now tell me about your arrival back in Australia? Well, you came via the Queen Mary into Sydney, was there anyone there to greet you?**

No, no. Well,

21:00 we were certainly greeted, I don't know if people knew that we were coming in. The whole of Sydney Heads for miles were lined with cars and people flashing mirrors in the sunlight too, as the convoy came into the Harbour. There was still, I think, three boats, Queen Mary and a couple of the others and the warships in company, came in and there were thousands of people on the cliffs on both sides, flashing mirrors. There were no

21:30 signal or that, they knew they were coming in, you know. Sydneyites were split off, the New South Welshmen and Victorians, there was no leave or anything there, we just went straight from the troop ships onto the trains, we were waiting and down to Victoria, to Melbourne and even there, there was the country blokes who just transferred trains and took off wherever they were going, home.

22:00 **Well, when you came home what was your welcome like here?**

Oh well quite moving, you know. Mum and Dad and girlfriend Enid at the station, dances and all the necessary things, you know, things you do on leave. I've sort of forgotten now just what, but generally what you'd normally do in normal life, I suppose.

22:30 No great celebrations, there was always, in the country there was always send offs to the local blokes going and when the war was over a welcome home at the local hall. They'd give you a presentation of a pen or something and wish you well, go on out and welcome you home and that sort of thing. But you'd go home and just live a normal life for that 14 days or whatever it was.

23:00 **It must have been a bit of shock to you though, I mean you'd been putting up with pretty brutal circumstances, to come home to seemingly normal life?**

Oh well, it was nice to put the legs under the table and have some home cooked tucker and that sort of thing, you know, and sleep in a bed for a change. But it was only for the

23:30 whatever it was, 14 days or whatever leave was, I've forgotten now. And it was back to the camp only a few days. I think they had a parade through Melbourne, a welcome parade through Melbourne. Back onto the trains and straight away to Queensland. Things were pretty urgent at that stage, we all had to get up there as quick as we could.

24:00 And up to Tablelands, a bit of amphibious training, and we did that training at Trinity Beach just north of Cairns, which is now all high rise and holiday places. In those days it was just bush, Trinity Beach. Out there the Americans, 532nd Boat Battalion had been allotted to us. Board their barges and go out to sea, stay out there for hours at a time, bobbing up and down in the ocean

24:30 and then do a mock attack on the beach. You know, synchronise everything, boats coming in and getting off, all that sort of thing. Apart from jungle training in the jungle areas of the Tablelands, they had rainforest areas up there where we did our jungle training. That was all of us to it there. The food was good there,

25:00 we had proper fresh meat and vegetables and fresh milk and all that sort of thing, fruit. One thing I forgot, is at Alamein, the night time, when the trucks were going down we'd send, have a whip around of money and send down, get the truck drivers to buy fruit for us, whatever fruit was available, if they could. Well they'd bring back all sorts of things, mainly oranges.

25:30 One day they brought back a bucket of figs. There was always a lot of figs over there growing just in the desert. And we had a Scotch fellow, a corporal who'd joined the unit find out they were taking over before they followed up their retreat. And hadn't, didn't know what figs were. He'd never seen figs and he'd never seen jam,

26:00 strange see, you wouldn't credit, but he'd never seen jam. And he had a real broad Scotch accent and he'd say "What's that?", say "That's jam, Scotty", every Scot was Scotty. "What's that?". "Jam". "What's



it like?". "Try some, help yourself", so he'd "Oh, that's lovely, that's lovely" he'd say, "Give it to me all". And he'd, when the figs came up one night, "What's that?". "They're figs". "What

26:30 do you do with them?". "Eat them, help yourself, try them out". And he sampled one fig and "Oh that's lovely", he said. And "Have as many as you want, you see". We knew what the result of having lots of figs over there. Scotty hopped in and had half a bucket of figs. He was running for about three or four days.

**Yeah well, I suppose, if he was wearing a kilt,**

27:00 **it makes it easier.**

Probably, but he wasn't into kilts.

**You mentioned before regarding your jungle training in Queensland, you mentioned that you had some veterans of the New Guinea campaign. Can you tell me some of the other things that they told you about? Did they tell you about Japanese tactics at all?**

Oh no,

27:30 not generally. They, well they indicated, told us, they indicated to us that they were great ones for frontal assault. Like if you, when the Japanese attacked they'd always stupidly attack at your strongest point. If you had machine guns set up and they knew they were there they would attack into the machine guns. The idea was the old bonsai business, knock out the machine guns and you'd won the fight, sort of thing.

28:00 That had worked previously on the, on you know, some of the early stages when the troops were well trained and that sort of thing. And not to take prisoners. Never trust them. Their fighting qualities, they were good in defence but in attack to a point, in a massed attack but if you can knock their officers out, they weren't much good,

28:30 which was a fact. We were told those sorts of things that was about all. Something about their arms, what arms they'd use. The stages of their weapons, like machine guns, woodpeckers which are heavy machine guns and things like that. Just general knowledge on what we were going to find.

29:00 The training was, the beach assault there as I say, on the barges, these small landing barges with the drop front, you'd have a platoon on board just the one come in and doing these mock landings on the beach and sometimes you'd jump off and you'd be lucky, they'd be able to get right up on the sand. And

29:30 other times they'd be in about four or five feet of water and you'd jump off up to your neck and you'd have to wade ashore. My mate on the machine gun, on the Bren gun, was a little short fellow and one day we were coming in, we breached on a sandbar. The front went down and nobody looked, we all jumped out, you see and he went completely out of sight into the gutter.

30:00 He was holding the machine gun up over his, he was carrying at that stage, he was holding it up over his head and he only had about three or four feet to walk out, the Bren was holding him down, it weighed 26 pounds, I think, a Bren. It was holding him on the bottom, he was able to walk out.

**That's one way of doing it.**

Yes.

**So from, from Queensland, you went up to**

30:30 **New Guinea?**

Yes.

**What was the ship you went on?**

Ah, Cairns, we loaded at Cairns on the Menora, which had been converted to a troop carrier. We went up on the Menora to Milne Bay. We landed at Milne Bay, I think the campaign at Milne Bay was over at that stage and we went

31:00 on shore there, and oh we might have been there two or three days, I've forgotten, just a short period. And then we landed on, we loaded back onto LCIs, which are Landing Craft Infantry. They can take a company, they're the bigger ones with the ramps down each side, still shallow draft and we went up to Buna and that's further up the coast. That campaign had been fought and won,

31:30 or was still, Salamaua still in operation, still fighting there just up the coast from it and we landed there to prepare for the assault on Lae. We went ashore there, and oh, our particular section was sent up along the coast, a mile or so as a picket in case there were stray Japs wandering around, in case they sent a party down from Salamaua to cause

32:00 havoc and we were up there for a few days. Then we went back down to the main battalion area and we were cleaning arms and taking in ammunition and graze and all that sort of thing and just generally preparing. We were still in khaki at that time from the Middle East, that's how well prepared they were.

So to solve that problem they

32:30 brought in a few 44 gallon drums, empty drums set fires underneath them and they made some green dye. So strip off and throw all your clothes in these barrels of green dye and they came out not very fast, and for a few days we were walking around, we were green men from Mars, you know. The dye came out on our skin, especially when it rained the green would drain down your leg. But

33:00 they were green anyway, they weren't a very good green, but they were green.

**I suppose most people up there were yellow from the Atebrin, anyway.**

Well we weren't at that stage, because, oh we'd started a maintenance course, but it was later on that you, like taking it every day and they called for volunteers one day. We were there to move trucks, there was a great

33:30 line of GMCs [General Motors Corporation], American GMCs, they'd come in, they were six wheelers, the big GMCs. The transport drivers were all flat out transporting troops as they were coming in off the beaches and they wanted drivers to shift these trucks up to the transport lines while the other trucks were out. They came round, anybody who could drive trucks. Well we could all drive trucks, some of us had never seen a truck before. Seen one, but we'd never been in one so right we all go down and jump into these GMCs. Well you

34:00 should have seen the commotion driving these GMC trucks out. Anyway we shift them over to the transport lines and park them. But Reg Franklin, the bloke I was telling you about, the corporal, Reg said. There was an open air picture theatre out near Popondetta Airfield at this stage, quite a few miles inland. "Are we going to the pictures tonight?". "Oh yes, how are we going to get there?" He said "we'll knock off one of these trucks, and we'll,

34:30 we'll take it out, you see". So he didn't deliver his truck to the line, to the transport line, he bought it back to our lines you see where we were camped, parked it out in the scrub. That night we set off for the pictures at Popondetta and every bloke that jerked a thumb on the road, he'd stop and pick him up. By the time we got there, it looked like a truck from, pardon the reference to India, you know when they're all over. He could just see through the windscreen.

35:00 But we were at the pictures and drove back again. Same thing, everybody that wanted a ride, got a ride on this GMC. They were hanging all over it like flies and so what to do when we got back, we dumped it out in the jungle and left it there. I don't know if it was ever found.

35:30 **Now, this is before, this is still at Buna, is that right?**

Yes, before we went up to do the landing.

**Okay.**

From there we landed, we loaded onto the, when the time came we went into battle condition arms and all that sort of thing and we loaded onto the LCIs. The 26th Brigade, my

36:00 brothers' brigade, were to do the actual initial assault and we were going in on the second wave. We went up, they did the landing at daylight, I think it was first light they went in and did the landing and there was no actual opposition to the beach landing, but as soon as it got light they got caught with a bomber raid.

36:30 And we went in, two or three of the LCI's had been hit in the bombing raid and were alight, quite a few of them had been killed on the 26th, and the 23rd Brigade colonel had been killed in that, their boss, like the leader of their company, the battalion rather, had been killed in the bombing, quite a few others. And they were being, we pulled in alongside of them.

37:00 Oh, there had been air activity o, over us on the way up. The Americans were in real strength there with fighter patrols, the old twin fuselage Lightnings, they used them almost exclusively at that stage. But nothing got through to our convoy and we went in and landed on the beach and that was the most

37:30 orderly and quickest disembarkation I think we ever performed. There was still a dogfight going on overhead, the Lightnings and Zeros up, way up, little silver specks, you know. Machine guns tearing at one another and we went off that in beautiful order, took to the jungle.

38:00 A couple of Zeros came down and got through and straffed the general area but didn't do any damage. They were just shooting up. They couldn't, once you got into the jungle, they couldn't see anything but they did a couple of straffing runs along over the area and the Lightnings were at them. They disappeared and that was our landing at Lae. Our designation

38:30 was to drive along the coast, 26th Brigade was to go inland and there was only a narrow coastal plain from the highlands down to the beach, only a few miles wide in places and they went inland and we went, did the coast drive back towards Lae. We were 15 miles beyond Lae, east of Lae, when we landed and we had to drive back that distance into the

39:00 Lae township itself where the air strip was situated. The 7th simultaneously, 7th Division had landed in

Market Valley and they were driving down from the north onto Lae from down in the valley, a simultaneous two pronged attack on Lae. We had it pretty lucky there. We had a couple of minor skirmishes

39:30 there. Oh C Company had the first initial contact. They struck a party of Japs dug in and they had to go to ground. They came under fire and they couldn't get out because of the machine gun fire, and they spent the night on the ground just in front of the Jap position. But we formed up in the morning to go in and do it over and the Japs had cleared out.

40:00 These were really only rear guards, fighting rear guard actions to stop their advance. Our next contact was, we went into the village and there were only two Japs there on a machine gun and the machine gun jammed of all things when they went to fire and somebody knocked them over.

**Well I'll get you to pause there, we're at the end of the tape.**

## Tape 6

00:33 **Ken, before we go onto to or get into more depth about Lae, I'd like to ask you a few more questions about New Guinea, before Lae, Milne Bay and Buna. When you went to Milne Bay what exactly was the situation there by that stage?**

The Japs had attempted a landing there, they were on their way to Port Moresby and they had been defeated there

01:00 and when we were there they had established a fighter airstrip, the Kittyhawks were operating off the air strip there. Still plenty of evidence of the fight that had taken place there. We actually landed, pulled in beside a sunken ship there that the Japs had sunk with naval fire, and we walked over the hull of that onto the

01:30 pier. Apart from that there was of course plenty of our troops there as well but we just moved in and out into a coconut plantation.

**There were no stragglers?**

Not at that stage, no. That stage was well over at Milne Bay, that was one of their earlier efforts. There was still plenty of evidence, as I say, of a couple of their

02:00 tin-can tanks had been knocked out there and things like that. We didn't see much actually. As I say, we moved straight out into a coconut plantation and then back onto the boat.

**Did you see any, so you were actually were close to the burnt out tanks that were there still?**

Not there, no. Did up at Buna, some of the tanks had been knocked out there but...

**What were they like, those tanks?**

Oh well they were American,

02:30 it was a Grant, Grant tanks mainly that was used up there, not a heavy tank anyway. Easily enough knocked out. The turret of the tank that is in the Australian War Memorial now in Canberra, was one that was taken off, the tank where we landed at was knocked out, just right where we landed at Buna and we had a look at that there. It had been hit by

03:00 AP [armour-piercing ammunition] and holed and knocked out- jst a shell at that stage when we were there.

**Did it look a formidable tank?**

Not as regards to tanks now. As I say, it looked like a tin can.

**The Japanese were known to have pretty inferior tanks.**

Yes, especially up there. You couldn't use a heavy tank anyway.

**You couldn't at all?**

Well, we used

03:30 Matildas, which was a 25 tonne tank in Finschhafen and that was about the limit because of the tracks. The weight of heavy tanks, you just couldn't have used them.

**You could only use them on the beach area?**

Just in the beach area but we used them fairly extensively at Finschhafen on the tracks there. There was a regional track going up Sattelberg and a cheap track going

04:00 up the coast where we went up the coast and we used a tank. Tanks were used up on Sattelberg, 26th brigade used the tanks up there and we used them up the coast and in towards the back of Bonga later on when we were driving in there but they were more like, looked more like a tank. They only had two pounds of guns on them, machine gun pickers, but they looked more like a tank and they could take a

04:30 bit of hammering.

**Now at this stage of your career in the military, you still hadn't seen much action, had you?**

No, no.

**Well you practically hadn't seen any combat action at all?**

Not, not...

**As far as infantry fighting?**

...real close fight, not real close fighting, no. And we went on through that Lake Embone [?] being very lucky. We had from the time where we landed, we, as I say, we had brush

05:00 in the first village we went to. We were moving as a company at that stage which was three platoons and whichever platoon was forward at the time made initial contact. We weren't in the leading platoon and they knocked off these two chaps that we left there. We were being harassed all the way down the coast by a four inch nail gun which was placed on the end of the airstrip

05:30 down at Lae and it was shelling the area individually, haphazardly right down. Somebody lit a fire and a bit of smoke went up, they'd throw in a few shells. We advanced then right down to, oh we had a couple of initial skirmishes, other companies with us and we arrived at the Durack River,

06:00 which was in raging flood. It was the last major river before Lae and the Japs were dug in on the far side of the river. But we couldn't get across. We were held up for about three days at this river. You had to see it to believe it. This river in the upper areas where the 26th brigade was, there was only just a narrow mountain

06:30 stream, it was just a sheer torrent down where we first struck it. There were boulders as big as those chairs, being rolled down the stream, normally just a little mountain stream and it was impossible, almost impossible to cross.

**What was the width of the actual river?**

Oh, at that stage?

**Yes.**

Up inland a little bit coming down off the hills up where we first struck it it was oh, about, oh, thirty metres wide, I suppose

07:00 but just a raging torrent. I think they estimated the current was 20 something miles per hour. Some of our strongest swimmers tried to cross it and they just hurled them out on the bank, the same bank.

**Thirty metres is fairly wide.**

Yes but normally it would only be about 15 or 20 metres wide, this was in raging flood. It was impossible for us to cross it there. The 22nd Brigade felled a big

07:30 mountain tree there which spanned the river but when it hit the river it just flung it out on the same bank. You couldn't get anything across and our sister battalion, 2/28th were down at the mouth where it broke into, sort of a little delta but it was still two main raging channels going through this delta. But they managed to get a line across from one, like there'd

08:00 be a delta and then a little bit of scrappy island and then another stream. They managed to get a line across there and in going across, 13 were swept out to sea and drowned from the 2/28th blokes.

**Thirteen chaps were swept out to sea and drowned?**

Yes. Some of them were swept out onto the sand bar, swirled out onto the sandbar and were marooned there. until

08:30 they were rescued but 13 of them drowned. But they got a line across and then a rope and they, the engineers brought up a pontoon and they hitched this, well they got enough infantry across on the rope to establish a bridgehead on the other side. They spent the night under the lee of the banks. The Japs were up top and they were underneath but they got enough across in the morning

09:00 to force their way out, make a little bit of a bridgehead and then everybody crossed at that point. Where we were, you know, loaded into the pontoon and crossed over they had one on each of the main tributaries, had it fastened to the rope that they'd cabled and got across. And then get out and get into the other one, over the next one, get across there and we got the whole brigade across,

09:30 the 28th, us and the 32nd battalions across there, then we started the last push into Lae. By the time we

got through the 2/28th had cleared out the Jap defences on the far bank and we'd moved out into a, I've forgotten the name of the little village, we were assailed by a group of Japs,

10:00 just still rear guard defences and I think C company were forward then and they cleared them out. And we moved into another village the Japs had just vacated then we had to spend the night there. We got in just on dark and this gun had the range of that very nicely and plastered that nearly all night.

10:30 Well we got shelled and everything, we got into the Jap slit trenches that they'd left, but oh, they were in a filthy condition. The Japs were so frightened of our artillery that they used to do their, their, what they had to do within two or three feet of their slit trenches.

**Oh, outside the slit trench?**

Yes, so as they could dive back in and you had to watch where you put your feet. Spent the night there, a few of our blokes got hit that night and...

**Can I ask you just one question**

11:00 **before you do proceed. When you were separated by the river, when the torrent was on, I presume you could see each other fairly well?**

No, you couldn't see each other. As I say this little delta, I suppose it was quarter of a mile wide where it got down to the flat country. There was about, I suppose, a mile of flat country before it started to rise. Initially we were up on some of the rises inland where we first struck the river

11:30 but when we came down to the flat, it had spread out. We couldn't see what was over the other side. We were out of sight and out of fire range of the Jap defenders there. One of our platoon sergeants, a fellow from South Australia, nice old bloke too, he and I were standing under a big tree watching. There was a stray Jap they'd found in a patch of scrub on the river bank and we put the patriot infantry,

12:00 always had a few patriot infantry fellows, that was the natives working up there with us as scouts.

**POB, isn't it?**

Yes, and we put them on to dig this bloke out and they were having the time of their lives. They were chasing him around through this patch of scrub, they were more frightened of him than he was of them, I think because they spent about a quarter of an hour chasing him before they got him. And a shell hit the top of the tree and old Poppa

12:30 Daddo was standing beside me, he got a big lump of shrapnel in the shoulder and came down. Never saw him again, he was evacuated and never, he didn't come back to the battalion. He was getting on in years, he'd be long dead now. But anyway we got across there and the second night we spent in this village. Left that first thing in the morning, glad to get out of it, and we came to the last small river

13:00 right on the outskirts of Lae. I can't remember the name but I know it started with 'B', but it was, it wasn't flooded, it was about 15 or 20 metres wide, water about 18 inches deep or so and we had patrols forward and there was plenty of evidence of fresh defensive positions on the far side of the river had been dug. And the patrols came back and said it was held fairly strongly by

13:30 the Japs, you see. So right, this is our last obstacle, we're going to do the assault across this river and they called in the artillery, 25 pounders, to lay down and barrage, a couple of, I think they were Flying Fortresses did a bombing run over it and bombed it. Our old OC [Officer Commanding], Flash Gordon we called him, Captain Gordon,

14:00 he said "Right, we'll do a bayonet charge across this, fix bayonets". And we all fixed bayonets and waited for the whistle and when the whistle went we launched into our famous bayonet charge across this river. I reckon we went across in three jumps, you know. Blokes were screaming blue murder and yelling at each other. The stones were all water washed and slippery, you know, and there were blokes going down in the middle and you got your real game on.

14:30 Anyway, we raced up into the Jap defences, very elaborate big fire bays had been dug and the Japs had pulled out after the artillery barrage and that was the last obstacle before. They were only delaying units, to delay us, while the main bodies escaped back over the ridges going up towards Seap and into the

15:00 northern part of New Guinea. And most of the garrison there got out, we only got dribs and drabs there, I don't know, a few hundred killed there at the most.

**So the battle for Lae was really...there wasn't really a lot of action?**

It was a walkover as far as we were concerned. And the 7th Div [Division] had a little bit of action coming down from the other side. We went in and when we found the last defences abandoned we just threw all caution to the wind and we

15:30 kept going on the run into Lae township itself on the sea end of the airstrip. One silly Jap, probably a wounded one left behind, had a machine gun in the manlunaman [?] which is just on the edge of the airstrip. He opened fire but somebody knocked him out fairly smartly and that was it. Just as we got

there, we saw the 7th Div blokes coming down along the other side of the airstrip and we captured the gun that had been annoying us

16:00 for ages, like it was deserted as well. They deserted it. It was just standing there, forlornly, pointing at the sky.

**Were you a bit surprised as, I mean among the soldiers and yourself, were you surprised that there wasn't much resistance?**

Oh well, we were pleasantly surprised. Reading history afterwards it was inevitable, like the Jap, their main striking force had been, well pretty well depleted on the Kokoda

16:30 Trail and Buna and Gona and the Salamaua was still in operation. We cut that off but it was still there below us. See we cut off the garrisons there but they had to be eliminated later. They were still fighting there weeks after we took Lae but up til that day, as I say, it was a walkover. We had a few killed there, I've just forgotten how many, a few were wounded but then almost immediately

17:00 I think we stayed only one night on the airstrip at Lae. Next morning before we moved out the American construction unit, all negros, had arrived to get the airstrip back into operational,

**At Lae?**

At Lae. It was just littered with knock down Jap planes, debris, bomb craters. We

17:30 went back up the coast, I think it took us two nights to get back up to where we, to the Burep River which they'd made into a big supply area for us as we went down. And we had one night there and they loaded us on the LSTs, that's the landing ship tanks there and it was immediate go for Finschhafen then. We went back down to Buna on those then we loaded onto

18:00 old American Destroyers, '14-'18 vintage that had been converted to assault destroyers. Went on board there one night and went up to Finschhafen as a support battalion. Our intelligence, American intelligence, was completely wrong there. They said that Finschhafen was likely held and they sent the 20th brigade,

18:30 which had been rested at Lae, plus our battalion and support battalion up to do the landing at Finschhafen. Well the 20th brigade did the actual landing and we came in the second wave again. We went up in these destroyers, that was an experience. They had curved steel decks, we only had our army boots on with the hobnails in it and you couldn't walk around. We had to crawl around if we moved around on the deck at night.

19:00 It was travelling at 20 odd knots and zig zagging and keeling over. If we went up on deck, we had to crawl around there. The Yanks were plying us with fresh apples and whatever we wanted all the way up.

**Don't tell me you got ice creams as well.**

Oh no, no, no. We didn't get ice creams there. I asked a bloke, I'd lost my toothbrush at Lae, some of my gear there, and I asked one of the fellows to go down to the canteen and get me a toothbrush. He went down to the canteen which was shut,

19:30 so he came back with his own tube of toothpaste which he gave to me. I stuck with that right throughout the campaign up there. Well then we went up and we landed in the second wave there, the 20th Brigade did the initial landing and they'd moved off and we had a lot of beach defence at that stage. And we were in the beachhead which wasn't very wide, again a narrow coastal plain and every morning at about

20:00 seven o'clock, the Jap bombers came over from Lae. Always in sevens for some reason, seven, 14 or 21 would come over, and they'd plaster the beach head. Some of them would circle out over the bay and come back and strafe it as they went home and our fighters, which were then stationed down at Popondetta, down at Buna, couldn't get off the strip there because the morning mists and that, they couldn't get up in time to intercept

20:30 these early in the morning. This went on for, oh several days. We moved up onto North Hill as part of the beach defence onto a hill that overlooked the beach head and we were sitting up there, and first thing at seven o'clock, sure enough, one morning, the bombers appeared down the valley and we were looking almost straight at them from the top of the hill. And they startled to waggle their wings and dive and we wondered why.

21:00 We looked up and there was a string of Kittyhawks coming and the overnight they'd gone up to Finschhafen and landed at the strip operational, cause they got off early and they caught these bombers and they shot them all down, every one of them, into the bay. Not a Jap parachuted, they all went down, there wasn't a parachute. That was the end of their low level bombing

21:30 on the beach-head. They used to come in at about 14,000 feet and they used to spray their bombs around everywhere.

**Were there many casualties?**

Oh, a few, but they didn't do a great deal of damage. They were falling into, bombs were into sand and coconut palms and everybody was well dug in by that stage.

**They were bombing Lae at this stage, was it?**

No, no they were bombing the beachhead, that was Finschhafen, the Japs were bombing, coming over from Rabaul, big air,

22:00 big Japanese air...

**Oh I see, right.**

...big airfield, Japanese airfield over there and they were coming over from there. As I say, the shooting down of these, I think it was seven if I remember rightly.

**Now the actual attack by the infantry on Finschhafen, what was it, can you tell us about it?**

Well the 20th Brigade that was defending the beach head but only lightly. Then the 20th Brigade were then allotted the job of going down the beach, back

22:30 Hells' Back and Finschhafen itself which was nothing really, it was only a harbour. They were allotted that task of driving back along the beach. We were given the job of going up after everything was established on the beach head. We were allotted the job, the 2/43rd Battalion, I think they brought in a pioneer battalion to take over the beach head defence and works.

23:00 We went up on the track up to the top of Sattelberg which was the dominating and the main defence feature of that area and we were given the job of going up and seeing if we could take this Sattelberg. We got half way up, we were on the right flank, it was only on tracks, the main track just wound up a razorback, just a bit of an old jeep track,

23:30 we were on the right flank weaving our way up through villages and tracks and our A company was forward and the Japs strung the track on them. They cut A company off and C company moved up beside us and I've forgotten the timetable but A company were well dug in on the track and there was, in between the two Jap forces, and they couldn't get out.

24:00 So it was decided that we'd attack up the track to see if we could dig them out, you see. C company got the job of the main assault straight up the track, we got the job of covering fire from the right flank. We might as well have been home in bed for all the effective covering fire, it was just a complete jungle, wild ginger and that, you couldn't see a thing and the Japs were on a little narrow

24:30 razorback with nearly vertical sides. C company attacked and they got knocked back in two attacks and then they called us in and we were all ready to do a third attack up this razorback. And our Colonel came up and he was supervising, we were going to do a bayonet charge up this,

25:00 see if we could knock our way through to A company and old Brigadier Porter, who we know he was up there, and he was going to join the brigade as brigadier, came up. And they were sitting there beside me, in this, well nearly down in a little depression and their old OC was a bit of a, one of the blokes who wasn't very popular, blood and guts, you know, win at any cost. He was going to have this

25:30 bayonet charge all ready to go and old Porter came up and the other bloke was saying to him, "just give me another, I can get it this time, you see". And Porter looked at the situation and shook his head and said "no, we'll pull back". So we pulled back and back in on the rims and then there was a stalemate. A company was still there but they were

26:00 doing all right. They dropped some ammo supplies to them from the biscuit bombers. And we were, Ren Franklin was the corporal of our section, and myself. Papuan Infantry Battalion, they had white officers, NCOs [non commissioned officers], sergeants and two native PIB blokes, five of us.

26:30 We got the job of doing a patrol to see if we could get up to A company on the right flank and we set off on this patrol and it was really oh, shocking going through this thing. It was getting on in the afternoon and the last bit up to the top of the razorback was nearly a vertical climb and we were climbing up and the sergeant from the PIB

27:00 left the natives at the bottom because they were no good if you got into a fight. The sergeant brushed a wasps' nest and they used to build leaf nests like a football and they told you if you knocked one of them, and he didn't see it and he brushed it and the whole thing fell down. He got about a hundred wasps down his shirt and they all bit him at once. Well he didn't climb down the cliff, he fell down

27:30 to the bottom. Made a hell of a row of course. Just as well he did because when we did, we were only about 15 feet to the top, the Japs were climbing right up into where the Japs were, you see, up top. So we got out of there, they couldn't see us. Of course, we got out of there in a hell of a hurry. That was alright situation. The next day we went on the left flank - the same three, trying to get up to them. We knew about where they were from the previous day, you see, so we

28:00 got in right underneath them but the only way up was up a creek bed. We again left the natives at the entrance to this and we started to go up this creek bed. And we got half way up and we suddenly

became aware there were Japs up on the bank of the creek just up above us. And they knew that there was something doing, they probably heard something. They stayed and were working the bolts of their rifles or something,

- 28:30 and we just stood still and they were calling out to one another. We weren't going to tackle them, whatever it was there, just the three of us. So we backed out slowly and got away. We couldn't get in there. Anyway, the next day, I think it was the next day, they ordered the A company to see if they could break out down the side, come over the side and down on the left side that we'd been in,
- 29:00 right underneath them and we went out and waited and they came over off the ridge down through us and we got them out. They had their wounded there, they had a few killed and a few wounded. The only time that we had one wounded in the battalion, or still alive, was wounded by Jap officers' sword. He got in some hand to hand fighting at one stage and the bloke in the gun pit,
- 29:30 or two blokes in the gun pit, put up their arms to protect their heads when he spoke to them and he cut their, both arms off here. They were just, just, hanging, you know, right through to the bone. But they were alright, they were still walking when we got them out. Well they decided then that Sattelberg was impossible for our strength at that time. We had to pull back. We waited then for the 26th
- 30:00 Brigade and the rest of our brigade to come up from Finschhafen. And we just had to wait, go into defensive positions and wait for them to come up before we tackled Sattelberg again. And that was the stage when the Japs decided to put in an all out counter attack to see if he could kick us out and retake the beach head, you see. In the meantime we'd moved back down
- 30:30 into the beach head, we got caught there in one of his high level bombing raids. Plum centre again and coconut trees all over the top of us and the only cover we had was previous bomb holes we jumped into, and one of the old hands, he reckoned he could tell us whether we were going to get hit or not, you see. We were lying on our backs, watching these bombers come in and he says "Oh we're right now, they're over". And the next minute, down they'd come right across us. His judgement wasn't too good.
- 31:00 And luckily we didn't get a scratch. We had coconut trees and coconuts all over us, and dust and dirt but nobody was hit. We then went up the coast, oh about five miles up the coastal track and the idea was to straddle a track up there to stop reinforcements to get in. They used to bring reinforcements down the coast by barge at night and then go in the back up to Sattelberg, you see,
- 31:30 and our job was to stop them from going up. Well we just dig in there and the same three blokes and the couple of PIB, we did some patrols out to see if we could see what the Japs were doing and we found a good observation point where we could look straight across to Sattelberg and really enjoyed the artillery. We were, you know, putting our strikes on artillery all the time practically.
- 32:00 Watched that for a while, then we, I think it was the next day, we went back again, trying to find out what we could about the positions and we spotted some Japs coming down the track. So we had an ambush position set up at the exchange as we, you know, as it had been called. So we reckoned we'd lead this mob of Japs into an ambush. We showed ourselves and immediately they took after us down the track, you see, and we took to our scravers
- 32:30 and kept out of range of them. They kept coming for a while then there was a point where we had to go over hills and couldn't see them. We got back and set up the ambush but they didn't keep coming. They turned off. We found out the next day that there was a hospital position sort of in the jungle to the west of us. We didn't know it was there at the time and they'd turned off and gone into that. So, didn't do any good there. But two or three nights
- 33:00 later when they launched their big attack, we'd all settled down about ten o'clock at night, got urgent void to get back to the beach head as fast as we could. This was starting off at 10 o'clock at night. Well we grabbed our gear and took off back down, we had about five mile to go back down on this track, mud and slush. We got back just after daybreak to the main battalion headquarters
- 33:30 and the attacks were on the way then. They'd already started but they hadn't reached just that point but things were pretty desperate further round there. The big main major medical resting station was only hundreds of yards or so from the beach. We all dug in, tented where the casualties were all going, the sick and wounded and what not and there was no defence in front of them.
- 34:00 There was a Beaufort gun in the kunai [grass] but they were infantry defence and they wanted us to go and plug this hole. It was unguarded. We were down to about oh, 16 men I think then because of sickness and what not and we tried to spread along this gap. Couldn't cover the whole area but we covered as far down as we could and we decided to keep the Beaufort gun in sight.
- 34:30 We were so exhausted we all fell down and went to sleep, virtually. Didn't dig in or anything, you see. They said "It'll only be temporary, there'll be another unit coming in to take over". I think it was about 11 o'clock in the morning, one of our blokes went out to relieve himself, just out in front of us and he was sitting down there and there's about a whole company of Japs, about 120 of them, coming in,
- 35:00 all camouflaged with grass and leaves. They used to do that, camouflage very well with their helmets and all over, they looked like walking sheaths of hay, you know. He didn't take his rifle with him and he threw a grenade into them, jumped over the back of a creek and he was able to get back into the line.



That woke us all up of course and it was a matter of seconds and it was on. They just kept coming, straight in and they hit the line, our line.

- 35:30 We were the last in line, six of our blokes were in there, normally a section of ten but there was only six of us there at the time. We were the end of the line and they came along, the line was straight and then on an angle and we were on the angle at the end of the line and when they hit the main line, they spread out down as they come. The less firepower coming in as they came down and they
- 36:00 set up a woodpecker up to our right, oh about 40 or 50 yards up to the heavy machine gun and they opened up. Firstly they opened up on the Beaufort gun and they shot all the truck there to pieces with glasses flying in all directions. The crew were jumping round in a queue, taking cover. And then they turned and as they came down in front of us, they turned and came straight in at us, trying to break through to the beach, which was...well
- 36:30 we were right in front of the MDS. If they'd broken through, they'd be in amongst the wounded, unarmed. They'd have created havoc and they turned the woodpecker into our area. They could tell by the fire, you couldn't see much really, they didn't know just where we were but they could tell by the fire, they turned the woodpecker in, they worked the whole area over and there was Kunai and bits of twigs and leaves flying everywhere. Little bloke from
- 37:00 Box Hill, Broken Hill, was next to me. He was killed instantly. Red Franklin, the bloke I mentioned, wanted the one in the knee, he was next in the line, he got wounded. There was two more, one of them got wounded. That left two of us like shags on a rock. My mate was on the Bren [light machine gun] at that time and
- 37:30 he got, he couldn't get because of the angle, he couldn't get it working for a while. I don't know why but I had loaded ten bullets into the rifle, my rifle and normally two Bren gunners worked together, one to load and one to use it, but we'd spread out to cover the ground. And he was down a few yards from me and he was on his own. The Japs, I could see them
- 38:00 in this scrub, it was like shooting rabbits or shooting at rabbits. I fired the ten rounds and I don't know whether I was hitting or not, but they were going to ground. Like when I fired, I didn't know whether I'd got them or not and as they came down, he was able then to get the Bren gun working and put them to ground properly. They were only about 10, 15 yards away and then they shifted the
- 38:30 woodpecker, the heavy machine gun down. They were in a sort of depression just in front of us and they set it up, might have been 20 yards in front of us and they really turned it on to us. I think they were mistaken where we were. We were on the same edge of the kunai as they were, it was only about 30 yards back to the other edge of it and the MDS was at the jungle in the back of that and they were shooting mainly over our heads
- 39:00 when they brought the gun down at the jungle edge, they were working that over. And the bullets, we found out later, they were going through the MDS tents. Were all dug into the ground, up to the eaves with only the top part of the tent exposed and all the stretcher cases and the signal men were down below ground level. And the bullets were seeping through the tops of the tents. And anyway,
- 39:30 what to do? I stood up and tried to see what was going on and somebody opened the LM machine gun, light machine gun, gave it a burst, and it sprayed leaves and all that around me so I decided that the ground was the place to be. And I got down again and I pulled out a grenade, and I got a pretty good throw and lunged up from the ground position and threw it over this scrub to where the machine gun was.
- 40:00 I don't know whether I really knocked it out but it was a good, nice, metallic clang and bang and we didn't hear it afterwards so I think I must have scored nearly a direct hit on it. But they kept trying to come in on us and by that time the rest of our company had worked down behind us, the pressure, they'd come off them up there and they were trying to break through down on our end.
- 40:30 **So it was just basically your platoon holding off a company?**

Well it was 16 originally, but then when they really put in the attack, there was only two of us left there. Two other blokes, one of them wounded and a bloke who wasn't wounded up on the right hand side. They were cut off because of angle, and they had to, they just lay, they were going in the can I think. They were out of commission. They were out of it.

**We'll have to stop unfortunately because we're running out of tape again.**

Right.

## Tape 7

- 00:32 Anyway, some of the others, about six of them I think, came down behind us, the pressure had been relieved up where they were and they came down behind us on the back edge of the Kunai [grass] in

front of the MDS. And under their cover they were shooting over the top of us and keeping the Japs down and we couldn't get up and outwards. We wriggled out on the ground

- 01:00 and got back to them then we formed a bit of a line there and about that time, a section from B company, I think it was...coincidentally a fellow from Numurkah here was in that section too, he's dead now...they came in our left down where the Beaufort gun was and sealed that off but they kept trying to persist in breaking through where we were. And because we had a marine gun and, I think
- 01:30 we had two marine guns actually, one a little bit up to our front could fire across our front and every time they tried to rush us across the Kunai, the two machine guns and the rifle that we had stopped them. And quite suddenly the intensity of it lapsed. We didn't know why at the time but it turned out their officers
- 02:00 behind them had recessed in this depression where they came along, had gathered to have a conference. I think there was five of them and our two inch mortar man set himself up behind the bulldozer that had been knocked out just behind where we were. Every time he'd opened up before, the woodpecker had had a go at him, tried to knock him out but he got behind this
- 02:30 knocked out bulldozer and he got his two inch mortar going properly. And one of the two inch mortar shells came down at this group of officers having their conference, hit one of them on the head, skimmed off his tin helmet, exploded the head off it, the base of it was still embedded in his dixie, rice dixie he had on his hip, exploded there. Killed the other four.
- 03:00 He was the only one still alive. The next morning we went in and cleared it out but that's what disorganised their attack, we found that later, that once you got the officers, they sort of didn't know what to do. They used to yell and scream and shout, you know, I suppose orders telling them what to do. Our blokes always fought in complete silence. There was never any orders or anything. Oh they
- 03:30 kept it up pretty well all the afternoon. One bloke in particular was trying to organise things and he finally led a charge right in front of us onto open ground and we got him. We wounded him and he went down and that was the last attempt they made to get across. We found out later he was a sergeant and he had a,
- 04:00 oh later they're yelling all the afternoon and somebody yelled out "Put that bastard out of his misery there somebody". And somebody further up the line said "No, let the bastard suffer". We just left him there. He died later on, apparently. But he had a red and white ribbon on his shirt and we took a prisoner later on up at the strong post fight up there and he told us, we showed him the ribbon and he said "Oh he got that for bravery in Singapore".
- 04:30 So he got his deserts at Finschhafen. Anyway, they didn't persist in that and next morning we organised, oh no that night, that's right, a probe about three o'clock in the morning and we'd fixed, we brought in Vickers heavy machine guns overnight and set it up and they'd fixed lines to fire upon, and little tracks where you had to move on through the jungle. And they set it up
- 05:00 on this track and the alarm put out a trip wire and at about three o'clock in the morning they tripped that and they opened up and they cut three or four of them in half with the Vickers and they then retired, pulled back into the jungle. The way they came down was a pretty obscure track, coming down round the Song River, which we didn't know was there and they'd apparently known it was there and they came down through this track. If they'd have broken through to us they'd have all the wounded and all the
- 05:30 sick and that in the hospital. But we went in the next morning and I think it was 20 odd bodies there and about another 20 odd packs where they'd been wounded and they'd taken them out. And they'd dug a big grave, oh, as wide as from here to the wall and they'd gone to great lengths in
- 06:00 camouflaging it. We didn't know at that stage whether it was bodies or whether maybe they'd buried the woodpecker. So I dug down with a bayonet and there was bodies in it so I don't know how many were in it, just covered it back over and left it but they must have had, there was about 120 of them had turned out that had put in the attack. So we got 20, a bit over 20. There must have been 20 or 30 of them wounded so
- 06:30 we did all right there. When we went back in the next morning, this officer was still alive, and oh, I forgot to tell you. I don't know if I can say. The officer was killed. He was only from here to the doorway away from me and I couldn't get him out under the circumstances.
- 07:00 When we went back in the next morning, they'd beheaded him with a sword so, when we found this officer, we just disposed of him. There was no mistaking in hindsight. It may be that our fellow
- 07:30 was badly wounded, he didn't move, I thought he was dead but he may have still been breathing when they found him and they just decapitated him with a sword. But that was the finish of that little fire fight as they described it. After we consolidated the line there, oh they put on their main attack against the 28th and the 32nd
- 08:00 which were on our left. And ne night in particular, they had Vickers set up on the main part down. Well this one particular night, the Vickers roared all night, and they counted 500 and something bodies, Jap

bodies, the next morning. Clear moonlit night and they were trying to come down through tracks which came through pieces of kunai which was lit up almost like search lights

- 08:30 and they just mowed them down with the Vickers. Because heavy machine guns would have killed them, they had long belts and they just took one belt on after another for sustained firing and they could just keep up continual firing, two or three of them firing together, just a continual roar. And they counted 500 and something Jap bodies there that night, just that one night alone. But that was their main attack,
- 09:00 oh they had skirmishes and, you know, what they call like skirmishes and fire fights and that for a few days afterwards, bands of a rear guard and that. We didn't try to follow them at that stage. We pulled back and we went back up the coast road, about a mile up into what we term the strong post, it straddled the coast track which was
- 09:30 more or less just a foot track before we went there. But we made it into a jeep track and we set up a strong defensive position there. We were waiting for the 26th Brigade to come up to regain the offensive against them and we cut down under growth for about 30, 40 yards out in front of our position. We had a circular all round position and we had two Vickers, heavy machine guns
- 10:00 on the track, one each side of the track coming down and we had normal three Brens and we had a Jap like machine gun as well on the front and we dug in very well there. We knew there was another attack coming down. We strung two strands of barbed wire across the front, and booby trapped the whole out beyond that on the edge of the jungle
- 10:30 where they had to come through. We used to get tins and put in the forks of the trees, fixed in the fork of a tree, and put a grenade pull the pin out, push the grenade into the tins just the size of the grenade so that the legal [?] wouldn't fire it, set off the fuse, and attach a wire to the grenade and a bit of sig [signals] wire or something, and then run it through the trees, tie it around the trees about knee height
- 11:00 in the jungle, camouflage it a bit. And the engineers also showed us a nice little trick. We unscrewed the percussion cap off three inch mortar bombs, which are a pretty terrible, violent sort of a weapon, three inch mortar, which is fired off mortar tubes ranges up to 1800 yards or something. We got some of them and we unscrewed the nose caps out, put a grenade in and pulled the pin out,
- 11:30 until it was almost a bit of knock. We'd finished pulling the pin out you see and then they'd go and the three inch mortar would go. We'd tie those in forks of trees and sat and camouflaged them with bush and that and tied trip wires on them. We had that nicely set up and we settled down there. We were there for, I suppose, a couple of weeks but we were getting
- 12:00 a bit of intelligence in at times that the next big attack was coming but we just didn't know when. The 26th Brigade had arrived and they were given the job of taking Sattelberg up where we tried before and they had Matilda tanks with them. They brought up Matilda tanks at that stage and we were just to hold this position. They knew that
- 12:30 they'd put in, there had been an attack down there. They'd tried to relieve the pressure on Sattelberg when the 26th Brigade went up. So our platoon, which was down to about 16 I suppose, might have been round about that figure, we went out about a mile out in front, and set up a sort of small observation defensive position. It wasn't a bad position to set up, there was a little stream running through
- 13:00 and then sections in turns of about six men, went about another half a mile and had listening posts all day. Go out first thing in the morning and settle down in the jungle and just lie there all day, and listen. We had our arms and this went on for a few days, and one afternoon, one of the other sections, a couple of blokes,
- 13:30 they were out on this listening post and the Japs, this fighting patrol jumped them. They knew they were there apparently, did some good reconnaissance and knew that they were there. Fortunately they saw them coming, they were about thirty yards or so away and they were able to get out. I must tell you, I think it was the day before, we were out on listening patrol and I set the Bren up in a position covering the main track and there was a little track came down off
- 14:00 Pineo Hill where the Japs were up on top. Down the side of the hill it was just a little foot track and they came out onto the main track through a little clearing. There was a bit of a clearing then they went out onto the main track, you see. And about four o'clock in the afternoon, something's coming down off the track off the top of Pinios, you see. You had to come through wild ginger and stuff, a bit of a rattle every now and again coming steadily down the hill,
- 14:30 and I thought "Oh here's somebody coming down to have a look", you see. So I'm waiting for him to come out of the opening in front of me, only about 10 or 15 yards away, all ready to let him have it and out came two wild turkeys, and here they are, out of this little bare patch, scratching round, having a feed, you see. And here we are lying there watching these turkeys, you know, we'd been on hard tack for months,
- 15:00 and thinking of how would they go in the pot, you see. But we couldn't shoot them because we were in a listening post. So anyway, the next day the Japs jumped our listening post, they came peeling back in, "They're coming". And that particular night, we'd, for a couple of weeks, we'd been getting an issue of

fresh steak packed in steel boxes only about so high.

- 15:30 They'd been frozen, they were coming up, I don't know how long they'd been on the track up to where we were, but by the time they got up to us, they'd be nearly running out of the boxes and they'd be fly blown generally. When something's fly-blown up there, the maggots are about that long, big brown, furry ones. And we got this issue of steak so we didn't waste it even though it was fly blown. And you'd call it, you know, really
- 16:00 well hung. So we cooked it. We had half a kerosene bucket, old kerosene bucket cut off, we carried it, our cook carried that, we had a cook with us. He cooked the steak up for the evening meal, in this thing we had. At this stage also, we were getting a few dehydrated onions and spuds which flavoured the bully beef a bit and he made this stew. And we got a case of peaches, too,
- 16:30 and we had tin peaches that night. The Jeep had brought them up and we were already to have this tuck in of steak and tinned peaches, and the Japs, unbeknown to us, they'd come down and left the track and bypassed us, came in behind us, cut the wire. Of course, the balloon went up and I was right out over the track on the right hand side on my own with a Bren gun. At that point we
- 17:00 hadn't been really organised, most of them were going over for their evening meal but I'd stayed on the gun. And the Japs cut the sig wire behind us and their lieutenant yelled out, I heard him quite plainly, "Right-o, we'll bust our way out down the track, all the Bren gunners come in and lead the way", you know, to blow us away down the track for the normal platoon. Just as I
- 17:30 picked the Bren gun up, slung it with a what's-her-name over my shoulder, the the sling. And fortunately I had it all ready to go, cocked and loaded. Normally you leave it uncocked, just pull it back there, the firing bolt and put one in the breech and it's all ready to go. There's 25 in the mag [magazine] and as I turned around, a Jap steps out from the little, there was a little bit of a clearing out in the jungle and
- 18:00 he had me and he was lining me up with his rifle, you see, about from here to the window away. It's funny how things strike you but I could see that he didn't know firearms. You could tell in the way he was in that flash, that he wasn't standing right. And as I turned round I just fired from the hip and put half a magazine into him and he virtually flew to pieces. Okay. Brens are hard to hold
- 18:30 on the target, after you use them a bit you can hold them, they can swing you sideways but I think I got every bullet into him and he just dropped there. Well, he was there, we went back into the same positions three weeks later and we drove up the coast and he was still lying there in the jungle. I suppose he's still there. They'd never, would never have known where he was. Anyway I walked, or I didn't walk, I took off to go across the track,
- 19:00 I had about 15 or 20 yards to go. In the meantime the platoon had thought everybody was there and they'd taken off. But unbeknown to them, our cook had put his rifle down and he didn't know where he'd put it, you see. So he's scratching around looking for his rifle. When I got back across the bloke from Charlton was there and the platoon runner and two reinforcements. I think they were Queenslanders, I can't remember who they were.
- 19:30 They were there waiting for this cook to find his rifle and just as I arrived. He did find his rifle. Anyway and another Jap, he must have wanted to commit suicide. He came walking down the middle of the track, the platoon had taken off and they'd run into them just down a little bit, and instead of going on down the track they'd verged off into the jungle, our platoon. This Jap must have thought there was only one or two of us left behind and
- 20:00 he had an open go and he came down the middle of the track and he could speak pretty good English and he says "Got you now Aussie bastards" he said, yells out you see. And I said, this is ironical that the last words he uttered, were in English. When we came back later on, they'd, the Japs' main forces had come down that next, that same night and
- 20:30 they'd buried him in the middle of the track there. He was still there but well we decided, the fellow from Charlton and I, decided we couldn't try the track because we didn't know how many were there. So we scrambled up a little knoll overlooking the track and there were some old trenches there. Apparently the Japs had dug them previously and we jumped into them and just formed a little perimeter there. We didn't know what was going to happen. We thought we were going to have to
- 21:00 get stuck into it next morning. We spent the night there and early in the night they started moving their main force past us only about 20 yards down the main track. And we'd put trip wire and that on. They were banging into this trip wires and they were moving the whole forward company, a hundred odd, an amount and going down the track past us during the night. And we didn't know what was going to happen to us next morning. We thought we're gonna be,
- 21:30 it was going to be our last day. First light, Ian and I peeked down into our campsite and here's a mob of Japs eating our steak and our peaches. They had a great old go there. We had a bit of a conference what we'd do, whether we'd, you know, have a go at them and then clear out. The old saying "He who fights and runs away, lives to fight another day", so we took to the scrub and we had to go in,
- 22:00 circle out, up onto north headland and then back round to our main position in the meantime. Then when we took off, we hadn't gone far when they put in the main attack against the strong post and of

course, they carved them to pieces, our own blokes. They just slaughtered them the Vickers, because they were just cutting them down in swathes and they also ran into our booby trap

- 22:30 when they tried to attack through the jungle, setting off our three inch booby traps. Made a real mess of them. But we'd only gone about half, about a quarter of a mile, I suppose and we stumbled over our platoon sergeant. He'd become separated when they took the jungle and the rest of the platoon. He'd become separated, he heard us coming, he thought it was the Japs and he crawled under the roots of a big Moreton Bay tree. They were huge roots, three and four feet,
- 23:00 like going out from the bottom. He had crawled under there and hidden and he heaved a sigh of relief when we came. He was nearly dead on his feet with malaria, he could hardly walk. So we gathered him up and took him with us and circled back up onto North Hill to where B company were. We were up there with, just made it out of their kitchen. They were boiling us a cup of tea when the rest of the platoon came out of the jungle, the rest of our platoon, they came up. So then we
- 23:30 went straight back up to the strong post, so A company came in with us, doubled our numbers and we went back into the strong post and took up positions. And the Japs were still marooned on what was left on the jungle side. We were cut down, they couldn't get out, a bit of sniping and duelling back and forth and
- 24:00 that was the night, I think, yes it was the first night. A group of them had dug in and another big tree on the corner of our perimeter out in front where we had the Bren pit and there was an old bloke from South Australia, he'd originally been wounded in Alamein, he was in the pit with me. The other Bren gunner had been evacuated sick and it was stand to til
- 24:30 eight o'clock. It was pitch black. Night up there just falls like a blanket, there's no twilight period or anything, there's just a little bit of dusk, and then bang, it's dark. Stand to til eight o'clock, and then stand down, one man on the gun and one asleep. And the Bren pitch is the only one who keeps watch. The others sleep or try to sleep and about, oh, a few minutes
- 25:00 before stand down from where this group is, that's where the group was dug in at the tree we'd been having a go at them all day and the noise started. We cut all the scrub down and you could step over stuff we cut down into a little clear patch and it sounded like a bloke just stepping over this stuff, very cautiously, and coming straight at our Bren pit, you see.
- 25:30 Very slowly he'd take a few steps and stop, as we thought. No sound, might be 10, 15 minutes then a few more. This went on and it was nearly 11 o'clock, I suppose it was half past ten or whatever it was. He reached the wire and we had the wire strung pretty tightly and gave a bit of a zing. You could hear it zing along in front of us and these we tied to a sapling and it started to
- 26:00 sway a bit at the top. You could see it swaying against the sky and then all went quite. Eleven o'clock came, no movement, nothing. So I said to old Bert, "See if you can get some sleep", and he crawled back in. We had a covered dugout range behind us, he called it, and promptly went to sleep. And a few minutes later I caught a movement up in the tree, up in this little cleared area, the only clear area there, and it was a flaming tree
- 26:30 kangaroo. He'd been hopping over the foliage that we'd cut down on the clear patches and stopping and he climbed the tree where we had the wire on, kept us up til, oh we had three or four blokes on either side of it all, waiting for what was going to happen, this lone kangaroo. If I could have, I could have shot him. Of course I didn't.
- 27:00 The next night I think the back part of our perimeter was, they hadn't cut the jungle down. It was a bit dicky, they'd had a couple of goes to try and get in there and shift. I had to take the Bren gun over, oh Bert and I took the Bren gun over and used a fire pit that they'd be using. It was at the butt of a tree and they'd dug the pit just in front of the tree. You could
- 27:30 sit with your back against the tree and the legs in the pit with the gun set up and there was a track going out into the jungle and the Japs had two or three goes to try to get in so there was only a rifleman there and so we took the Bren gun over and we set it up before dark and it was two hours watches on the Bren. Bert and I did the shift, I've just forgotten how it worked, in what
- 28:00 rotation but I'd done my shift and old Bert was next. I woke him and we set up a groundsheet cover, it was raining and crawled in under the groundsheet to sleep, side by side. I woke him, crawled in and promptly went to sleep and he went onto the gun. And I had a dream, I've written about it in my memoirs.
- 28:30 I was worried about this track coming in because they could, they had a habit of, these suicide blokes of crawling in if they knew where your pit was and trying to knife you in the dark. There were occasions where they got in, into the foxholes and knifed our blokes. I was a bit concerned about this. I was sitting there with me back against the tree in my dream and I felt a touch on my leg. The dream is still clear to me.
- 29:00 I thought that a Jap had come in and was feeling up my leg, just light touches up my leg, to get up to my body to knife me where it would do some damage. And when I got up to about there, I, in my dream I

thought well, this was it, I've got to be game, and I whirled and it was old Bert crawling back in from his gun shift. I bowled him over, bowled him over and he let out a string of curses. Of course, I woke up

- 29:30 and I shook for about an hour after that. Of course we laughed about it afterwards but I knocked him sprawling out from under the groundsheets. Anyway, nothing happened there. After two or three days, we sent out fighting the trail, I think there was about ten of us, to see whether it was clear out in front of us. We only got about a hundred yards
- 30:00 and we got really nicely ambushed. We walked into a nest of Japs concealed in the jungle, really thick jungle. But for some silly reason they didn't use firearms. They threw a shower of grenades amongst us and they had to tap their grenades for some reason to set the fuses going and they gave you a couple of seconds to do something. All of a
- 30:30 sudden, this tap, tap, tap from the shower of grenades come in, about six or eight of them in amongst us but we'd by that time, most of us had hit the ground and we only had one wounded and we had to, we shot up the position there. We couldn't see them but from where the grenades came and got the wounded bloke out from Tasmania, and retired gracefully back into the strong post.
- 31:00 We waited there then they sent a tanker, I don't know what time lapsed here, but they sent a Matilda tank up to the 26th Brigade. And we were progressing at Sattelberg, they took Sattelberg and the line of defensive positions, they had to go along through to Wareo, the next high point. We went behind a Matilda tank up this track up the coast and the
- 31:30 Japs had prepared a few pillboxes or coconut palms on the side of the track covering the tracks. When the scouts came onto these they just called the tank forward and blew them out of the way and the Japs departed. We didn't have to take any part in that part of it. We then went in onto where we'd been weeks before, on to exchange, sitting on the track.
- 32:00 And then further on to the observation post that we'd found, part of the 2/32nd had gone onto this little sharp hill and the Japs had laid everything on, trying to kick them off that while we were down on the strong posts and we went in through them and continued on up the track in the back track into Wareo, in the back of Sattelberg. C company was forward at that stage.
- 32:30 They got held up, it was kunai up to the rainforest line, a couple of lakes there and there'd been skirmishes and they had a 75 millimetre gun there at that position and it was doing a bit of damage with the 75 millimetre. And more than that, an 80 millimetre mortar there, and they
- 33:00 were raking the track in there. We had to slip through between barrages, sort of thing. We got through and the C company was held up. They'd knocked the tank out. They'd taken over from the tank, the Japs had, then with the 75 millimetre they hadn't knocked it out really. They'd got a lucky hit, they only had HP, they didn't have any AP, armour piercing and one of them had hit the traversing ring on the tank and they couldn't traverse the gun. They could see the gun, the
- 33:30 semi, the Jap gun, but they couldn't traverse the gun to knock it out so they just went out through the escape hatch underneath and left it there. Next morning they, C company, woke up to a clang and clamour and they looked up half at first light and there was a Jap up on top of the top, trying to open the top with a pick. So they despatched him. Anyway, we got the job then
- 34:00 of encircling that road block, that Jap stopper position and to cut the track behind them between them and the main, the next main Jap position. Well it took us nearly all day. We set off in the morning and we had to circle out through the jungle, shock again, razorbacks and gullies and slippery slopes and we were loaded with ammunition. We had to carry everything in with us,
- 34:30 one water bottle of water, when we started off. Field rations, what we could carry, but we threw most of the field rations away so we could carry extra ammo. And we climbed up on this razorback where the track came down and bunged in between the Japs down in the forward position and the main one up top. And we'd arranged the C company to shoot up the
- 35:00 forward position in a bid to cover us coming in and we were digging in like rabbits into this across the razorback. The bloke from Charlton had a Bren and I had a Bren. We were on the track and three or four other blokes across there we were...now razorback were only a few yards apart. and we just got nicely dug in, and it was getting on towards evening and they started coming on down the track
- 35:30 and they still hadn't woken up that we were there. They thought that all the firing was coming from down at the forward position and they didn't know that we'd cut the track and they started taking their evening rations down at the forward position. The first bloke came down with a big dixie, carrying a dixie in his hands, you see, waltzing down the track and it was just sheer murder. The dixie went flying everywhere, you know and the next two came round only a matter of
- 36:00 a minute or so afterwards and they both had a rubber sack of rice, boiled rice, strapped on their backs, carrying on their backs and each of the sacks weighed about a hundred by the look of them. And they had them tied on their backs, and the track was pretty slippery and pretty rough and they were taking great care coming down with this weight on them. They weren't looking where they were going, you see, and they reached this bloke we'd knocked off before and

- 36:30 they just stopped open mouthed and they stand looking round. And I don't know who's shot got them but one of us ripped the bag of this rice out and it was so steep that I still remember the rice was running down the slope like water from these two poor fellows. I think we got five all told before they woke up we were there. And then they sent a patrol down because they still didn't know
- 37:00 our exact position. We made no noise as far as talking or anything, no orders. We had nobody to give us orders. There were only about six of us there and this patrol came down and they were very cautious. They'd come a few paces and they'd stop and look and we were trying to get them bunched up so we could get them but two or three of them didn't, so they didn't
- 37:30 oblige. So anyway, we couldn't wait any longer and we opened up on them and knocked some of them over. And the others took off back up and they then shot up our position with like machine gun from up top. That's what they were trying to find out where we were. It was only guess work and they went over the top. The forward position, the Japs
- 38:00 abandoned their position during the night and they were going along a creek down the bottom where we were on the razorback. Every time we heard a noise, we'd throw a grenade over down in the gully and they'd squeal and yell like pigs. They hated our grenades, they didn't like them at all and they'd abandoned the gun and the mortar that was holding C company up. They buried it, dug a hole and buried it and they were without their gun, their
- 38:30 75 millimetre and a stack of ammunition, mortar ammunition and then the mortar. And 32nd moved up, company of the 32nd moved up through us the next day and went up til they struck further up attack and we followed them up and they gave them the job of making a right hand flanking attack on the next hill. And half a dozen or so
- 39:00 went on the left flank and moved in as close as we could at the top to the Jap position and shot it up as a diversion for the main attack going up the other side. But the attack didn't succeed. It was a pretty strong position and they'd apparently seen us as we were coming in and they gave us a hard time. They pinned us down for a while and we abandoned that and that was our last
- 39:30 action at Finschhafen. We pulled out then and came back down to the beach. But I think at that stage, we, well out of ten men that went in there, we had two killed, three wounded, there was five out of the
- 40:00 ten of us put out of action, inaction, but the rest went out sick. There was out of 130 that went into New Guinea, there was five of us who weren't evacuated during that six months period. Five out of the 130.

**I might get you to pause there, because that's it.**

## Tape 8

- 00:35 I wasn't further involved in combat, other than a bit of shelling and all that sort of thing. I can tell you that briefly as we go on.
- Well maybe I could ask you some questions. If you'd like, if you walk us through all that first and then I'll ask you some general question about your experiences in combat.**
- Right.
- So yes Finschhafen, you just did it after Sattelberg?**
- Yes, that was our last action
- 01:00 there and we came back down. There's a couple of things. We're in recording now, are we?
- Yes.**
- When we were in the strong post, oh we were in you know, getting in pretty poor condition and I went in there about 12 and a half stone, I was down to about 10 stone the times you'd get fever and that but we were so strapped for
- 01:30 manpower that if you could walk, you stayed. And I got a real doze of general ulcers on the legs, up to my knees, both. More on the right leg than left and the doctor came up one day to the strong post and sent me back to the beach for I think it was two days. Told me to live in the sea water which I did, and washed them out and
- 02:00 that started me on the road to recovery. But they were a hell of a mess there. I could hardly walk with them at their worst. But we also captured our one and only prisoner we ever took at the strong post. Word came up from headquarters that they wanted a prisoner and
- 02:30 it's alright to say they want a prisoner but the opportunity presented itself when things died down and we spotted a Jap sitting at the butt of a tree, right under, almost under our guns. And he was shell shocked, completely off in a trance and he was sitting at the butt of a tree, leaning against the tree, so a fellow from Tasmania,

- 03:00 he says "I'll get him, we'll give them their prisoner", you see. So he went out, we covered him and he crept up on this bloke on the other side of the tree and pounced on him. Tried to pull a grenade out when he jumped it, but he took it off him and that was the one and only prisoner we took in the New Guinea campaign. He turned out that he was quite valuable, too, for information. He was attached to some special section or something, I've just forgotten now.
- 03:30 But after that last job we did there, we came back down to the beach head. We had Christmas there in 1943, Christmas and we'd been told then that we'd be going home again.
- 04:00 So we walked, march, walked, whatever you like, back down to Finschhafen and another little interesting experience on the way, we stopped one night right on the bluff overlooking the ocean, very steep, fair way down to the ocean and moonlight night. And at about nine o'clock we heard what we thought was a whale out in the bay, just a small inlet.
- 04:30 We were having a look and realised it was a submarine and it surfaced, I presume. We didn't know whether it was ours or theirs. There was an artillery position on the top of the hill up above us and we sent word up to them. They were in touch with radio. They'd radio if there were any American submarines, in the vicinity, there were American submarines operating. And word came back after some time, that no, there's no Americans in
- 05:00 in the area, and the word was not to fire on this thing. They were trying to turn a gun round up on the gun position to have a go at it but in the meantime it had gone out to sea and disappeared. I had a wonderful opportunity of shooting up a submarine with a Bren gun, missed. It'd be like throwing peas at an elephant.
- 05:30 When we came down, we boarded an old liberty boat, American liberty boats at Finschhafen on the way back to Australia. We had an air raid overhead as we were on board, that was our goodbye salute to New Guinea. Ran into a hurricane out in the Coral Sea, thought the ship was going to snap in two. The necks of those old liberty boats were welded and it ripples from one end to the other and as the crew
- 06:00 said, "Well if it doesn't ripple, it ripples and breaks in half". Anyway, we made it back to Townsville and I might say, the day we landed in New Guinea we were the real wise guys, liked to carry a mosquito net, half a blanket, all this sort of paraphernalia. We weren't half way through the first day and we threw the half a blanket and mosquito net away, and you couldn't wear underwear, you couldn't wear
- 06:30 socks because of the conditions. You'd be in a mess with dermatitis and that in no time if you wore underwear. You had to keep it loose and baggy. No socks, just straight on the boots, and we lived in those for six months. Never, never got out of them in those six months until we got back just before Christmas and we were able to wash them in a creek there, have a dip in the creek.
- 07:00 But when we were out in the field there, we'd just come to a stream where we could lie down clothes and all. Have a bit of a swim round, get up and walk out and clothes were dry and that. It was pretty horrific. And when we landed at Townsville there were a lot of people there congregating to watch us, and I still remember we walked off, we didn't march off. I suppose we were such a bedraggled looking crew that they just stood with their mouths open, looking at us, you know.
- 07:30 We were still in the same clothes we had six months previously. Boots were hanging.

**No change at all?**

No change, no.

**For six months?**

For six months. Hadn't even taken them off. Well as I say, until we got back. Five months, I suppose, we just lived in those clothes.

**I'm surprised at that, considering that the Australians had a better supply situation?**

But up there you couldn't supply. There was days especially at Lae and Finschhafen where we went days almost without food except for a little bit we carried.

- 08:00 At one stage I know we were down to one tin of bully beef between five or six men. This was our food for a day.

**Between five or six men?**

Just because you couldn't get supplies to us. Like we were out in the jungle on a track somewhere and the jeep tracks. We had to cut corduroy at times, so the jeeps could get along the tracks to get supplies up. When we were held up the Busu River, we, five or six of us, left our arms and we walked

- 08:30 back a mile to the, we knew there was a supply dump on the Burep River and went back there and got a load of food and carried it back up so as we'd have food. Nobody had food there just because the supplies couldn't get up to us on the tracks. It either had to be carried up or by jeep and half the time they were stuck, the tracks were churned up, you know. But

- 09:00 we got at Christmas time, we got fresh bread. That was the first time we'd seen fresh bread for that five



months. They had a field bakery going.

**Did you lose many mates?**

Well as I say, out of our ten in that section that went into New Guinea, we had two killed, one, two, three wounded, that was five out of

- 09:30 ten, one out of two, out of that section. So, that was actually wounded the others, all except me, oh and the bloke from Charlton who was, we were the only two in the section that weren't evacuated for some reason, we were all killed or wounded. But that's how it was. Anyway, we came to being offloaded in Townsville, down to Brisbane and
- 10:00 into camp at Chermside ,I think it was, where this big Chermside Shopping Centre is now. That was all bush. They refitted us there, new jungle greens, shirts, trousers, hats, the works. Handed in our arms, onto the troop train, straight home on leave for whatever period it was. Enid and I became engaged then and
- 10:30 I remember I went to buy the ring in Melbourne, and went into the jeweller's shop. None of them had rings, finally found one that had one ring left, take it or leave it, so that was it, that was our engagement ring. Anyway, in due course we finished that leave, back to Queensland again
- 11:00 up onto the Tablelands. And at this stage the war was winding down and they were clearing out a lot of the training camps throughout Australia. There was three or four of us who had been, more or less, been indicated that we'd get promotion to section commanders, that's corporal, before we went on the next stunt. But after a while we
- 11:30 found that they were bringing up confirmed ranks from the training camps, sergeants, corporals and then, bringing them into the units as reinforcements and we didn't have much prospect of promotion and the difference of six bob a day to ten bob a day, ten bob a day was good money. So the fellow from Charlton and myself and two or three others, transferred out. He went to mortars and the mortar
- 12:00 section was always with headquarters and they get there and we used to call them the long range snipers or the nine mile snipers. They're always well back, you know, laying down DF or something like that. I went to the military divisional police, the military police which are usually engaged in moving transports and once you land on the beach heads, you direct traffic to the destinations and try to sort out the who goes where and
- 12:30 what not and road blocks and all that sort of thing. And I transferred there, I think, oh just a few weeks before we went to Borneo I transferred over. It was an immediate promotion there. I was on ten bob, ten bob a day. And we were flat out moving,or supervising the convoys going down to
- 13:00 Cairns and those places to be shipped out. There was always two riders, motorbike riders, one at the front, one behind the convoys, the bloke in front clearing the road for the convoy going through and stopping any traffic wandering into the convoy and the one at the back stopping anything from coming in or any trucks breaking down and dropping out the back. It was virtually non-stop there
- 13:30 for, oh a fortnight or so, as we were when the division was moving down too, the brigade was moving down too. I was then with headquarters of 26th Brigade, moving down to be shipped out to Borneo. We finally went down to Cairns and we went onto a fairly big 26000 tonne modern American troop carrier. Beautiful
- 14:00 stainless steel kitchens and ice cream.

**Doesn't surprise me.**

Got it at last. You know, the American style of eating, down the mess with the trays and a dob of this here, a dob of beans and a dob of that and a dob of ice cream on your tray and away you went. Very strict lock down every night after dark, no light on deck. They had the security blokes walking around with pistols and if you didn't move, they'd produce the 45

- 14:30 and very promptly announce that you had to get below and you didn't argue. You were locked down every night down below. It was pretty, you know, full of bodies and heat, what not. We went up around northern New Guinea, we picked up an escort as we went around the southern tip of New Guinea, up to Hollandia up there. And we transferred onto, oh no, we went right across to Morotai on that boat,
- 15:00 which is over in the Celebes, about half way across to Borneo and we transferred onto the land at Morotai. We were there for, oh it might have been a week, a couple of weeks, something like that. I've forgotten now. And then we went onboard the LCIs, which is the Landing Craft Infantry again, for the trip across to Borneo to do the landing on Tarakan and that was one of the
- 15:30 most spectacular sights of the lot. Tarakan was fairly strongly held but they were so confident that we sailed in between them, Tarakan and the mainland and dropped anchor in the Straits. There were two destroyers in shore from us and two rockets, LCIs that they'd converted to rockets, they'd had rocket
- 16:00 launches built on each, down each side and they'd cruise up and down, and they'd let one side go, rockets, onto the beach head and then turn at the end and come back. And the destroyers were cruising

up and down, bombarding the beach. It was just a cloud of smoke and you couldn't see what was going on. There were bombers overhead all the time, long range bombers, Liberators and Mitchells and Bostons,

16:30 fighter patrols. They were coming up from long range patrols from Morotai. Artillery, we landed an artillery section on a little island. They were joining in and as I say, the whole shore was just erupting. The Japs found out later they'd taken a little bit what was coming, and they very wisely fled out from the beach up into the hills. So the landing there was,

17:00 untested again and an ingenious way of mudflats there when the high tide went out, there'd be anything up to a quarter of mile of mudflat. There was no beach as such, no sand and to get the heavy equipment onto the beach they latched long steel pontoons, probably as long as from here down to the lane way at the back there, about 30, 40 metres long.

17:30 Steel pontoons wide enough to take vehicles and tanks and they latched them onto the sand, the sides of the LSTs carrying the heavy equipment and they charged the beach at high tide. And they had crews on the steel, what did I call them, I've forgotten.

#### **Pontoons.**

Pontoons, yeah.

18:00 And when the LST grounded, of course it threw these forward onto their moorings and they cut the ropes and the momentum of the LST grounding through these pontoons. And they were very shallow draft of course, being smaller and they skidded on the mud, and some of them came in pretty close together and then the crews jumped off and manhandled them some of them

18:30 end to end, but others were just, they'd overlap them enough for a vehicle to turn from one to the other. And all the heavy equipment had to come off there because we were ashore and had to receive all this heavy equipment coming off, direct it where, trucks and equipment and tanks and one little road for about two miles to put all this stuff on. They couldn't go off it because of the condition of it. It was bedlam.

19:00 It was the heavy equipment, the forward equipment that had priority but there were trucks getting in the road, people getting in the road. At one stage we had to call in bulldozers to push trucks off the road sideways to let the heavy equipment through up to the front line. They the infantry had pushed up then to the air strip and were...

#### **So you had to get rid of those trucks, you just couldn't help it?**

The worst part of it was that they had an air field construction crew of our RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force]

19:30 who were to work on the airfield the moment it was taken. But the resistance was more than they expected and there was a hold up before they took the airstrip and they'd mistakenly sent all these air force equipment blokes off with their equipment, all their air strip work equipment, and they cluttered up the road. It was mainly then that we had to push off the side of the road with the bulldozers

20:00 to let the other stuff up to the front line. Of course they pulled them back on afterwards with tanks and bulldozers and that and they got sent on up to the air strip after it was taken. For the infantry Tarakan was probably more vicious than the New Guinea. It was very strongly defended and very thick,

20:30 low scrub on it and very sharp little ridges on it. It was almost at times one man up all the time, trying to advance. And they...

#### **Did you see much combat there yourself?**

No, well, I was then in the military police. We were on the control work, on the... Oh we had road blocks on but we had a few stray Jap parties would come down from the hills and

21:00 carry out raids. But the closest I come to there, after the main fighting was finished, we were out, the reports had come in, the natives had come in, they'd say "Oh, there's Japs at so-and-so", you see and we'd have to go out. We'd take a Tommy gun or an air gun or something, and go out and round these Japs up. They were mainly sick blokes, most of them were unarmed and we'd just collect them and take them back and put them in the compound. But we

21:30 were checking a bunch of prickly pear one day and I only had a pistol that day and I'm looking into this big patch of this prickly pear, and the Jap strays used to hide in it. And the natives had said that there was one in there, somewhere. There was also unbeknown to us a group up on the ridge up behind us. They'd been there for all the time, for some time. We didn't know about it. He lined me up apparently,

22:00 and let go one and the first indication that anybody was there must have missed the side of my face by a fraction and hit the prickly pear just beside me, and threw stuff all over my face and it had gone passed my ear. Not too many know that when you're under, when somebody's really shooting at you point blank at not too far range, you don't hear the report

22:30 up there, it follows the bullet. In New Guinea we often found that fighting at 15, 20 yards, they'd fire a

burst of machine gun and the only sort of sound we'd hear, would be in the trees behind us when they were hitting the trees. The bullet, the sound would follow the bullet through. You couldn't really pinpoint a lot of fire because we were inexperienced first timers, first time for us too.

- 23:00 In turn we were thinking we were being fired on from behind. I suppose it's a bit like the sound barrier of the aircraft.. The sound follows the bullet through and that's what happened this day and the whole explosion seemed to come just in front of my face. Anyway, we cleared out of there, we didn't argue there, only had a pistol there, weren't going to argue with them. They sent a patrol up and blew them
- 23:30 out afterwards. But then we had a compound of prisoners. As they came in we had to go through and we had a Japanese interrogator there that those we thought worthwhile we'd sent up to him and he'd interrogate them. We had to guard him all the time. And we had a group that was in the hospital, about 20 or 30 of them. Oh, they were coming in with, we were bringing them in there, some with their arms off, some with their legs off and they'd be sick.
- 24:00 They were operating on their wounded without alcohol, they'd hold them down, they'd cut their arm and leg off, or whatever had to be amputated. Tie them up and let them go and that was that, they had no medical supplies, the Japs that is, and we were getting them, you know. They were at least willing to surrender most times and we were guarding the hospital. That's when I found a pair of old rusty scissors that were there and I lined them up, one by one on a tree stump
- 24:30 outside the tent and cut their hair. Some of them had hair down to their shoulders, you know. This was, they'd been hiding in the mangroves and in the bush for weeks. And we, when the compound fell, we took a batch of 40 I think it was, back down to Morotai. There were four of us. Took this batch down, loaded them onto an American ammunition ship and took them back to Morotai. They had the big compound down there
- 25:00 where they took the main body of prisoners coming off the surrounding islands and, of course, the war had finished then but we were still getting, a lot of them didn't know that war had finished, the Japs up there. And they'd still, some of them were still fighting here and there but mainly they were just sick and they were trying to escape across to the mainland, Borneo. They used to make rafts and they'd cut the top off a coconut tree and cover the raft with the top of a coconut
- 25:30 tree and it was quite common in the tropics to see a coconut tree drifting on the top, just out of the water. And they'd cut these rafts and a few of them would pile on the raft and they'd push off and try to then drift across to the mainland to escape. And we had an American PT [Patrol Torpedo] boats, torpedo boats, sectioned there then and they used to do the patrol every day up around the island. They'd go right round the island. Every palm tree that they
- 26:00 saw floating, they'd just open up with their .5 Browning on it and clean up the Japs underneath. Sometimes there were none, just a coconut tree, but most times there was a few Japs underneath it as well. But that was the finish of that campaign there. The rest of our division had gone over to Brunei on the opposite side. They got the airstrip operational there and they had a
- 26:30 squadron or a flight of Spitfires operating, going over the mainland strafing and giving strafing support on the mainland. 7th Division had come in later and landed down on the east coast of Borneo. One day we were there, down at the airfield and word came in that bit of perspex, that bomber was on the way back, damaged and couldn't make it back to Morotai.
- 27:00 It was going to land on the strip and we watched him come in. When the fighting finished there, the Americans, they had a PT boat there, a lot of airfield equipment, all the equipment, they run it down to a bluff, this fairly steep bluff on the sea and just ran their jeeps and everything over the bluff in a heap, poured gasoline over them and set them alight, burnt them.
- 27:30 Thousands and thousands of dollars worth of stuff, they just ran it over the bluff and left it there. They just, it wasn't worth moving in their mind, it wasn't worth trying to salvage it, leave it back. Of course there was no shipping available to move the, you know. All the troops coming in from various areas were delayed considerably. To finish up our main body was taken
- 28:00 off on the Glorious, British aircraft carrier, that had come up to join the fleets up there. She called in and took off the main body. We came out, we were the last off there, we had to do patrols to see the island was clear. You always got the few idiots who'd sort of reckoned they had to go native, you know, and stay there. We had to make sure that there was nobody there. The chief of the local police there,
- 28:30 a Malayan, he had a pretty good information network going. In fact he was one of the heads of the underground there feeding out supplies. He came out to meet our convoys when we went in in a little speedboat and he had his information all over the island., There was no, nobody left. So we got on an English LST and came back to Australia on the LST. Landed at
- 29:00 oh, Cairns, I think or Townsville, I've forgotten now.

**Does it surprise you now that there were Japanese who actually did stay behind in those islands?**

No, it didn't surprise me at all. There was still, we knew, there were still Japanese in New Guinea. Well, not so much down in those areas. Well, there was. We cut a pretty sizeable body off when we took Lae.

They were still fighting down at Salamaua

29:30 which is further down. When we took Lae we broke up a lot of their formations there. One of our units surrounded an entire company of Japanese marines sent down to try and delay us and they annihilated the whole lot of them, but...Oh, practically all of them, the last few of them committed hara-kiri

30:00 when they knew they just held grenades, they used to do that. They knew there was no escape, they'd hold them in their stomachs, and bang, away they'd go. A lot of the wounded and sick, like in the stages when we were way out on our own and we'd come across them and they'd just point to their heads and point to our rifle. That was it. They knew what it was.

30:30 We had no prisoners taken, they had none. We couldn't handle them, you know, we were miles out, we couldn't, didn't have manpower to send them back. So, that was it. So then it was home to Australia, back to Melbourne. We marked time down there for a few weeks and

31:00 I applied to the police force and was accepted, did exams and that and was accepted. And on the 30th of June '46. Oh Enid and I were married, I had to get some special leave, we were married on the 25th of May, I think.

**You think?**

Right on. Went to Adelaide on our honeymoon. Got over there only the BOC

31:30 where we were in camp he was an idiot, he wouldn't give me special leave to get married, didn't have the brains enough to ring up to find out if I was, in fact getting married, so I passed him, by-passed him. I went down to southern Command which was at Albert Park, went to the leave section there and the bloke just picked up the phone and rang Nathalia, the minister up there, said "Have you got the wedding lists for such and such a date", yes, right "Here's your leave pass".

32:00 I took it back and waved it under the OC's nose and that was it. He only gave me seven days but when we got over to, went over to Adelaide it was quite easy to find a doctor and I found one who'd just come out of the army, a young army doctor, and he scribbled out another leave, sick report, sick certificate for me and he scrawled all over it. And he said "There, nobody will be able to read that, they won't know what it is",

32:30 and gave that to me. So I went back in due course, after I'd had a few extra days.

**Did you find it difficult settling down after the war?**

Not really because I was discharged on the 30th June, '46, and I went into the police force on the 1st July. From one to the other and that was, I think, 16 weeks of intensive training, then

33:00 the police force.

**What about dreaming? Did you dream about the war?**

Yes. Yes. I still do now, you know, after all that time. For weeks after, you'd find yourself out of bed of a night, all that

33:30 sort of thing. But it amuses me nowadays, like anything happens, somebody has an accident, somebody, they have to be counselled. When we were discharged at Royal Park they asked us if we had anything wrong with us. No, we were so eager to get out, there was nothing wrong with us.

34:00 Oh, I'd had malaria and when I came back from New Guinea in Queensland I woke up and blacked out, sat on a stump one day and they took me out in a truck. I woke up in a hospital with malaria and I had a recurrence of that for months afterwards after I married, even after I was discharged. In the police force, I, we were taking the Atebrin then, the only cure, well it wasn't a cure, it was a suppressant, and

34:30 if you'd feel it coming on, take up to six or eight or ten Atebrin tablets in a day and it'd suppress it. But that recurred for months afterwards, gradually diminishing.

**What particular thoughts or dreams troubled you in the post war time?**

Well, you'd relive the, you know, the shooting matches. You'd

35:00 see the blokes all wounded and all that sort of thing, you know, blood and guts, and you just couldn't, you couldn't disregard it. You couldn't get it out of your mind. It still effects me now. But, in their wisdom, of course,

35:30 you were discharged. You were out. That was it.

**How did you handle it at the time, when these things were taking place?**

Well, what could you do? You just had to, like when you, as I say, at times you'd be out of bed, getting ready to meet the charge or whatever it was, and you'd wake up, that's when you'd wake up. You'd hear blokes, you know, I've heard my brother yelling at night, all that sort of thing.

- 36:00 I don't know, if he told you but he was a good soldier and up on Sattelberg, they were up in a pretty desperate sort of attack there and one of his section was badly wounded, right? And he was close in under them, the Jap guns and they couldn't get him out.
- 36:30 They didn't realise he was there until after they had gone back, they didn't succeed in attack. When they got back they realised he was missing and they couldn't do anything, It was pitch black by that time so next morning at first light Eric went out and found him lying under the, he was badly wounded, just in front of the Japs and this, this fellow said to him, after he got him
- 37:00 out safely, he said "I knew you'd come for me, you big bastard". Those were his words, he told me that afterwards, Eric didn't tell me. I talked to the bloke afterwards. I don't know if he told you about it but he was a good soldier.
- 37:30 **Did you ever talk about this with Eric, your brother?**
- Oh yes, we often talk about it. It's, I suppose a bit of release, you know, to talk to a bloke who's been through it, and you can talk, they know what you're really talking about. It's only, like we've only
- 38:00 scratched the surface of the whole business there. You know the days getting on towards the end of that six months in New Guinea, we're at the end of our terror, at the end of our tether, mentally and physically. Like we were, we were walking zombies when we came home, more or less.
- So I presume that the, you know,**
- 38:30 **your memories of the war are the strongest memories you have, it seems?**
- You can look back, you know, things that happened during your lifetime and you can pick up a few points, salient points here and there that sort of stick in your mind. But war just is there all the time. You can almost go, you know, word for word over the things that happened. Well lots of
- 39:00 little things like that. Oh when we were at Queensland, we made up a battalion song, the words and tune, a group of us, about six of us and we used to sing that when we were marching. It was quite a good marching tune, too. And the battalion which was sent in South Australia, I know they got it but they wouldn't have got the tune that we'd put it to and all those little things that you think back on.
- 39:30 All the things we used to get up to, you know, the stunts and that, the tricks we used to play on one another.
- What was your view of the Japanese at the time, and now?**
- Well now, I wouldn't trust them as far as I could kick them. If they, they say that they've got this program of peace but I think that if given the chance...Perhaps the younger generations have
- 40:00 been brought up in a, more in a peaceful manner, like wanting peace but, in those times, most of their field troops were peasant types. And we interrogated officers on Borneo and they said that they'd brainwashed the forward troops that we were cannibals, that we'd kill them all if
- 40:30 we captured them and all this sort of thing, and eat them. And this is what they were brought upon, that's why they wouldn't surrender. Like when it came to the crunch most of them would commit hari kari, when they knew that there was no way out for them. And it was right at the end that they accepted surrender, they knew that it was, well most of them surrendering were sick and wounded.
- We've only got less than a minute, I'm afraid. But is there anything**
- 41:00 **you'd like to say that you haven't told us.**
- No.
- Unfortunately we haven't even got time for that either.**
- Well that's it.
- I'd like to thank you very much. Good on you.**
- Right.
- INTERVIEW ENDS**