Australians at War Film Archive

Kenneth Clarke (Ken) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

01:21 **If you could just start with an overview of your life.**

I was born at Kent Town, Adelaide. My father

01:30 at that time was importing fabrics, cotton piece goods from Manchester and silk, double double Fuji silk from Konevo in Japan and up until the age of twelve or eleven we had a very comfortable life and we were reasonably well off. Then the Depression hit and my father had forward orders and had lodged letters of credit and of course there were no buyers, and to honour his obligation he sold up the house and the car

02:00 we had and we finished up in Adelaide with really nothing and by this time I was about twelve I think, and we moved, twelve or thirteen, and then we moved to Victoria where he though he might find employment which was difficult. He was out of work for a long long time. In the meantime I went to Elwood Central School. From there went to Melbourne High School and by the time I had reached seventeen, just after intermediate

02:30 it was necessary to get a job, it really was, because of the Depression. I wanted to go on to university, but it was an economic impossibility. So every Friday afternoon I used to walk the streets of Melbourne trying to get a job because it meant some money to help the family and finally with a lot of persistence, it was no use trying to apply for the banks or insurance companies because they were reserved for public school boys, state school boys had to take secondary industries like tobacco companies

03:00 or oil companies. So eventually I used to call at this oil company every Friday afternoon and finally I think they got sick of me and they gave me a job as an office boy. That was the Atlantic Union Oil Company which was subsequently taken over many years later by Esso. And I joined them as an office boy and then slowly worked by way up into the credit, I was then posted down to the terminal where we started work at half

03:30 past seven and finished at half past four and by this time we were living at Sandringham so I had to get the ten past six train every morning from Sandringham to change at Flinders Street to get to Spotswood and you had to, although I was on a pound a week at this time, a workers weekly was four and twopence and I was able to give my mother ten shillings a week which really helped. A packet of Turf cigarettes was sixpence but you could buy half a packet for

04:00 threepence. Anyhow, from the oil company I then moved back to the head office of the oil company in Collins Street. It was in the credit department. And in the meantime I had started to do an accountancy course with Hemmingway and Robertson. And I looked around and I found that those people doing accountancy in those days sat at desks and filled in ledgers but on the other hand the sales people were provided with a car and they were out and about calling on

04:30 garages and industrial people and eventually into country areas. So I decided I would go the sales course way and eventually at 21 the company financed me into a car and I worked in the, for about a year, did the industrial suburbs of Melbourne, Carlton, Clifton Hill, North Melbourne and Collingwood and then after a year I was posted, or it might have been a bit longer than a year,

05:00 but I was posted to Shepparton, in the Goulburn Valley as the oil company representative, oil company representative there. And that took us up to 1940 and then when Paris fell, I think it was in June 1940, just about everybody was thinking about joining up and I didn't have to think very much about it so I decided to resign

05:30 or take leave and come down to Melbourne and join the army, which I did. I walked in and I took the oath. In the meantime in the militia, before I went to Mildura, one of the first world war diggers from the oil company was an officer and they had five Mark VI light tanks, which were brought out to Australia with a

06:00 a warrant officer called Sar' Major Ives from the Royal Tank Regiment to run this. And so this fellow

called Captain Huff who was a first war digger said why don't you come in, I'd been in the militia, in the 2nd, in the 14th Battalion infantry, why don't you come and get into the Mark VI light tanks, which I did. So by this time under the Sar' Major I'd been promoted to corporal and I knew my way round a bit with what was a quartermaster sergeant

06:30 and left turn, right turn, and a few thinks like that. Anyhow, I marched out to Royal Park and sitting at Royal Park as a full blown private, every morning they'd say 'anybody for infantry, anybody for signals, anybody for engineers' but nobody said 'anybody for tanks' and this went on for two weeks until I went to a dance on a Friday night and picked up the, just dashed out away from camp, and picked up the girl I subsequently married and we went to the

07:00 Palais on Friday night. And on Friday night there was George Milne and we used to go around in a group in those days, you really didn't particularly pair off and maybe five or six fellows and five or six girls and at the dance was George Milne, and Jean, the girl said 'well there's George Milne' and he was a subaltern with two pips and I said 'well I can't talk to him because he's a lieutenant' and she said 'well don't be silly'. So anyhow I walked up and George couldn't have been nicer. He couldn't have been

07:30 nicer. He said 'what are you doing?' I said 'I'm out at Royal Park waiting to go to the tanks' and he said 'there aren't any tanks there yet, so how would you like to join me, I'm transport officer on the 2/22nd Battalion and I need a transport sergeant'. So I thought, my, what a blessing. Fancy being with somebody you know, being a sergeant, eating in the sergeants' mess instead of out of a dixie. So I said 'great' and he said 'well come down on Sunday to the Hampton police station

08:00 where Colonel Evans will be there'. George Milne's father had been, was a detective who was murdered by some criminal, but that's beside the point. So, anyhow, I saw Colonel Evans and three days later I got a movement order to go to Albury, to the Albury showgrounds. And the Albury showgrounds was a holding depot where they'd move troops from Colac to Albury. And on the third or fourth day, in marched Colonel Evans and three or four officers whose

08:30 names I remember now, doesn't matter. And they sent for me and said 'oh, you're to be transport sergeant for Mr Milne' and I said 'yes' and I immediately put up three stripes and went into the sergeants' mess which I thought was great. And then we moved from there, the battalion was formed by Colonel Evans, and then we moved from there and marched out to Bonegilla. And so I took over the transport platoon. Most of the fellows in the transport platoon were long range truck drivers so there wasn't a great deal

09:00 to teach, to teach them. We had a couple of trucks and my company commander, a fellow called Major Wool, couldn't drive and didn't know anything about trucks so we used to disappear during the day around Bonegilla and the Hume Dam and have a wonderful time. So, about two weeks, yeah, about two weeks before final leave I was paraded to Colonel Evans and he said 'I know you came here to be with Mr Milne

09:30 but Brigadier Lind won't transfer him from the 2/22nd Battalion to the 2/23rd Battalion. And I know you came to be with him and I don't want to hold you here if you'd like to be with him or go to some other unit'. And by this time I'd settled in and got to know all the boys in the transport platoon and we'd formed, you do form friendships very quickly. And I said 'well no sir, I'm very very happy here, I'll stay here'. So it came

10:00 three, another week before final leave and I was again paraded to Colonel Evans and he said 'You know that Mr Milne can't come here, do you think you can hold down a commission?' And I thought yeah I'm sure I could and I said 'Yes' and he said 'well fill in your A22s and go into Mates in Albury and get yourself a uniform and a 'valeece'. I didn't know what a valise was. So

10:30 I got across to the 2/22nd Battalion, we were camped, another brigade not far away from us, said to George 'come into Mates and help me get this'. So that's where I got the uniform and the valise. So final leave came along and I went down on final leave as a Sergeant Clarke with my officer's uniform in a pack or something and I was staying with the Miles family. Jean, the girl I subsequently, stayed with them. And

11:00 Bernard Evans said 'where will you be on Saturday morning? I'll be at LHQ and I'll let you know if your commission has come through'. So of course on the Saturday morning I get up and put the officer's uniform on. I'm out to impress my girl friend and impress her mother and father. No phone call. Now I've got the uniform on. Now at that time, neither of us were interested in the races, but it was free for servicemen to Flemington racecourse. So we decided to go to the races at Flemington. And I've never spent so much time in the lavatory,

11:30 the men's lavatory there, dodging officers from the battalion, because I hadn't received confirmation that I had my commission. So the final leave came and back to Flinders Street, back to Albury and I put the sergeant's uniform back on and back to the camp. There for about forty eight hours. Colonel Evans, you're to be paraded to Colonel Evans. So I get paraded to Colonel Evans. And he said 'I understand you were masquerading as an

12:00 officer on final leave'. And I said 'well yes sir, you know, I expected you to ring me and you didn't ring and to be quite honest I wanted to impress my girl friend with it all'. And he said 'don't worry I did exactly the same thing'. So I sailed as junior subaltern, I was commissioned, I was the junior, absolute

junior officer of the battalion when we sailed on the Strathmore for the Middle East. Okay?

12:30 It was a great start. Well then we went on, got on, the Strathmore and Carl hadn't, we were sailing down the bay and Jean, my girl, was standing on the North Brighton Pier, so she said she would be there, I couldn't see her and we got half way down the bay and the Adjutant said, called to me and said 'you and Lieutenant Jess are Ship's Messing Officers'. So we did nothing but to report to the chief steward.

13:00 So we reported to this chief steward as ship's messing officers and the chief steward was a delightful man that did everything and had his cabin and he arranged everything and we used to eat with him in his cabin and we ate very well. Anyhow, one day, what happened on the troop ship going over, they used to hoist from the hold 36 gallon kegs of beer, they were big 36 gallon kegs, hoist them

13:30 up, up onto the top deck and of an evening everybody had what subsequently became known as Lady Blameys which were beer bottles cut in half with a wire, it was a half a beer bottle. And when about four o'clock in the afternoon the chief steward sent for Carl Jess and I and said there were two, three 36 gallon kegs hoisted up there just after lunch and they've disappeared.

14:00 So Carl and I started, and we started on the top deck and worked our way down and down and by this time, it must have been about six o'clock at night time when we got right down to the lower decks there were some of my platoon and the rest of the battalion, most of them pretty drunk. And what they'd done, they'd decanted, they'd got this beer down by forming a work party. One fellow, putting on, they told me later on,

14:30 I said please tell me how you did it, the next day, I just want to know. They said we had a working party and we had a corporal and eight men and as we rolled it down the deck and down the gangway we said 'excuse me sir, excuse me' and what had happened when they got down there, so they all could get a drink they decanted, I know it's hard to believe, I can't when I go down there, they'd decanted several of these things into hammocks and the hammocks were full of beer and they were dipping

15:00 their Lady Blameys into this and drinking it. We eventually arrived at Kb [[Qantara?] on the Suez Canal – Oh on the way we stopped at Ceylon and I remember vividly we were allowed to go ashore and this was the first time I'd been overseas and I was so impressed, particularly coming back on the boat, back to the ship in the evening with the, there were the smell of frangipani, and of moon-

15:30 light warm night and we'd been to the Galle Face Hotel and had a look around which was a nice break. From there we sailed up to Suez Canal to Ismailia and got off the, at Qantara, I'm sorry it was Qantara, got off the boat there and went ashore on the, what was then, the Palestine side and they gave us, I remember vividly, the meals on the Strathmore

16:00 were pretty good for everybody. And there the British army gave us a meal, I remember vivid Spinnies Tin Sausages. Then we took the troop train across the Sinai Desert to our camp at Dimra which had been set up by some of the 6th Division who were there ahead of us. And I remember sitting in the carriage and Curly Condon, a great character, who was my batman,

16:30 and we'll hear more about later on. I remember him saying 'sand, sand, sand nothing but bloody sand'. So we settled in at Dimra and were there over Christmas. And I remember New Year's Eve. It was probably the most melancholy and sad night I'd ever had because the previous New Year's Eve with all the boys, half a dozen girls and boys, we all used to go round together in a group, had a treasure hunt

17:00 down at Williamstown, which was, we'd paired off, which was great fun, having to get a spent round from the Williamstown rifle range and a signature of an undertaker. And here was New Year's eve 1941, stuck in Palestine. And I remember wandering off by myself across to the sandhills and being rather sad about it all. However, about three weeks later, because

17:30 I was transport officer, the 6th Division in the meantime had done the first desert push, under Wavell up to, through Bardia and into Tobruk, and they needed trucks. So, my platoon, we picked up eighteen trucks including four ambulances and I was to take them across the Sinai Desert, across the Suez Canal, up through Egypt

18:00 to Alexandria and then follow the 6th Division and hand these trucks over to the 6th Division which was very interesting to follow in the wake of what had been a campaign to see various stores and wrecks and things and what the 6th Division had done at Bardia. And eventually I caught up with the 6th Division in Tobruk and there were thousands, literally tens of thousands

18:30 of Italian prisoners there. And amongst them I found, and we were in a holding camp waiting to go back to Palestine to rejoin our battalion, there was an artist there, and I had a photo, a little colour photograph of Jean and this artist made a pencil copy, which I've got

19:00 upstairs, a huge thing which I've had framed and signed as what ever his name was, prisoner of war. Well to get out of Tobruk, to go back to the battalion we were I think about sixteen or eighteen, I've just forgotten, put on the Ulster Prince, a small ship, I suppose about five thousand tons with two thousand Italian prisoners to take them

19:30 from Tobruk back to Alexandria. And there was myself and my platoon, and we were really a transport

platoon and not very well trained infantrymen in any case. And the Italians could have taken over the boat and taken over us, 'cause it had Greek crew, and sailed to Italy but they didn't. But the diet, they'd been eating a lot of bread in prison camp, and I know it's not a very pleasant thing to say, but down below where they

20:00 were there was literally three inches of vomit, they were all seasick. Eventually we got, well eventually we got to Alexandria and one or two who could speak English all hoped that they would be sent to America and not to India. So back to Alexandria and there, we were, for the first time in my life I was quite surprised, Sergeant Thompson and my platoon was taken away to a transit camp

20:30 once we got off the British transport. So you'll stay at the Cecil Hotel, well I nearly fell over, you know, the Cecil Hotel. So I was placed, went to stay at the Cecil Hotel. I remember having a good hot bath there and I realised how well the British army looked after their troops compared with us. So then we picked up some more trucks and had to drive them back to the ordnance depot from Alexandria where they'd been unloaded from England

21:00 they were British trucks. So we drove back to the unit which was in Palestine. Hadn't been there very long and the whole division, in the meantime the 9th Division was formed in Palestine at that time, from part of what was the 7th Division and they formed the 9th Division and we were to go up to the desert to relieve the 6th Division who had done the first desert push right through. And the

21:30 6th Division were being pulled out to go to Greece. And we were to go up as almost an army of occupation. And up we went. The battalion went in the trucks and of course being in the transport platoon we really travelled in comfort with our own trucks. So we eventually moved up and took over from the 6th Division and

22:00 we got as far as battalion headquarters at Derna and so the 9th Division were spread out right through to Benghazi and El Agheila and the 2/13th Battalion, a magnificent New South Wales battalion, made first contact with Rommel who had landed at this time in Tripoli. And of course we were forced back in what was very famously known as the Benghazi Handicap.

22:30 Well we all helter-skeltered back to Tobruk. And out of Derna we had no transport at all, so what we did in the transport platoon, we grabbed diesel, Fiat diesels, and the boys repaired them and got them going, we got trailers to tow behind them, we grabbed the Derna fire engine and stripped that down and got a trailer to tow behind that. Then we got back to, eventually found our way back to

23:00 Tobruk. We were strafed on the way. We had our first casualty there at the top of the Derna Pass, the CO's batman was killed. Reg Noy, who was the transport corporal and I were, we came back, Sergeant Thompson was wounded but we got back into Tobruk and of course General Morshead was there and said 'here we are and here we

23:30 stay'. Well we were really a completely untrained division compared with the training that the Royal Australian Regiment and the SAS have today, we were really just like a bunch of boy scouts. We had very little training, we had hardly any weapons of any consequence – Lee Enfield rifles. And what happened, we then had, I was

24:00 transport officer for the first three months so I was behind the lines, but the battalion were manning the Italian posts around Tobruk, the concrete posts which they had established. And the battalion in April, had very heavy casualties, they did an attack, the Germans did an attack and the battalion counter-attack had very heavy casualties. And then I was, to my surprise, I was called,

24:30 sent to report to battalion headquarters again and battalion headquarters said to report to Captain Rattray at C Company, you're to take over 14 Platoon in the salient. Well I was completely untrained as an infantry officer, really, some of the troops, what we did I think was really by common sense. Anyhow, I went to take over this platoon and they had a crackerjack sergeant

25:00 called Sergeant Jack McCallum and Sergeant Jack McCallum really carried me for about a month and told me what to do quietly and where to go. We had to patrol every second night and the subaltern, the lieutenant, took out a fighting patrol one night and then the next night the platoon sergeant would take out a reconnaissance patrol. And it was Jack McCallum that told me, you know if you're taking out a fighting patrol

25:30 these are the fellows that you want to take, these are the weapons that you want to take, this is the formation you should adopt with a forward scout and a getaway man and slowly we, slowly I learnt. And finally we were relieved out of Tobruk and came out, I came out ahead of the battalion to be seconded to a commando unit in the Suez Canal at Kibrit for training. Obviously, they realised I needed

26:00 some more training, and this was a training unit. And I came out the destroyer, Havoc, I remember it vividly. A British destroyer at night time. And I've had some good meals in my life, but the greatest meal, the best meal I've ever had in my life, at the wharf at night time, I walked on board the Havoc and a young British seaman saw that I was an officer and said 'I'll take you down to the ward room'.

26:30 I didn't know what the ward room was. No idea. So I was taken down to this little small room with a table and a little settee in the corner and a little room, which I now know what a ward room was. And he said 'can I get you something to eat?' and the rations in Tobruk were appalling, they really were, we

had bully beef and occasionally Maconochie's Stew, the water was brackish and salty, we had kippers in tomato sauce

27:00 the food in Tobruk was, and biscuits, the only thing that kept us going was the ascorbic acid tablets, the vitamin C. So anyhow, back to the ward room and he said to me, 'can I get you something to eat?' And he brought me in a mug of cocoa and a hot buttered toast. That's the greatest meal I've had in my life. Fresh buttered toast and a mug of cocoa. I'm sorry, can we pause for a moment?

27:30 Well I did the school at the Suez Canal and Tobruk was pretty big news in those days and I remember, we did exercises and there were fellows from the Coldstream Guards, a fellow from the New Zealand, a fellow from the 2nd Battalion the Highland Light Infantry, a fellow called Jock Shelberdeen who subsequently

28:00 became a good friend. But what happened, the chief instructor would rather embarrassingly say 'what patrol formation did you adopt in Tobruk, Clarke?' and I'd say so and so and 'what did you do this in Tobruk Clarke' and finally there was a quiet voice at the back of the hall which said 'was there any other fuck up but you Clarke in Tobruk?' and it was Jock Shelberdeen. Finished the course, rejoined the

28:30 battalion. By this time they'd come out of Tobruk and they were back in Palestine, at a camp called, either Kilo 89 or Julis, anyhow one of those. And strangely enough from there I was sent to two schools, one a regimental training officer school for infantry officers and then another tactical school where suddenly

29:00 I learnt in theory all the things that we'd been stumbling along doing in practice. We'd been groping our way along and we managed pretty well as a battalion learning as we went. The battalion was made up of country boys and they're so adaptable and so capable of doing things but again we were, we had no real formal training

29:30 but just learnt as we went along. So those two schools in Palestine really helped me, I didn't know anything about enfilade and defilade fire and what the characteristics of a machine gun were but when you learn all those things it makes it easier to employ them. So we're in Palestine and then Christmas day we had a Christmas day

30:00 in Julis, and it teemed with rain and we had some VADs and nurses up for that particular Christmas day and it was good to see them. Shortly after that we were then sent to, up to Lebanon because there was some thought, I believe at that time, that the Germans would come down through Turkey into Lebanon so we were sent up to Lebanon

30:30 north of Beirut to a town called Tripoli where we lived in the French barracks, because everybody had been in Lebanon from the Romans on. In the meantime the 7th Division had fought, while we were elsewhere, the 7th Division had fought the Vichy French in that particular campaign. So, then

31:00 probably as you know when that campaign was over some of the French elected to go back to France and some elected to stay with the allies. That's where Roden Cutler got his VC as an artilleryman. So we were then in the French barracks in Tripoli and we did a bit more training there. And there was a very good little

31:30 Red Cross unit run by some of the young ladies of Tripoli, I think they were a mixture of Armenian and French and Arab and Gerry Lukey said to me there's a very nice little girl down there called Aruvniaz Drooney, her name's Cologne but I've, and I've been seeing a bit of her not to take her out or anything but to just see

32:00 and he said, I'll take you down, because I'm doing a school and you might like to meet her. So I went down and met this little girl. She must have been seventeen or eighteen. And she was a quite an attractive little girl and then I said, they used to have movies in Tripoli which started at nine o'clock, talkies which started at nine o'clock with one main an American feature, so I said to her would you like to come to the movies with me and she said

32:30 'yes, yes I would like to do that, I'll ask my mother' and eventually I saw her later and she said 'yes my mother said it's okay'. And so stupid me in the mess saying I'm the first fellow to take a local girl out you know, so when I went to pick up Cologne, I had said about ten to nine, quarter to nine, are you ready and she said yes. She spoke very little English and I spoke very little French but eventually my French improved and her English improved. So

33:00 I stood up to go and she stood up to go and her father stood up to go and her mother stood up to go and her two sisters got up to go and her brother, Galbeesh, got up to go and I walk in with the whole of the family. So you could imagine what happened the next night back at the mess when I've been boasting how I was going to take this girl out, and I had to take the whole of the family. So from there we went up and we dug in north of

33:30 Tripoli building a defensive line with Arab labour and I picked up a bit of Arabic which was helpful, been helpful recently with a chemist who is Arab, that's beside the point. And then Rommel broke through to the outskirts of Alamein and we were told,

34:00 with about eight hours' notice, the whole battalion, the whole division to move back to Egypt. So we

were all loaded into big eight-ton trucks and they said, they'd taken off the wombat sign on the side of the truck, and don't wear your digger's hats, which was stupid of course because we came down, right down through Lebanon, right down through Palestine, as it was then and of course

34:30 all the little Arab boys and girls knew exactly who we were. We got south of Beersheba and we needed a hot meal, and I remember this vividly. Somebody had loaded the Padre's piano on the back of one of the eight-ton trucks, so the cooks took it and we cooked a meal with the chopped up, made a hot stew with the chopped up padre's piano. We then moved to down across

35:00 the Sinai across the Suez Canal up into Cairo where we dug in for a day then up to Alexandria and moved west of Alexandria behind the line, and by this time it's July, early July and then we moved up and relieved the South Africans and the Kiwis. We relieved the South Africans, it was the South Africans

35:30 and the Kiwis who had really stopped Rommel, who also by this stage had almost run out of supplies himself. So we moved into the line and the first thing I was involved in was a jock column called Day Force which was made up of some British light tanks, a battery

36:00 of Australian Artillery, I won't mention which regiment they're from yet, and a battery of the Royal Horse Artillery, my platoon, and by this time I think I know what I'm about as a platoon commander, and four carriers under my command. Well we burst out, right out at dawn and we go, I suppose a thousand more yards and run

36:30 into an Italian division and we take about, I think at that stage, about eleven hundred prisoners and find an ambulance and then we stopped and we started to be shelled and I remember vividly the command being given out to the artillery, 'action front', and I was just

37:00 so impressed. The Royal Horse Artillery had unlimbered their guns and were down and firing while the Australian battery was still milling around. And it's so true, again of this, although we have different attitudes to discipline, the drill, drill, drill that went on in the British army was

37:30 absolutely amazing. I can jump back to the retreat from Tobruk where again I saw this with the Northumberland Fusiliers who were with us right through Tobruk. There is a tarred road, and as we were coming back there is a young English subaltern with a silk scarf round his neck and a little poodle dog in his arm, on the right hand side of the road, just behind him he's got two machine guns and on the left hand side of the road

38:00 he's got another two machine guns. And he's saying 'don't be frightened, don't be frightened. No. 1's action, up a thousand yards, fire, stop'. And here he is standing in the middle of the road and we're all crouching down at the side of the road. But when the Northumberland Fusiliers came down the truck, they were out of the truck, down to the side of the road, guns down, ready to fire. Just the drill, drill, drill, the training, the training that we never

38:30 had. So where was I, back to Tobruk, back to Alamein. That was the first thing that did and then the next thing was as a platoon commander we had to attack a feature called Point 24 which I suppose back at quarters, or army headquarters on the map looked like a feature, but it was just a mound of sand

39:00 and maybe a maximum of about six feet high, of no great tactical significance whatsoever. And on the 15th July, our sister battalion, the 2/24th Battalion had gone out there and attacked it and been forced off because the Germans had zeroed in with their artillery right on it. The next day we were to attack it and hold it,

39:30 that was C Company of the 2/23rd Battalion. The 2nd B Company under Keith Neuendorf, where once we'd held it, was to go through it and hold a feature of about five hundred yards in front. Well we went through what was known as a railway cutting and took a lot of prisoners, I'd say about forty or fifty, we got onto the feature and there were some of the dead from the 2/24th Battalion the day before

40:00 and I remember looking at a ten pounder tank gun and seeing a gunner sitting there and there was a piece taken out of the side of him like it had been carved out with a knife, just half of him had been, he was sitting there with half his torso completely gone, I remember that vividly. Anyhow, the B Company

Tape 2

00:41 So we get to Point 24. The B Company withdraw back through us then we get the instruction that we're to withdraw because we're just being shelled, the German artillery had zeroed right in on us and it was just pointless

01:00 we were stuck out there, well out in front of what was then our front line and we were being shelled and it was Bernard Evans who told us to withdraw and we withdrew back through the railway cutting up to towards the Hill of Jesus, Point 33 which was known as that, Hill of Jesus, where the battalion headquarters were.

01:30 And Stumpy Strickland, the corporal, on the way up, I could, you know, just because you had a

commission you had to be first in and you had to be last out, it was not being brave or anything, it was just the thing to do. If you took the commission you took the advantages and disadvantages with it. And I saw Stumpy about 100 yards to the left get hit as we were being shelled, mortared coming out

02:00 and I was just about to make by way across to him and two fellows from the platoon, I didn't know who they were at that particular time, run across to him, I could see them, they picked him up and then carried him up the slope, because the battalion was camped just over the ridge just behind the Hill of Jesus. So that was the 16th July, then

02:30 I did a few patrols with Toby Tobin and some of the boys probing to where the Germans were. Then we had casualties and I was then posted as second in command of B Company, so I had to leave 14 Platoon, which was rather sad, and go to be second in command of B Company of the 2/23rd Battalion.

03:00 So on 22nd July the battalion and other, the 48th Battalion from our brigade, were told to do an attack, and we went, the whole battalion went in, three companies went what I might say, due east, and my company went east, north east, and when I think about it, the stupidity of it. We had no

03:30 artillery support, we had no tank support. The start line was a five o'clock in the morning. We had to attack across, about a thousand to fifteen hundred yards of just flat, undulating sandy country with no protection whatsoever. What the higher authorities sought to achieve, I have no idea. A, B and C Companies on our left

04:00 were cut to pieces, they really were. My company, I was second in command with the rear platoon and a runner came to me and said Captain McCoy wants you to come forward. I walked forward and got along side Alister, Alister said 'oh my' and dropped dead at my feet. He took a burst right down the side, I took a burst in the

04:30 leg, in the ankle and dropped too. I looked at Alistair and he was completely dead, and we were absolutely pinned down in this flat country without any support. So we were there for most of the day and Curly Condon was able, he'd been slightly wounded in the

05:00 head. He was my runner. And I said 'Curly, if you can crawl out like a snake, there's a derelict tank over there.' In the meantime, some of the, we were reinforced that night by some young boys who reinforced, never got to know them, they were reinforcements, they were just pushed out to platoon with no well train, quite a few of them got killed. That was their first and only action. And Curly crawled across behind this tank

05:30 got back to battalion headquarters and in the meantime I'd taken a compass bearing on the Hill of Jesus and on the railway cutting and given it to him to take back to battalion headquarters which he did and of course the 2/7th Field Regiment who were supporting us were marvellous, they knew exactly where we were from the compass bearings and they sent over smoke. One or two of the boys, I said stay down, stay down, and some of the boys

06:00 said it's gas. I said it's not gas it's smoke and I then dragged, well as best I could, I hopped around and said those of you who can get out, get out now. And then some of them managed to get out, about forty or fifty of them. And the rest of us lay there all day. I made the mistake of not carrying a water bottle in with me and I found a small tin in a slight depression where I lay all day and it was

06:30 German rations of sardines, and foolishly I opened it and ate it, salty sardines, and I was very thirsty. Anyhow, we were picked up by a patrol that came out later, cooks and reservists and some of the boys that had gone out when the smoke was over and we were carried back to battalion headquarters, to the regimental post. But in the meantime, before

07:06 on the 22nd July, I took a patrol out that night to see what we were going to move into and got out there, I was with B Company and by this time, I've forgotten who was with me, and when I came back, I kept Curly Condon with me and the batman wherever I went and when I got back he said 'what's out there boss' and I said 'oh just I-tyes we'll walk over' cause once you got close to the Italians with a bayonet

07:30 they fired on you but once you got close to them, the closer you are to the enemy, the safer you are. And once you got close with a bayonet, they were very happy to give up. So I said 'oh just I-tyes, we'll walk over and just dig in'. That was about three o'clock in the morning, about four o'clock in the morning the Italians were relieved by 91st [90th] German Light Division. So the scene – I'm wounded and eventually evacuated back through casualty clearing stations and eventually a hospital train

08:00 out to 2/6th Australian General Hospital, and I'm lying there and in walked Curly Condon and sat on the end of the bed and jarred the leg and he looked at me and said 'nothing to worry about boss we're just going to walk over and dig in'. And we was gunned down like bloody peas. So that really, the wound became infected and they had to incise it

08:30 and I never got back, I never got back to the battalion for the big final Alamein breakthrough, Alamein campaign. And selfishly, I think if I had, I wouldn't have lived because again all the company commanders were either killed or in the battalion in the final Alamein

09:00 breakthrough. The only two people in the battalion, the only two officers that went through the Alamein campaign, were Bill Vines the adjutant and Bernard Evans. And Bernard Evans was magnificently courageous all the time, I wouldn't say he was the greatest tactician but a great leader and set a great example. So, I regretted not

09:30 going back, but on reflection I think if I had gone back I wouldn't be here today. An interesting asides – Bill Vines and I grew up together. I was best man at his wedding and Judy's godfather and we joined the battalion. He came as a reinforcement later and subsequently we both worked together in the International Wool Secretariat. And I found a book on Alamein which I gave

10:00 to him, to Bill. And the flyleaf said 'I rather fancy I missed the best part'. I saw him about, we see each other regularly now, he is pretty frail, and I saw him about six months ago and he showed me this book and said 'do you remember giving this to me' and I said 'yeah, I remember giving that to you in about '63 or '64' and he said

10:30 'my next door neighbour is a Yugoslav, he was pottering around in St Vincent's shop amongst the books, he found this book about Alamein and knew I'd been there and gave it to me, and I've no idea how I lost it, it was something I would never lose', but what a coincidence for the book to go all the way round. Anyhow, I rejoined the battalion. There was an interesting story about

11:00 Bill, our Adjutant, he got jaundice and was at the 2/6th AGH and will jaundice your urine, of course is brown, and we knew the battalion was coming home, so what Bill did, he got one of the other boys in the ward who wasn't, didn't have, jaundice to give him a beer bottle of his urine so Bill blended, slowly blended, his mate's urine

11:30 with his and he got it pretty clear and he was able to come out on that. We came home on the New Amsterdam back to Australian, did a sort of march through Melbourne. Oh, when we arrived off the New Amsterdam at Princes Pier in Melbourne we got on a troop train to go

12:00 up to Seymour, to there to hand in our rifles and get food coupons and leave passes. And when we got to Seymour station we expected trucks to take us out to the old Seymour camp and the CO had got off the, Colonel Wall who was killed later, was allowed to leave and go direct, so Bill

12:30 Vines and I were the two senior people. I remember vividly. The battalion by this time knew what it was about. It had an esprit de corps and a confidence, most of the NCOs and officers had come up through the ranks. We never had any discipline problems. By this time we'd become pretty sophisticated in what we were about, in training and patrolling and doing things, unlike in the early days

13:00 in Tobruk. We arrived at Seymour station and Bill Vines and I got out, he was the adjutant, and an RTO came rushing up and said 'no, nobody's to get out of the train'. I remember Bill saying 'nobody will until we tell them to'. Anyhow, where are the trucks, there are no trucks. So we then had to march out to Seymour camp. And I've forgotten the old VC who was in charge of the camp. We had to hand in our rifles, get food coupons and rail warrants and

13:30 things and we arrived there at eleven o'clock at night and he said 'well we'll order you a train to take you back to this city for you the day after tomorrow' and I remember Bill saying 'well order one for three o'clock tomorrow afternoon'. And again the discipline within the battalion, rail warrants and coupons were handed out to company commanders who were given to platoon commanders who were given to corporals, it just naturally, the thing was without any

14:00 fuss or bother. And we caught a three o'clock train back to the unit. Had final leave, wanted to get married, but that had to wait. That's another story. And then back in the troop train, from Seymour, we took a troop train up to the Atherton

14:30 Tablelands which was interesting, from Seymour to Cains, in a troop train, sitting facing each other with no toilets, no bunks or beds or anything. When the train stopped well out in the bush it was quite interesting to see how four or five hundred fellows fertilised the side of the railway tracks. We were fed by the County Women's Associations at the various stations. The thing that made us

15:00 mad was that the navy always went first and we had to take our dixies, even officers carried dixies, but the navy were given plates which was a bit of a joke. Up onto the Tablelands to do jungle training. We arrived on the Tablelands, the battalion, to a camp called Kairi, which was appalling, it really was appalling. There were some tents put up there, there were no facilities and, you know, for troops I think that

15:30 had done some Tobruk and had done Alamein, and we were a great division, were treated, I felt like second class citizens by either the Australian authorities or somebody. It was just I thought so unfair. Anyhow we settled in and started to try and get a vegetable garden going and tidy up the camp and from there I was seconded to Headquarters, New Guinea Force

16:00 because the Lae landing was in progress and I was just a young company commander by this time. A captain and Neil Gilmour, dear old Neil, he died a few .., fantastic second in command. I was sent, flew to Head Quarters New Guinea Force and what I had to do there, they were planning the Lae landing and they had a big planning room with a big sand table

16:30 model of the Lae airstrip and the coastline there. And what I had to do was put on the various gear that you would take for an amphibious landing. You know, the pack on the back and a tin helmet and the rifle and so forth. And I'm not being, I am modest about this, I continually objected to them wearing tin hats. I said 'what's the point in wearing a tin hat, it's heavy, it's uncomfortable'.

17:00 In a landing that the planners insisted we did, and I'd go out with my rifle and my pack. So anyhow, the planning was done for the Lae landing. I rejoined the battalion, we did the Lae landing and fought our way from Red Beach. As we hit Red Beach there were three bombers, Japanese bombers, took off from the Lae airstrip, hit two of our barges,

17:30 wiped out Colonel Wall, our CO, killed him, killed Don Company commander, I should think of his name in a minute, and about thirty troops on his particular barge. So Bill Vines took over the command of the battalion for the next eight or ten hours until, Wally Brown who was a major then

18:00 assumed command. Anyhow, we then moved along through the jungle towards the Lae airstrip and in the meantime, the 7th Division had landed at Nadzab where the American paratroopers went in and cleared a kunai, on old kunai landing strip at Nabzab and the 7th Division landed there. And what was interesting about the 7th Division, there was one battery, and you may hear about it,

18:30 one of the boys may tell you about it, one battery of one of the field regiments of the 7th division had never done a parachute jump in their lives. They all volunteered to put on parachutes in that battery. I hope you run across it sometime because it's a great story. And they landed there. So what happened, they came down from Nadzab just north of Lae about twenty miles down. And they got into Lae half a day before we did. And there's the famous signal the 7th Division

19:00 sending a signal to the 9th Division as we were moving along the coastline 'would we please stop shelling Lae airstrip because they'd already captured it'. I remember vividly, Bill Vines and I sleeping in pouring rain on a tin, a sheet of corrugated iron, off the mud, sleeping together side by side right through that. Lae was a mess, there

19:30 was evidence where the Japanese had had their comfort women. There were places there with lip stick and condoms and things around about. It was there that I received advice that I was selected to do the staff school at Canberra. So I decided, that I would, to get back to – I'm sorry. Yeah Canberra, the Royal Military College.

20:00 And to get back to Moresby, to get a ship or something from Moresby down to Cairns to get down to Canberra I could either take a barge from Lae round to Billum Bay or I could walk up the twenty miles up the track to the Nadzab airstrip where the 7th Division had concentrated. They were then fighting up the Ramu Valley and there were American planes coming and going

20:30 from Nadzab back to Moresby and in New Guinea you just had to present yourself at an airfield, and anybody, got a seat? Yeah hop on board. And I knew I could get a flight back to Moresby. And this is a story against myself. I reported to brigade major and said I'm going to walk up to

21:00 Nadzab and he said 'well I think you're foolish because there could be a few Japanese we haven't mopped up, stragglers round about that'. But I was anxious to get back. So I set off at about eight o'clock in the morning and thought I'd get there by late afternoon. I was 24, 25, 26 and fairly fit. I'm going up the track, this narrow track right in front and there was a Japanese with a

21:30 rifle darts across the track in front of me. And again this is a story against myself. So I sidle up the edge of the track and work my way up quietly, quietly and I see him off the track behind a fallen log, a fairly big fallen log and he pops his head up and I've got a Smith & Webley [Wesson] pistol so I take a shot at him and I miss and then I edge around so I can take a better shot at him

22:00 and I take a shot and it misfired, a round went, it's a bad round and it doesn't fire so I work my way around further and with the third shot I get him, I hit him in the chest and kill him. And then I go across to him, and what does a Japanese with a rifle – he was a poor sick emaciated Japanese that's been left behind and holding himself up with his staff to get along. So anyhow, I thought this is a bit, I've got this Smith & Webley [Wesson],

22:30 I've got a couple of spent rounds. If I keep going I might run into two or three of them and I'm not that bloody brave, I think I might go back. So I walk back and I walk back into Lae and I remember vividly, Bill Mollard of the 2/24th Battalion was sitting on a box of ammunition and he looked at me and said 'what did you come back for, you probably ran into a poor old Japanese' and I said 'yeah, that's exactly what happened.' But fortunately, that afternoon, brigade headquarters

23:00 were sending a Jeep with some messages, or dispatches through with two armed fellows, I got a ride back to Nadzab and then I flew to Moresby. When I got to Moresby I ran into Arthur Downs who has since died. And Arthur said – I said 'I've been selected to staff school' and he said 'so have I'. He said 'are you prepared to take a

23:30 risk' and I said 'what risk do you mean' and he said 'well they've given us I think four to five weeks to get to the staff school by sea to Cairns and then by train to Rockhampton and then by train to Brisbane and so forth, but I'm prepared to type a letter on New Guinea Head Quarters note paper saying this officer is carrying

24:00 dispatches and is to be provided with priority air transport, signed Brigadier Thompson, BGS Head Quarters, New Guinea Force. I'll type it if you sign his signature'. So I did. And you're the only ones I've ever told this story to. So I report down to Moresby to the RTO there and they look at it. So I fly out the next day on a DC-3. And on the DC-3

24:30 piloting was a fellow George Yelkins who I used to know in Melbourne. So we land at Cairns and then from, then it goes down to Rockhampton I think, overnight. So I produce this letter to the RTO there and the RTO says 'it's a bit unusual for a captain' and I said 'well you know I'm carrying these special dispatches to Land Head Quarters', and he said 'all right I'll put you on the flying boat

25:00 but I'll need this letter'. Thank God there were no Xerox or copying machines in those days. So I said 'well I might need this when I get to Melbourne'. So I was put on a Sandringham flying boat. And there were brigadiers and major-generals and me on this flying boat. And I just sat quietly in the corner. And we fly all the way down to Sydney. Get to Sydney, over night in Sydney where I'd checked into a Sydney hotel and I got a flight down to Melbourne

25:30 the next day on ANA. In the meantime – this is the personal part – in the meantime I'd written to Jean and said 'the next time I get leave lets get married' and previously she'd said yes. So by this time I've got four weeks before the school starts. So we get married. Her people were living in Punt Road, South Yarra, in a unit

26:00 and we walk up to the corner of Punt Road and Toorak Road and catch the tram to the Scots Church and get married and I walk out the church door and standing outside is Harry Orr. Harry Orr was badly wounded on 22nd July and Harry Orr and I had been quite close friends. He had been badly wounded on 22nd July at Alamein, he had been a prisoner of war and been repatriated because of his wounds. So I leave my bride

26:30 on the steps of Scots Church to spend some time with, see Harry, I'm so excited to see him. Anyhow, he came to the wedding reception, that's another story. So we managed to get this leave and managed to get a trip down to Wrestpoint for the honeymoon and I went down with malaria on the third day so that put paid to that. So anyhow we had a bit of time together

27:00 then. Back up to Canberra to do the staff school. Jean, along with many other wives hopped the border, you know you weren't allowed to go, interstate travel. And we were allowed to see, and we rented a house, again with Arthur Downs who had also forged Brigadier Thompson's signature for air priority transport. They can't court-martial me now, thank God. We rented a house

27:30 there and were able to see the girls weekends. Finished the staff school and I was determined because it was an economic impossibility for me to go to university from Melbourne High School because of the Depression, I was determined I was going to work hard and do well because I think there were only, of the thirty there, there were only four or five of us who didn't have

28:00 degrees of some kind. For that particular course, it was interesting, names were submitted, but General Blaimey, I found out later, made the selection. He said any future staff officers, as far as he was concerned, would have had to have had line or regimental experience. And all the fellows there, I can mention Smedgely and others had all had line

28:30 experience. Anyhow, I finished I think second on the course and I nearly fell over, I was a captain, I nearly fell over when they called me and said your posting is to be brigade major at the 17th Brigade. Well the 17th Brigade was part of 6th Division. So back to Melbourne for a few days and I called in to see the Military Secretary and he said 'well

29:00 your temporary rank as a major will come through but I don't you to arrive at brigade headquarters as a captain if you're going to be brigade major, put your crown up now. Which I did and reported to brigade headquarters. Subsequently, a rather unpleasant fellow who I'd known in civil life was on was on

29:30 div. headquarters and reported the fact that I was not a substantive major because they hadn't come through in part two orders and I was paraded to John Bishop and I told him what had happened. I said 'the Mil. Sec. told me to do this', and he said 'well that's fine. Three days later my substantive rank came through from my own battalion. Because when you join a battalion you're with that battalion for life and you move up the regimental

30:00 seniority list. I reported to 17th Brigade and Brigadier Murray Moten was the brigade commander and I settled in fairly well. I was doing something one day and I remember he said to me 'a little less of the staff school procedure please, Major'. I got a bit offended

30:30 by this. And then later on he said 'I want to do a brigade exercise, a bridge in advance, a brigade in attack. Will you write the exercise.' Well it was easy, honestly it was easy to do this, because after the staff school, which was magnificent training. And I looked at what I'd written several years later and I couldn't believe that I'd written it. But at the time, because you were fresh out of staff school, which was magnificent training I read it.

31:00 I never had any more problems with the brigadier then. So the final thing was, the brigade went on leave and I think that I might have mentioned that Johnny McCallum came through and I was able to

send him back. So I'm there alone in camp on the Tablelands and 6th Division are to relieve the American division, I've forgotten its number

31:30 now, who had captured the Aitape airstrip and it had formed a perimeter around the Aitape airstrip as MacArthur was moving north, and the 6th Division were to relieve them while they moved on. And I flew up in a DC-3 with the advance party. There was myself, Jack Marsden, the

32:00 IO from my brigade headquarters, Jackie Stevens, Major General Jack Stevens, the commander of the 6th Division, his senior medical officer and somebody else in this DC-3. I remember Jackie Stevenson had a wonderful, he was a wonderful divisional commander, I remember him sitting in a deck chair, in a collapsible canvas chair in this DC-3, which didn't have seats, eating custard with a spoon

32:30 out of a jug because he had an ulcer. Anyhow, we arrive in Aitape and I'm able, with the advance party there, to start getting some facilities ready for the arrival of the brigade. And I decided to establish things and very shortly afterwards

33:00 one of the battalion padres arrived, a CofE padre, he said 'would it be possible to build a small chapel' so I got some native labour through ANGAU and the engineers and they built a small chapel. A very nice altar with a big white parachute behind it and a cross and so forth. And they took me down to see it, and I'm Protestant, not that it matters what you are. And I had a look at it and

33:30 there was a confessional and I said to this CofE padre, I said 'I thought this was to be.. ' and he said 'oh, no, this is for Paddy McGuiness, the Irish priest, who was going to use it also'. That was one of the nice things about then. Jumping even further ahead, when we got to New Guinea, both the CofE padre and Paddy would change, if anybody was killed, one was with the 2/5th and the other was with the 2/7th, and if a boy

34:00 in the 2/5th was killed, where Paddy wasn't, he was Protestant, Paddy would write a letter and say 'your son received a Christian burial, the Reverend so-and-so'. And what they used to do, they used to change digs every now and then, because you couldn't more around – I'll come to that later on – you couldn't move around, you had to, it was like patrolling, you had scattered pockets here and there was no fixed line. And I remember when we were in

34:39 – later on in Africa, and I'm jumping ahead – as brigade major I could only authorise the people, because at the airstrip there, to fly in, otherwise it was a ten day march. And Paddy was evacuated, sick, and he had to walk, and the only way to get in was in this little Auster aircraft which brought in and took out wounded, it had been converted, and I got a signal from him, 'permission to use air transport to fly in otherwise I'll join the Salvos'.

35:00 So anyhow, then the brigade arrived and we moved inland. My brigade, 17th Brigade, moved inland into the Torricelli Mountains and the other two brigades moved along the coast towards Wewak and we fought our way right along the Torricelli Mountains in the

35:30 centre of New Guinea and eventually got to a place called Maprick which had been a station for patrol officers before the war and south of it was Asimbi. It had a small strip there which you could land a Tiger Moth. And I remember General Blamey flying in to see us in this Tiger Moth, which I thought was good of him.

36:00 And he came up to brigade headquarters and gave the briefing of what the brigade was doing. And then we subsequently found south of that Asimbi strip which was cleared with native labour, which was called Hayfield, after David Hay, one of the company commanders of the 2/7th Battalion whose company had captured it. And I named it Hay-

36:30 field, which is one of the lucky things you can do as brigade major, and it is still known as Hayfield today. So that's about the only fame I can talk.. So then we moved on to Yamall and I'd been down carrying malaria, I'd had a lot of malaria and I'd stayed on duty but finally, you know, I'd really had it and I was evacuated

37:00 just after VP day with malaria. In the meantime General Yoshihara, the second command to General Adachi of the Japanese 18th Army. General Adachi had hung himself in Rabaul, said he wouldn't return. But General Yoshihara marched into headquarters and surrendered. Then I was evacuated with malarial debility

37:30 and came out on the stretcher back to Australia, back to Royal Park and was discharged. After the war I took an appointment in Japan and a long story – I was interviewed by a Japanese magazine and amongst other things, I said I had served in New Guinea and I received a phone call from a man called Mieda, not directly but through my secretary, you never did anything direct in Japan.

38:00 He'd like to meet me. So I agreed. We met at the Mitsui Club, Mitsui Bussan, that's the trading company, he was managing director. And he said 'we'll have lunch at the Mitsui Club' which was a magnificent club for executives and then he said 'there are some other men, would you like to meet them' and I said 'yes'. Well the first thing I said to Mieda-san, I said well the first thing, by this time my Japanese is pretty good, 'we're both

38:30 bad soldiers because we didn't kill each other'. But then it was interesting, he said well it will be

interesting, our next meeting, we meet every three to four months, General Yoshyhara from Odawara is coming up so I meet him again in Japan. But the whole New Guinea campaign of the 6th Division and the subsequent campaigns of the 9th Division at Tarakan and the 7th Division at

39:00 Balikpapan were completely unnecessary. And all the divisions, the militia divisions who were on Bougainville and all the boys that were killed, I know I'd left the battalion, being posted… But two boys who had been original members of our battalion the 2/23rd had gone right through Tobruk, right through Alamein, right through the Lae landing, two weeks before the war ended were killed in Tarakan.

39:30 Bill Vines stayed with the battalion, my life-long mate. But they were completely unnecessary wars. The Japanese were self-contained prisoners. They were cut off from food. Even the ones we were fighting in New Guinea, they were fanatical, but they were cut off from food, they were living off native gardens, they were subject to true cannibalism.

40:00 We never took, the war in the desert was a chivalrous war it really was a chivalrous war but in New Guinea we just never took any prisoners, even the wounded, any wounded Japanese, you just stood up and put a bullet through their head because if you got close to them they'd pull a grenade out. But I, time and time again we talk about how unnecessary

40:30 the final campaigns were and certainly good boys were killed so unnecessarily. I think that just about wraps me up.

Tape 3

00:32 **Mr. Clarke, I was wondering if you could tell me what you knew about World War I, what you had heard about World War I growing up.**

I knew very little about World War I. It had been over about 25 years I think. The only thing I knew, in the oil company, at that stage there were half a dozen

01:00 men who had served, Doug McInlay, Neville Beach, Robbie Robinson, I remember their names, they were men in their forties and fifties, and who were all first world war returned diggers. But I knew little about Passchendaele or the Somme or Hamel Wood and I wasn't particularly interested which I'm ashamed to say. Jumping ahead, I remember

01:30 dictating a letter many years after the war to my secretary and mentioned the word Tobruk and she said 'what's that' and I was a bit unset because she didn't know about it. Jumping even further ahead, I'm not annoyed that people don't know sixty years not twenty five, who don't know about Alamein and the Kokoda Trail. Although there's been more publicity because of television than there was in our day. There were no, just, even

02:00 early radio. So no, I didn't know a great deal about the first world war. I knew Jean's uncle, Uncle Jack Rohan had a Military Cross, and that interested me because when we used to go down to his place, Jack Rohan and Walter Lindrum, Walter Lindrum the billiard play, used to go round the country towns of Victoria

02:30 giving exhibitions to raise money for the Children's Hospital, and I remember seeing at Jack Roan's on the piano, of a photo of a very lovely young girl and written underneath it was 'to a very naughty patient from his very good nurse, Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon'. Which of course is the Queen Mum. And he was wounded, Jack Roan was wounded and decorated

03:00 and when I was down at the [Australian] War Museum [Memorial], which I go to occasionally, I went to the research section and asked can I see his citation. And I nearly fell over when they produced a folder in 1918, there it was originally written with his citation. So to answer your question, no I didn't know a great deal about the first world war. These men were

03:30 very kind and very helpful. But no I didn't know a great deal about the first world war at all. I'd heard about Gallipoli but to my shame I think my generation didn't read too much about what had happened at Gallipoli, learnt more about Gallipoli in the last, you know, twenty years than I knew even before the war.

Did the veterans talk

04:00 **about their war experiences at all?**

Some of them did. Robbie Robinson, I remember, I was fascinated, stayed on after 1918 and was one of the Australians who went to Russia to help the White Russians. He talked about it, what it was like. But none of the

04:30 others did. Reg Purser, who was my superintendent down at the oil company, he didn't talk about it but he married an English girl, lovely, Mrs Purser. No, to answer your question, I wasn't particularly

interested I'm ashamed to say, and I didn't hear much about it.

When you joined the militia what were you expectations, we you expecting to ever go to war?

05:00 Yes. This was at the time of the Maginot Line and the Siegfried Line, before hostilities started. I was a member of a group called Power House in Melbourne, which originated, Lord Somers, the then governor of Victoria started a camp down at Bowlarring [?] in which half of

05:30 the boys were from public schools and half of them were apprentices and non public schools to mix up. And from there they had a club house at Albert Park on the lake there where there was rowing and rugby and a Saturday night dance for a shilling and no drinks, just orange juice. And all the boys from Power House decided

06:00 in those days you went around in groups. There was no real pairing off. I'm talking about Jean of course, that was, finally just before the war started I realised that of all the girls she was rather special. We went round in groups, there was no pairing off, and everybody knew each other at Power House and we joined,

06:30 I think it must have been '39 or even earlier, bit vague, the 14th Battalion which had a drill hall in Punt Road, South Yarra. And Bill Vines and I joined that and Frank Hiddlestone and Lindsay Orr, both who were prisoners of war with the Japanese, and it was from there that Huff persuaded Bill and I to go to the Mark VI light tanks. Yes,

07:00 I rather expected, in the back of my mind, that something would eventually happen. And it did happen when Paris fell when I was a young oil company representative in Shepparton and I came down to Melbourne to join up. I thought I'd like to join the air force which seemed a bit glamorous but somebody told me that you need to have

07:30 your Leaving certificate and I only had by Intermediate certificate, and somebody else said they put you in a chair and spin you round and round and round to see if you can – and I thought to myself I'm not going to apply for the air force because if I don't get in there's a shame and a disgrace of being rejected so I'll stick with the army.

08:00 That's why Bill Vines and I walked into the town hall and got ready to take the oath and said 'we just need a week to clean a few things up we'll come back in a week's time'. In the meantime, Bill had been married, he married early, and Billie, his wife was pregnant and he said to me at the eleventh hour ' I'm sorry, I'll just have to let you go on alone, I just

08:30 feel I can't leave Billie pregnant'. Which he did subsequently which I can't understand anybody leaving a pregnant girl, I just think I wouldn't have the courage to do that. But he got commissioned before he left Australia, worked it so he could become a reinforcement officer to our battalion. That's where he caught up with me.

09:00 **Given your experience in the army do you think you would have made a good airman if you had applied for the air force and gotten in?**

Well I can answer that question – I don't think so because five or six years ago and friend of mine said 'would you

09:30 like to come flying with me down at Moorabbin'. And the friend was Peter Gibbs. Peter Gibbs and I played tennis together. Peter Gibbs was probably the most highly decorated airman from the second world war. He was flying as a young man with Holyman [Holyman's] Airways, joined the air force, he was the only survivor from his squadron, I've forgotten what they were, in Malaysia because he could

10:00 fly in the clouds and instrument flying. Very interesting story and he's worth talking to in my opinion. And he said, we went down to Moorabbin and he took me flying in this little light aircraft and gave me the controls and I've never been so terrified in my life. So to answer your question, I don't know. But two of my friends did join the air force, most unlikely characters and both flew

10:30 Spitfires and both came through, Ted Oakley and Lionel Garnsworthy, one of the mob that we used to go round with, another two were prisoners with the Japanese. But no, the answer your question, in the light of what happened later, maybe, I don't know, I don't think so. But I was happy to be a, George Milnes platoon sergeant.

Before Paris fell

11:00 **to the Germans, what did you know about Hitler and what was going on in Europe?**

Very little. Very little. Very little about Hitler. The Germans were very aggressive. The Germans had moved into Poland and I remember Robert Gordon Menzies saying 'it's my melancholy

11:30 duty to inform you as of a consequence…' It was the Germans that moved into Poland, Czechoslovakia then Poland. That was a bit disturbing. It seemed that war would be inevitable. And then there was the phoney war for nearly twelve months with the Maginot Line and the Siegfried Line. Hitler, as an individual, didn't,

12:00 in my, maybe others knew about him but I didn't know much about him. I'd heard about him but it was the 'Germans' that were the people that were there. And when Paris fell, we were part of the British Empire, England was the mother country, you grew up saluting the Union Jack

12:30 in the school yard and as part of the British Empire, when England went to war you felt well we had an obligation to go to war because in my day, my mother and father and their friends, if they were going back to England, although they were third or fourth or fifth generation Australian going on a P&O ship they'd say 'oh, we're going home'. And everybody knew what they meant. They were going

13:00 home. It wasn't home at all but that's how it was referred to. So that and the fact that there was a sense of adventure, there was also the fact the everybody else was joining up and you knew you would be branded a coward if you didn't join up, and that was quite, in my judgment, in my case, a fairly big motivation,

13:30 it wasn't so much the sense of adventure, but not wanting the eyes of some of the boys and girls, the boys that had joined up and the girls that we knew in our group, of not going, staying behind when quite a few of them had already joined up. And the 6th Division, the year before, I didn't know any of the boys in the 6th Division but the 6th Division the year before had gone off, about a

14:00 year before, we'd started a year later and had done the first desert push. So does that really answer the question? It's a bit difficult to remember. I think it was a combination too, not so much a sense of adventure, part of the British Empire, the Mother Country's in problem, I don't want to be branded a coward and stay home, because I always remember my mother, my father wasn't a serviceman, didn't serve

14:30 and I won't dwell on that, I wondered why later, but I always remember one thing my mother said to me even before the war, war was just breaking out and as an aside, if you wrote the specification for the world's best mother, I had her, and I think the thing my mother said to me 'a mother would rather have

15:00 a dead hero than a live coward'. And it always stuck in my memory and I didn't want to let her down because I just adored her.

Did you write often – did you communicate with your mother while you were away?

Yes. Yeah, I wrote to, that was one of the problems in the end, the letters. Aunt in a wheelchair, Nancy Ferguson, a

15:30 14 year old girl, a little girl Furphy from Shepparton who was 14, my mother. Jean wrote to me every week, not love letters just simply letters – the leaves in St Kilda Road are turning brown. Sent me cakes. And, yeah, one of the problems was trying to reply to the letters at times. I remember one time when we came out of

16:00 Tobruk, we were in Julis, I had four Christmas cakes in tins, fruit cakes. What they used to do, the mothers and sisters was make a fruit cake, put it in one of those tins and get the plumber to solder round the edge then cover it in canvas and stitch the canvas up and that's how they arrived. One of the sad ones that did arrive was from a lady in

16:30 Shepparton, I can't think of her name but I will in a minute, whose son was in Singapore and captured as a prisoner of war of the Japanese, and she'd sent him a cake and it didn't leave Australian, they'd sent it back to her and she sent it to me. And I remember getting this cake from her which she said, Mrs Simpson, Mrs Simpson,

17:00 Simpson's Orchard up there, lovely lady. Because when I was a young oil company representative I used to go to the Simpson's to play tennis and have a meal with them in the evening. There were two boys. One of the boys was again a prisoner of war. So where were we, we were talking about Christmas cakes, what were we talking about? I'm getting vague again. Yes lots of mail from home. I couldn't keep the mail.

17:30 One particular letter I vividly remember I wrote. This girl, at that stage, when you're 20, 24, 25, it's a different atmosphere today, we were only talking about it at tennis. In those days, when you were a boy of 23, 24, 25, the next logical step was to get married, that's the thing that you did.

18:00 Then you looked around to find somebody that you knew you were going to spend the rest of your life with who was pleasant and charming and sweet and attractive and it wasn't so much, it was certainly a physical attraction, but that was only part of it. The main part was would I like to spend the rest of my life with you because you're nice and sweet and I've known you for a long time and known your family. So I remember writing from Tobruk,

18:30 we were just about to go up the line and the letter's upstairs somewhere there, no shilly-shally I remember saying, will you marry me when I come home? And the answer came back, yes I will. So that's one I do remember. But I couldn't keep any. But we did get lots of letters. Jean's kept a few which are upstairs. But she's kept

19:00 all the letters when we were in London and Japan and the kids were at university and away, she's kept all the letters that everybody's written to her, they're personal and sacred as far as I'm concerned, I don't touch them, I don't look at them, they're hers.

Was news from home a great comfort?

Oh, fantastic. It was absolutely fantastic. Particularly in Tobruk. You could write a letter, you could receive a letter

19:30 and then reply to it as soon as you possibly could and then within fourteen days, about a week lapse because of the flying boat service. Tobruk received a tremendous amount of publicity and when I look back on it compared with some of the boys in the 8th Division

20:00 in the hands of the Japanese, and when I think of what happened on the eastern front when Germany, Barbarossa attacked Russia and Stalingrad and the brutality of those wars, I think we in Tobruk, the Rats of Tobruk received a little more publicity than we really deserved

20:30 because, except for the, after the initial, twice the Germans tried to break in and they were repulsed, from then on it was pretty quite. We controlled no man's land, we were patrolling every night. There were Stuka parades, you were bombed by Stukas but the food was bloody awful. The fleas and the lice were awful but in terms of physical danger

21:00 it wasn't terribly dangerous in my judgment and I think it's been kind of overrated in terms of publicity. Alamein was really dangerous but comfortable because you were sixty miles from Alamein and you got hot meals and fresh food coming out from a town only sixty miles away. New Guinea, on the other hand, was much safer

21:30 in terms of casualties but uncomfortable, it was wet and damp and malaria. Where were we?

Well, we were talking about mail but that's okay. We'll move onto when you left Australia to head off for the war. Where did you stop in Ceylon?

We stopped at, what's the Port in Ceylon? Colombo

22:00 yeah Colombo. We stopped at Colombo for two days and we were given shore leave and this was the first time I'd been out of Australia and I was just so impressed. Being a young officer I realised that, we were allowed to go to the Galle Face Hotel and have afternoon tea and then down to Lavinia Beach and see it, it was really exciting. I think I mentioned

22:30 before, coming back on the boat of an evening, on a warm moon lit night. I remember young Carl Jess, Carl was killed in the early days in Tobruk, just so romantic and so wonderful. Carl Jess, Carl borrowed £1 from me because he wanted to send a telegram to this girl and, I remember vividly, he sent which you could do in those days, to this girl who was the daughter

23:00 of a very prominent bookmaker and Carl was the son of General Jess and Carl sent the telegram, I remember it, - 'mad with the Spring, let's get engaged' and he showed me her reply which said 'yes, Spring infectious, yes lets'. Some of the funny things you remember.

And what were your impressions of Colombo itself.

Well in the short time I

23:30 was there I thought it was just a magical place. With the facilities that we had. Just 48 hours, a little longer… But it was just wonderful for me to see a foreign country. Even so, with Palestine and Egypt, seeing those places, and Lebanon, was

24:00 interesting for somebody who had never been out of Australia. Because in those days, even in the postwar years, the first time my mother and father had ever left Australia was well into their sixties when they took an overseas trip. And the girl that I married, the first time she had ever been out of the State was when she hopped the border to come to Canberra. So from the point of view, moving to a foreign land was exciting and

24:30 interesting, the different customs. Tele Aviv, the Dead Sea, It was very very exciting.

How did you find the cultural differences in Ceylon? Could you interact with the local population?

Well you didn't have much of a chance to do that. Some of the boys were lucky

25:00 enough to be sent out to those, I've forgotten the Jewish word, those farms, commune farms that were on… You didn't have a great deal.. Tel Aviv and Haifa were full of Europeans. European restaurants and shops and cafes and bars, you met the people there, but you didn't have a great deal to do with them. The only

25:30 time that I spent with a family was with Murray Goldstone and I, were give leave and we went to stay with a Jewish married couple at Nahariyya I think it was on the coast, in this Jewish household. It was a very very nice Jewish couple in their forties who took us there as boarders at a very modest

26:00 rate. Murray Goldstone was wounded on 22nd July, the day we were all wounded. We were evacuated, I caught up with him at the British Naval Hospital, he was a great character, Jewish boy, courageous, a

great great character, very funny man. He was in the bed opposite me and I managed to hobble across to his bed on crutches at this Naval Hospital

26:30 in Alexandria, and he said 'have they taken my leg off', I said 'yeah' and he said 'what's the point of living, I'll never play football again, I don't want to hobble…' He died about eight hours later, just gave up and died. But he was really a great character. Stories told of Murray, at the British Officers' Training Unit, OC2, at Kasr el Nil barracks, there were another fellow there, Neil Gilmour,

27:00 and as they were being interviews, the young sergeants and fellows from the British army were saying, this is true, occupation gentleman or gentleman farmer came to Murray Goldstone, and they said 'what's your occupation' and he said 'bookmaker's clerk and macaroni manufacturer'. Sorry, I've jumped away.

Was Murray's response to that kind of injury, from your time in hospital, was that how a lot of soldiers responded to this?

No they didn't.

27:30 I didn't tell you the whole background story. What had happened on the 17th July, the colonel had ordered a raid on the railway cutting which was strongly held, again without any artillery support or any tank support, with a platoon strength, only thirty men, Murray's platoon,

28:00 oh sorry, it was a night raid, it was suicidal, it was stupid. And half a dozen fellows in Murray's platoon, for the first time refused to do it. And I was close by and I remember Colonel Evans saying 'Goldstone, you're yellow' in my hearing, which was a stupid thing for him to say in the heat of the moment and to tell you the truth, it was Murray who said

28:30 'everybody thinks I'm a coward and I'll never play football again', I think he played for Fitzroy seconds or something like that, 'what's the point of living'. I think we can edit that out. Bill Vines and I both say, and Bill is now Sir William Vines, chairman of the ANZ Bank, but Bill and I both say, I've got a photo of Murray upstairs,

29:00 he's the most unforgettable character we've ever met in our life. Wonderful fellow.

Just to divert totally into this conversation, in situations like the one he faced, did the infantry know they were walking into something that would be suicide?

No, otherwise you wouldn't have done it.

29:30 Everybody believed, we were afraid, but later on I don't think it was so much fear, everybody, I think everybody was afraid, I've heard this question asked a lot of times, but I, I don't want to be different, but in the end I think it was more apprehension, rather than fear, because deep down

30:00 I think everybody believed, I believed, I can't talk about everybody, that I might be wounded but I wouldn't be killed. I think if I thought I was going to be killed I wouldn't have gone on across the start line. And the other thing is, starting with the platoon, with the boys in the platoon, they all had nicknames,

30:30 I wasn't going to let them see that I was afraid, and they weren't going to let me see they were afraid, or apprehensive, and everybody, I think, knew they could depend, completely depend on the other fellow if they were hit, they could get them out or look after them. But it was a case of – I'm not going to let us see

31:00 I'm apprehensive or afraid and he wasn't either. Certainly when we were being mortared, particularly in Tobruk or shelled, the boys would say 'who's got the nerve sticks?' and we'd pull the cigarettes out and smoke. I think that answers it. I think if you thought you were going to be killed you wouldn't have gone on, you would have turned around walked away from it.

Did the support, in that kind of situation, the support of the men you were

31:30 **leading and the comradeship, was that what really kept them going?**

Yes. You were very lucky to have a commission. Because there was a sense of responsibility when you were a young platoon commander for thirty-four or thirty-six men. Then you become a company commander and you've got a hundred and twenty or a hundred and thirty men.

32:00 But particularly as a platoon commander. They looked to you to lead them, to give the instructions, to do the planning and they either completely trust you, which, and you're not going to let them down or let them see that you're nervous or frightened and it's the comradeship. I see old blokes

32:30 marching on Anzac Day and people, I think, might find all these old blokes like me, but we're not, we're 22, 23, 24, we spent four and five years together. We were nervous, we were frightened, we cold, we were tired, we were hungry, but we helped each other and leaned on each other, irrespective of what socio-economic group you came from. And we never, it's interesting, the work 'mate' has

33:00 come into the language, when I came back into Australia from London, 'how are you mate?', that was a

word we never used in 9 Div., it was always ‘sport’, ‘how are you sport?’ If you’d been out on patrol, you were coming back, you had to come back through a gap in the wire, you’d be challenged, you’d always say ‘it’s me sport’ and they knew who you were. I remember one night

33:30 I was out on a patrol and when you took a patrol out you looked at the map, how many yards it was, you had metres and yards and you converted that to paces and you had so many round in left hand pocket and every ten yards you walked in the dark with you’re

34:00 luminous compass showing where you were going, put a round from one pocket into the other pocket, then you’d take a reverse bearing of 180 degrees and come round. And I did this, we did a reconnaissance patrol, and I turned around to come back and I’m heading off, looking at my compass and I get tapped on the shoulder by Stump Strickland he said ‘where you going boss?’ and I said ‘the compass..,’ and he said ‘stick the compass,

34:30 it’s over there’. And being a country boy he knew exactly where to go and what to do. That happened quite often. Interesting, we fostered in the 51st Scottish Highland Division. The 51st Highland Scottish Division were really decimated in the first fighting when the Germans pushed

35:00 down and took Paris. They were reformed and they came out to the Middle East as a new reformed battalion. And they were fostered in, they’d send three or four fellows up at a time with each platoon, and our boys would take them out on patrol or show them trench store and what to do. It was quite interesting later on when reading the report of these boys, they said, the

35:30 Australians keep themselves and their weapons very clean, and the officers call their troops by their first name. Which was unlike the British army: Smith, Jones, Brown. So it was, the relationship was very very good. In the line, it was always Boss, out of the line, in a parade ground or in anybody’s hearing, the boys would always say ‘Yes sir, no sir’ and

36:00 not take on any more… But in the line and when you were away by yourselves it was quite informal. But even in New Guinea, when you were patrolling in New Guinea, along a narrow track, somebody had to be point man, out in front and you could be ambushed. And I was talking to Neil about this, quite recently, before he died and I found

36:30 the same thing – never at any time did I say to any of the boys ‘Jack, will you take point?’, never and any time did anybody refuse, ever. Not once, it was great courage.

You didn’t find as an officer, that that informality meant less discipline in your troops?

Oh, not the slightest, not the slightest. The

37:00 informality there, they would say ‘what’s on tonight boss’ which was a form of, to me, a form of affection, respect and affection, because I knew when we came out of the line in camp, and mounted a guard, they would do their best, they would always salute, if anybody else was about. We were proud of our platoon. Every platoon is proud of itself and reckon it’s got the best platoon

37:30 you know. And you don’t last long as an officer in an infantry battalion, I don’t think, unless you are, have two things: respect and affection and both of them are important. And you have affection and respect for them too because you know when you’re doing something you

38:00 might say ‘No. 1 Section go left and hold that’, and they move, they don’t argue, they just go.

You mention talking about affection for troops, country boys. What was the difference you found between the country boys and city boys.

Well, the difference was, the country boys were so able to improvise and

38:30 adapt. They were all good shots, they were all good shots. That was one thing. Quite apart from their lack of infantry training in the early days, they were all good shots, they knew how to handle a rifle. We captured, in Tobruk, a lot of Italian machine guns – Bredas and others, and being farmers and able to improvise, they’d pull them to pieces and put them together and got them operating. They could make themselves

39:00 comfortable. Again, jumping up to New Guinea, in a section, there’s eight men, a corporal and seven men in a section and they might be moving along to take up a position, and they’d stop for a rest. In a couple of minutes they’d have a peach tin with a bit of wire, they’d have a fire going and brew a tea. Not being critical of the Americans, but the poor American boys, unless things were provided they

39:30 were unable… But these boys were just.. to make a duvet, to make a bed, to improvise they could do almost anything. And they were caring they were caring about you, when you were pouring over maps or doing something, and having to do something, in addition to your batman, two or three would come over ‘oh, I’ll give you a hand Curly to fix up the boss’s duvet’, from that point of view. But again the country boys were very very good. Some of the city boys –

40:00 we were talking about Jack McCallum, Jack McCallum who carried me for the first few weeks in Tobruk, worked in the glove department at Paterson, Laing & Bruce in Flinders Lane. So you could have anything, but a great sergeant, a great sergeant.

Tape 4

00:34 **We spoke yesterday, we did a summary of you experience, but I was wondering if we could go back to North Africa and I guess, could you describe what the compound at Tobruk was like?**

It was horrendous. When I got there, as I said, when I got there I wasn't with the 6th Division, I followed up with

01:00 the trucks that we had to deliver, and there must have been ten or twelve, or more, thousand Italians prisoners and they were just sitting around in a group. At that stage, I remember, there were no latrines, there were no formal feeding arrangements for them. But they all seemed to be very happy, for them, that the war was over,

01:30 they weren't hostile in any way, they were grateful for any bits of food that you could give them and they were all anxious to be repatriated. I'm sympathetic to them because they were sent out to North Africa by Mussolini from Tripoli right through Benghazi and that area, once you get past Derna, once you get east of Derna

02:00 it is really unpleasant country. I know in Tobruk, there was a circle, a perimeter of concrete pillboxes to defend Tobruk, and the same thing at Bardia and it must have been a horrible place to have been, to have been posted for a couple of years. And again I think there was conscription for them

02:30 and most Italians would prefer to be sculptors, painters or play guitars than soldiers. They surrendered later on at Alamein in a couple of stunts that I was in. Their artillery, who were back behind the infantry were pretty good because they were fairly well protected and you didn't get as close to them as you got to their infantry. And they kept

03:00 firing and they were pretty good. So did the Italians, they would keep firing until you got close to them but every time you did a company or battalion attack you went in with fixed bayonets. And even today when I hear the command 'fix bayonets' I get a cold shudder, but that's beside the point. Now, when you got close to them with fixed bayonets they were very very happy to stand up and surrender.

03:30 I think I mentioned, I came out of Tobruk on the Ulster Prince, there must have been two or three thousand on the little Ulster Prince, I think she was well under eight or ten thousand and they were all anxious to be posted, asking me, those who could speak English, 'we hope we will go to America and not to India as prisoners of war'. The Germans, on the other

04:00 hand, fought to the last, till you were on top of them. I remember on 16th July, when we went through the railway cutting which was held by the Germans, I was along side Johnny Metfan, who was subsequently killed on 22nd July, and when we got to the top of this little railway cutting, I remember I was

04:30 close to John, there was a German officer, kneeling with his hands up in the air, surrendering and John was just about to bayonet him and at the last moment realised he wouldn't and pulled back and didn't bayonet him and let him walk back to the rear. One of the interesting things was, the song, 'Lily Marlene' which we used to listen into on the

05:00 German broadcast, it was quite a catchy song, and it was the German theme song, and we didn't know the words in German but everybody used to listen and sing it and I remember on one occasion, just behind the lines, there must have been thirty or forty Germans just sitting around on the sand, and a couple of Australians walking around with their rifles slung over their shoulders and one of them whistling 'Lily Marlene', I thought was rather

05:30 incongruous. It was a very, as far as the Germans were concerned, it was a very chivalrous war. Talking with Alan Hutchinson, who got a DSO in Tobruk and was badly wounded and eventually repatriated, talking with Alan after the war, they were very well cared for by the German doctors in the German hospitals. And Alan said on one occasion a

06:00 German doctor said 'well I'm terribly sorry, I got to hand you over to the Italian Hospital now'. I think I mentioned, when I was wounded, there were half a dozen Germans and probably half a dozen of us lying around wounded and John Agar, the doctor and Les Alan the RAP sergeant just treated people on the severity of their wounds. And I've talked to some of the boys who were POWs and were wounded and exactly

06:30 the same thing happened in the German regimental aid posts. It was interesting, the desert, there was no villages, there were no civilians, it was just men, and I don't think on either side there was any great hatred it was just a question, there, of self survival. I've got to knock him off

07:00 or he's going to knock me off. But there was no deep-felt hatred, not on my part, and I'm quite sure not on the part of the boys in the platoon and the country, it was a question of self preservation rather than a hate to knock them off or to kill them. There was sympathy for the Italians on our part and respect

07:30 for the Germans, particularly the 91st [90th] Light Division who the battalion were up against a number of times. And I look now at photographs, I've got a number of books on the uniforms and the German Afrika Korps, and Rommel's background and when you look at the photos of the German soldiers, you know you put an Australian or British uniform

08:00 on them and they're just hard to distinguish. So, that's I think all I can say about the feeling for them. That's in North Africa, the attitude to the Japanese was completely different, completely different. But we will talk about that later on.

Were the Italians considered cowards because they didn't want to fight by the Australians at all?

08:30 Yeah, there was that element about it. There was that element about it. There was a feeling that they gave up too soon. I don't think we ever used the word 'coward' though, I don't think we ever thought of them as cowards. We were more – get as close to them as you can – there was more sympathy, I remember particularly on the

09:00 10th July on that jock column we went out on we wrapped up nearly eight hundred of them and they were so pleased to be captured and be sent back, as we sent them back. No I don't think their hearts were in the war anyhow. Maybe it's cultural thing, it probably is a cultural thing when you look at the different cultures, of a German, an Italian, a Japanese, the cultures are all

09:30 different. And you can indoctrinate people, I know. I don't want to jump forward to the Japanese, having lived there for eleven years, I don't condone what happened but I understand why they behaved the way they did because you can indoctrinate people, fellows can be indoctrinated and there was little, I don't think, indoctrination on the part of the Italians,

10:00 there was pride I think on the part of the Germans as there was pride on the part of our lot. We never mentioned it, it didn't seem to be, but there was just a pride in being an Aussie and pride in being in your platoon and pride in being part of a group but there seemed to be a lack of pride on the part of the Italians. Does that answer the question?

It does. In the incident when you captured the eight hundred Italians

10:30 **POWs at what point do you realise that you are no longer shooting at these, or bayoneting these people, but you are about to take them prisoner.**

On that particular occasion my platoon and I, we went , we were told by Major Day to attack once the column had ground to a halt. So we went forward with fixed bayonets and ran into the company of them, we got very

11:00 close, I suppose within sixty feet of them, and then they started to put up their hands and come out and then it become almost a flood of people and we were telling them to go behind us because the artillery and the Mark VI light tanks and the other, we were just about three or four hundred yards in front the base, the column in which we'd left and they

11:30 then just moved behind us. I remember one officer, rather arrogantly walked towards us, and he had a beautiful pair of binoculars around his neck so I pointed to the binoculars and he objected, started to object to handing over the binoculars which I thought was a very good souvenir anyhow. So again

12:00 you went in with your troops, carrying a rifle and bayonet and also you had a pistol, a Smith & Webley [Wesson] pistol so when he just held up his hand and started to protest, and he was rather arrogant about handing it…, I pulled out my Smith & Wesson and put it right in his face, and off came the binoculars very quickly. We also, that day, I don't know why it was, captured an ambulance as we pushed

12:30 a few yards further on which was dug in and it must have been used as a battalion headquarters rather than an ambulance and, I had at that stage, my own platoon and four carriers under my command, so we hooked up one of the carriers to this ambulance and towed that back. Which was quite a good souvenir.

Was the language barrier

13:00 **a real difficulty in situations like that? Did many people speak Italian or German?**

No, none of us did. I think Australia and Japan enjoy the privilege of being the world's worst linguists. Except I remember on 22nd July when Johnny Metfan didn't bayonet that fellow, we went a bit further, now I'm

13:30 confused, it wasn't that time, it was when we went in on 16th July and ran into some Italians, and one Italian officer had obviously been wounded and as we moved forward they were, some of them were streaming back, it must have been forty or fifty of them, as we were going forward and this fellow was wounded and as I got past carrying your rifle and bayonet at the high point, he knelt down

14:00 and put up his hands, and I remember vividly him saying, my French is not very good, ……. 'accompany me' I think he was trying to say. I had no time to accompany him. I think he was wounded, I

didn’t notice where he was wounded, but he wanted some help to get back. Unfortunately I had no intention of stopping anyhow, we just kept going.

14:30 Yeah, I remember that quite vividly, the Italian fellow who was wounded and I think he was an officer and he looked quite distressed.

Was there ever times, I mean incidences you heard of where troops were so, I guess, excited is the wrong word, but revved up from the battle that they would

15:00 **continue to fight after people had surrendered?**

No, not to my knowledge. I don’t think we were thinking that we were revved up with a high pitch of excitement, nervous excitement probably, because almost all of the time you could hear rounds of ammunition

15:30 whistling past you. It was apprehension, I don’t think you were revved up, it was a question of deep down, when you were doing an attack or doing a patrol, of being apprehensive and a question of more self preservation I think, and hoping you wouldn’t be wounded or hit. I don’t

16:00 think I’ve quite answered the question. There was no, being hyped up like, again, like the Japanese who blew a bugle and screamed out ‘Banzai!’ and worked themselves into a frenzy. I never encountered any of that on our part and certainly on the part of the Germans that we captured

16:30 or over ran. I remember, I just can’t think of his name at the moment, a subaltern in our battalion, he was wounded and remained on duty, wasn’t in my company it was in C Company, that’s right, Wally Dunham, Wally Dunham, that’s right. Wally Dunham, his company again

17:00 ran into a lot of trouble and had a lot of wounded and were surrounded by Germans, and a German officer came across with a white flag to Wally and his half a dozen fellows, two of whom were wounded, and asked him to surrender. And Wally realised that if the German could see how weak they were, to let him go back that would….. So he held the fellow

17:30 in his dugout for the rest of the night and took him prisoner. Which probably wasn’t very ethical according to the Geneva Convention. But I know about that because I was talking later about it with Wally and it’s also recorded in our battalion history, a book called Mud and Blood which is an absolutely crackerjack history, beautifully written.

18:00 **Were there times in Tobruk, or anywhere in North Africa where it was a lonely time, you weren’t in groups, you were out on … ?**

No, you were always together, you were never alone. The only time you were alone,

18:30 when you were on a standing patrol. There are three types of a patrol, three types, a fighting patrol when you go out a night time with ten or twelve or fifteen men heavily armed to fight, then there is the reconnaissance patrol which were just two or three

19:00 of us when you go out to try and find out who’s in front of you and what their disposition is and the third thing is a standing patrol. Now a standing patrol in Tobruk was one hundred, two hundred, three hundred, maybe four hundred yards out in front of your own line which was just a small slit trench with a couple of fellows in it, with a telephone line from them

19:30 back to you at your platoon headquarters. And they would go out at last light and sit in this slit trench in case there were Germans patrolling, and they’d lie doggo and say there’s a German patrol. That was called a standing patrol. And that was the loneliest, I didn’t, being an officer, do any standing patrols but a couple of the boys did.

20:00 But I should imagine that would be quite lonely stuck out about four or five hundred yards at night time in front of your own line, just lying doggo there in a standing patrol.

Was it difficult, what was the rations like in Tobruk?

Appalling, absolutely appalling. I think Tobruk, I’ve said it

20:30 before, I hope the tank on the battlefield enjoyed a reputation a little excess of its true value. I’ll come to the rations in a moment. It was not overly dangerous compared with the later battles of Alamein and some of the fighting that took place up and down the desert with the New Zealanders and the other British units, but the conditions were really appalling,

21:00 the food was appalling, and never had any fresh fruit or fresh vegetables the whole time we were there. They had a bakery there, the bread was doughy and almost, in my memory, semi rancid. There were biscuits, first world war biscuits. We had Carnation

21:30 canned milk, bully beef, Maconochie’s stew occasionally, never any Shepparton Preserving Company apricots or fruit, never saw anything like that. The water was semi-brackish and full of chlorine and you just got a waterbottle-full a day which you

22:00 had to used to shaving and drinking and cleaning the vital parts of your body progressively down. There were fleas, the fleas were unbelievable in the dugouts and everywhere and lice. I couldn't hold down bully beef, I just couldn't hold it down and of course there was no refrigeration,

22:30 You'd see a boy put his bayonet in the corner of his can, the bully beef, the open it and fat would just ooze out. I literally existed in, we had ascorbic acid tablets, vitamin C tablets, I think which helped, occasionally there was some Maconochie's Irish Stew which wasn't bad. There were gold fish which the

23:00 boys called gold fish, which were kippers in tomato sauce, which were appalling. But what I did, I used to get these couple of army biscuits, put them in my dixie at night time and put a bit of water on them so they'd soften over night, and we did get a bit of sugar and in the morning when they were reasonably soft I'd sprinkle a bit of sugar over them

23:30 and we had Carnation milk, and pour a bit of Carnation milk over them. That was reasonably tasty as far as I was concerned. But over all the conditions were really appalling. But everybody was in the same boat. Everybody was cheerful about it and there was no moaning. And

24:00 occasionally we'd get newspapers back from Australia telling us how good we were and how remarkable, which helped morale a great deal. And then the name 'the Rats of Tobruk' came along. Maybe I'm a bit of a philistine in saying this, and some of my other comrades or blokes who were in Tobruk

24:30 may disagree with me, but I didn't think it was, compared with other campaigns, the most dangerous place to be. It was certainly the most uncomfortable except New Guinea.

You mentioned, stuff on food, you mentioned when you were injured you ate a German ration of sardines. How did they compare?

25:00 Well, that was the only ration I came across, strangely enough. I read, subsequently, from the German side how pleased they were to get some bully beef. I never obtained any German rations. But I think what happened, you got sick to death of your own

25:30 rations and when you got, later on, when you got some American rations, they were a change from the routine. I think one of the great, to me, one of the great scandals was, of the war, was the appalling rations supplied right through all the campaigns,

26:00 it was bully beef and biscuits and tins. Only at Alamein did rations improve because behind Alamein you had Alexandria, a thriving city with lights and fresh fruit and fresh vegetables and consequently at Alamein, at night time, the boys were able to get some fresh meat and some fresh vegetables and they'd bring up hot boxes of stew which was

26:30 quite good. And there we did get an occasional can of tinned peaches or pears or something. So the rations at Tobruk were really good. And even on the Tablelands I thought their rations were appalling. Ted Oakley, a friend of mine, who flew with 450 Squadron, who was in the desert the same time we were, and strangely enough, we were talking about something, and I'm digressing,

27:00 Ted looked at his logbook, he was a life long friend, and he was flying Kittyhawks over and above us during the July fighting. But the reason I mention that, the army were supplied by the Australian Army Service Corps and they could only supply the rations that were supplied to them. And the Australian Army Service Corps of course supplied, kept the air force, provided them with rations. And the poor old air force got the tail end of the

27:30 rations. So while we complain, at least the air force even got the dregs of what was left.

Oh dear. Before, well several times you have mentioned having been involved in charges on the enemy. I'm just wondering, as an officer, if you could walk us through how you prepared for

28:00 **an infantry charge?**

Well you were just told. Particularly in the July fighting, in the July, and I've of course talked with the boys in the later October fighting. It was Bill who went through that and I was..... You were just told

28:30 the night before that, what your objective was. And this would come down through your company commander, your company commander would be called to battalion headquarters and told at battalion headquarters that the battalion would do a battalion attack or a company attack next morning

29:00 and what the objective was, you'd have your maps there, what your objective was and what the start time was and where the start line would be. Then your company commander would come back to company and he would call his three platoon commanders in and you'd have your maps, I've still got my map case upstairs, and tell you what time the attack was about to start and what the start line

29:30 was. There were no trenches like the first world war, there were just doovers here and there, little shallow hollows in the sand and if you could find a few small stones to put them up, we called them sangers, so you were scattered about. So then as a platoon commander you would go back and call your

three corporals, your sergeant and three corporals together and say ‘tomorrow morning at five

30:00 o’clock we’re going to do a company attack and we’ll be reserve platoon or we’ll be platoon on the left, and thirteen will be on the left and we’ll be reserve and fifteen will be on the right and we’ll move up to the start line which would be a piece of hessian scrim laid down in the sand and you’d move up to that at first

30:30 light And you’d probably say ‘fix bayonets’ and everybody would fix bayonets and then you were a little nervous and little apprehensive and standing around waiting. And the start time for the attack would be part of the operation order which was intention, you know ‘attack and capture Point 24’ ‘information enemy’, what was known about the enemy,

31:00 ‘information own troops’, you will be so and so left of battalion, any support…. The really scandalous part was in those early days, attacks were over flat desert country, were just organised without any, only on one occasion, was there a tank support and never any artillery

31:30 support, which was just incredibly stupid. At Alamein, of course, once Montgomery got there, the whole thing was planned, as did Monash at Hamel for the first time do some proper planning. So that’s what you did. You just went in like that over flat ground. Only on one occasion in July did

32:00 we have some tanks. But again the was no, we never had any training to work with tanks. Later on there was a great deal of training to work with tanks and as a consequence of that the infantry had no faith in the tanks what so ever. They just used to, we don’t want the tanks, to use an expression, they destroy the crabs. But later on there was

32:30 working with tanks, but before that, when the first time they were used, we hadn’t worked with tanks before, couldn’t communicate with them, you know, you’d bang your rifle butt on the tank itself, the fellow inside, there was no form of communicating with the tank commander, and say ‘over on the right there’s a, fifty yards over there, there’s a machine gun, a German machine gun posted that has us all pinned down.’ If you could say that to

33:00 him, he’d swing around and fire on that. Because they had two-pounder guns and they also had Vickers machine guns. So there was really no support from that point of view. But I think, as I’ve already said, when you did an attack, you knew what you had to do, how far you had to go and it was made in an operation order, sometimes written but very seldom,

33:30 you’d take notes of what was to be done, but it was mostly verbal all the way down from battalion to each company to each platoon. At times you couldn’t even employ the units, the platoons in the headquarters company of the infantry battalion, which were machine gunners, Vickers machine guns

34:00 and two-inch mortars You could only often use those when you were in a defensive position and dug in. Certainly in Tobruk in the Post 8 [S8] where I was for a time we had four Italian Breda machine guns

34:30 which the boys had fixed up and repaired plus our own Bren, so to relieve the monotony, often at two or three o’clock in the morning we’d just have what we called, a bingle-bingle, and we’d just fire everything into no man’s land to relieve the tension. That’s at Alamein,

35:00 the same thing later on in New Guinea. Most of the instructions for a company or an attack were verbal and that’s how they came down.

As officers, I know this might sound a naïve question, but in films you see officers saying something I guess inspirational before they take troops on charges.

35:30 **Did that sort of thing happen, that the officers would say something?**

Not to my knowledge. You had a great rapport with your platoon. You were like, I won’t copy the American … , you were like a band of brothers, you knew each other, everybody had nicknames in the platoon.

36:00 You had to do things but no there was never any inspirational talks – we’ve got a patrol tonight or there’s a battalion or a company attack tomorrow morning, this is what we’ll carry, don’t forget your waterbottles, which I did and other things. But no, there was no inspirational talks, I think the fellows would have thought you were off your

36:30 rocker if you had done that. But you knew everybody in your platoon. You knew your three, your sergeant and your three corporals and you had just great faith in them. They all had nick names, Almazza Joe, I remember one of the boys, his nickname was Nuffield,

37:00 and I said ‘why do you call him Nuffield for’, well you know, what do they call you and I said ‘Stumpy Strickland’, one of the corporals, and they said ‘well you know Lord Nuffield, the great philanthropist who is always giving things away, that what he wishes, “I give it away, I give it away”’, so they nicknamed him Nuffield. And I had one little boy, I have his photo there as a matter of fact, one little boy who was 16, young Georgie

37:30 Stockpile, I didn’t know he was that young until later on, and I rather sensed that the other fellows were

kind of rather big brother in looking after him. I didn't know what it was until I found out later he was only 16. No, there were no inspirational talks I don't think. You were lucky enough if you had a commission, you were very

38:00 lucky to have a commission because you then had a sense of responsibility, a sense of obligation that you had to set an example and you were the one that took the decision about No. 5 Section out on the left or sing out to Toby 'Toby take this section, there's a machine

38:30 gun'. You were able to give the directions, you were able to think. The fellows who were magnificent, absolutely magnificent were the private soldiers who just had to take instruction and do as they were told, and wait for instruction and look to you or the sergeant or the corporal, if the message was relayed through the corporals and knowing

39:00 if the platoon commander was wounded or killed, the sergeant would take over and often, later on corporals took over the platoon and this was accepted by the boys. So rank was an advantage in giving you something to do. The boys, as I've said, the boys that I admired and still do were the private soldiers who had to wait

39:30 until they received instruction as you went in or what ever you did.

How did, going back to the young man in your platoon, how did a sixteen year old boy cope with the war?

He coped pretty well as a matter of fact. He seemed to cope pretty well. Yeah, he coped fairly, he coped quite well. So much so, that I didn't realise until half way through Tobruk that he was only

40:00 sixteen, he was just treated as an equal with everybody else. He was a bit baby-faced. He was a cheerful little boy, a cheerful chap and accepted by the others, well he mixed with the others and went on leave before we went into Tobruk and did the usual things that the boys did together, the usual houses of ill-repute and getting drunk so forth.

So he got up to mischief with the rest of them?

40:30 Yeah, they did get up to mischief. I remember taking, once I'd come back from the first 6th Division, pushed back to the unit, I was able to have some leave and there was a tour bus service run by a Jewish company, small primitive sort of bus that took

41:00 sixteen or eighteen people in the bus with one officer in charge and you went for a tour around Palestine for three or four days, which was a leave, and I remember on that at night time, we'd pull into Tel Aviv or Haifa or somewhere and I'd say to the fellows 'okay be back at the bus', and there were places for them to stay, there was troops'

41:30 hotels and always an officers' club and I'd say 'okay, the bus leaves at half past eight, we're going to the Dead Sea', or something, everybody turned up. No matter what we did during the night. And the same thing at other times, when we were passing through Cairo or passing through Alexandria and we weren't

Tape 5

00:30 **Coming back from North Africa to the Lae landing and I guess your impression of the Japanese as an enemy force.**

The Japanese, at the Lae landing they were pretty well feed, they were reasonably well fed and well equipped, although they had been cut off by

01:00 the Battle of the Coral Sea from continuing supplies from Rabaul. But, at that time, at the Lae landing they were pretty well, they were reasonably well equipped and well fed. They were, of course, fanatical, absolutely fanatical and indoctrinated and as we know,

01:30 never never surrender, because if you surrendered you could never return to your own country. And this was manifested in the break out of Cowra, in the prisoner of war camp. They were fanatical, they were good, very very brave, but very very stupid. If they launched an attack on your position, there was a bugle sounded and lots of Banzais

02:00 and shouting, and gave warning of when they were coming, when they were going attack you. The early part of the New Guinea at Lae and Finschhafen was small incidents of small units against small units. You had to move along native tracks,

02:30 the jungle was impenetrable and consequently there, you could always run into an ambush. And I think I mentioned before and Neil Gilmour and I were talking about this, you always, moving up the track, had to have one man, the point man, well out in front and it was interesting, I think I've mentioned this before. Never, at any time, when you'd say to Stumpy or Bill

03:00 or Jack or Kanga or Ocker or whoever the boy was in your platoon, will you take point, never did anybody ever refuse to take this most dangerous position when we were moving up a track.

Were you given any impression of the Japanese before you arrived.

No. Yes and

03:30 no. I think on the Tableland they were myopic and small in stature, which they were, they were quite small in stature compared with the Germans in the desert. In the back of our minds they didn't rate, the were Japs and they wouldn't be too much trouble, although

04:00 the 7th Division who fostered us in on the Tablelands, the jungle war training, did pass on the news that they were fairly fearsome and fairly fatalistic. So before we went to New Guinea we had a better idea that they just weren't as weak as we were originally lead to believe. So that was the Lae

04:30 campaign then later, a year later, for the Aitape-Wewak campaign, by this time the Japanese had been completely cut off in Northern New Guinea, in the Aitape-Wewak and also over in Bougainville which I'm not too familiar with. But certainly where the 6th Division were for the Aitape-Wewak campaign,

05:00 the Japanese were completely cut off from all supplies, not even a submarine could get through. Consequently they had very limited rations, they were living off native market gardens, they had resorted to cannibalism

Did you ever see any evidence of that?

Yeah, I did.

Really, what was that?

I'd rather not mention it with one of our boys, if you don't mind. Yep. Steaks

05:30 taken from the back of the thigh. You'd do anything to get one of your wounded out, anything. And on a couple of occasions, somebody would be wounded, Jack would be wounded, and then Bill would be determined to move further up the track to get him out and then Bill would be wounded and Tom

06:00 would go after and he would be wounded, just the desire not to let any of your boys….. In the end, Neil and I talked about it, you had to stop it, you had to stop taking casualties which was rather sad. Consequently, we never took any prisoners, not the slightest. I suppose our attitude, or my attitude, and the boys' attitude deep down, they were just rats, treated like

06:30 rats, and if one of them was wounded, a Japanese was wounded lying there, you'd just stand up and put a bullet through his head because you dare not go too close because of the treachery or the bravery depending on which way you look at it. They fought furiously, courageously and stupidly in our

07:00 opinion. I remember a true story. At night time you set booby traps around your position, which were Mills bombs, with a string tied to the pin across to another tree, so if they pulled the string….. So you had to lie very quite, cause they did put in attacks, sneak attacks at night time. And Jack McKeddie who was with the 2/12th Field Regiment, who got an MC and Bar,

07:30 was our forward. Jack was much older than most of us, a great character, was our forward observation officer and was lying down in the only dry spot he could find, and a true story, Bill Vines got up and wanted to have a pee, and walked over very quietly and peed all over Jack McKeddie and Jack McKeddie could say anything or scream out or make a noise. Sorry about that, it was an aside. It was one of the

08:00 funny things that happened. There was Jack McKeddie being peed all over from a great height by Bill Vines. They were really self-contained prisoners, courageous, stupid, very very brave but when you took one of their positions, as we were moving and my brigade

08:30 were in the centre of New Guinea in the Torricelli Mountains, the other two brigades were working along the coast, from Aitape to Wewak, what the Japanese did was occupy a native village, and all the native villages were on top of a ridge, not down in the valley, down the side of the ridges would be the native market gardens and when the Japanese

09:00 occupied these villages, and we eventually captured them, there was a technique of using both of the bombers as heavy artillery, when you got into the village they, in a hut, they had constructed a platform, which I've subsequently seen in photographs of prisoner

09:30 of war camps from the 8th Divvy boys, of above the ground, are beds, platforms alongside of the hut for everybody, but they were filthy, absolutely filthy. They had no concept of a separate toilet anywhere, they just seemed to defecate below their beds, below this bamboo

10:00 platform on which they slept. And the place was just stinking and filthy and they seemed to have no sense of personal hygiene which our fellows of course were absolutely meticulous about keeping themselves clean and using a spade and a toilet away from everybody.

Was it difficult fighting considering at lot, well I've read many reports of

10:30 **how you just couldn't see your enemy a lot of the time because of the jungle?**

Yeah, that was… When you were moving and trying to take a position you really couldn't see anybody as you were moving up the track and if they were holding a position, the first

11:00 knowledge you had of where they were, was when your point man was fired on, or when they fired at your point man on the patrol, and if you had a platoon lined out along the track behind you, the moment that happened then one section would go to the left into the jungle, another section would go to the right into the jungle, and try and move up alongside the track as best

11:30 they could to the Japanese position to attack them. Once you got reasonably close to them and knew where they were, you would open up with every thing. But there were no bayonet charges, to my memory, all you went in with, Brens and Owen guns, everything firing flat out, you know,

12:00 trying to blast them out from where they were. So it was different, much more personal, individual, less dangerous than the desert but much more uncomfortable personally. Some prisoners were taken. Towards the end of the war into early 1945,

12:30 prisoners were taken. And I remember, when I was BM again in 17th Div. [Brigade] and some prisoners were taken and at the headquarters we had a couple of Nisei, now these are Japanese from Hawaii who were there to interpret and

13:00 translate any captured documents we caught. And we also had to have one fellow, one Australian boy, along side them at all times so there wasn't some confusion about the Nisei. But we did take a couple of prisoners and held them at brigade headquarters. The other thing I did at brigade headquarters when I was there, there's a defence and employment platoon of thirty-odd men to protect brigade headquarters.

13:30 When I got there I found out finally, these were all young reinforcement boys, who'd never seen any action, it was not there fault because they were young and joined up later. So what I decided to do was change over the defence and employment platoon by writing, not writing but getting in touch, with the three battalion commanders of the 2/5th, 2/6th and 2/7th and saying 'look,

14:00 I'd like you to send me a corporal and a section from your battalion of all original boys who've been with the battalion right through the first desert push, right through….. who deserve a break and I'll transfer these young ….'. So that's what I did and I ended up at brigade headquarters having a defence and employment platoon under a fellow called Quilty of all old original

14:30 17th Brigade desert-trained soldiers. And I didn't do this for self protection because I had to move around and every time you moved out to the battalion you had to go with a patrol, you just couldn't walk anywhere, you had to take half a dozen fellows with you because you could be jumped at any time. Anyhow, back to the prisoners. A couple of prisoners were there

15:00 and one was evacuated and the other was held to be interrogated by Nisei interpreters. So the sergeant came to me, who again was an original member from 2/5th Battalion, and he said 'oh, sir, that Japanese prisoner of war we were guarding last night died'

15:30 and I said 'what do you mean he died' and he said 'well he died and we buried him'. And I thought, this is odd, a fellow died and they're very quick to bury him which is unlike the Australian fellows. And I said 'alright'. So later on, I've forgotten his name, he was, strangely enough a wharfie, and a very good sergeant, I've just forgotten his name, I said 'look, lets go for a walk' and I said, 'look this is just between you and I,

16:00 what happened to the Japanese prisoner, that he died of natural causes and was buried at night time so quickly?' and he said 'Well sir, what happened, one of the boys was guarding him and he got obstreperous and tried to escape and attacked, who ever it was, Kanga or Bluey, and Bluey grabbed him by the throat and he just seemed to go limp in hands'. It's not a very pleasant story but

16:30 that's what happened to the poor Japanese prisoner. Another time, I wish I could think of his name, a young subaltern 2/5th Battalion and I will think of his name in a minute, was patrolling his platoon and some native police boys and a Japanese officer and twelve men, and they were about four days march away,

17:00 they were doing a wide sweep down on the flank, surrendered and they brought back twelve Japanese prisoners to battalion headquarters which was rather unusual because the Japanese just didn't surrender but these were a couple of isolated cases. There are some photographs there that I just took of some of them. But they were pretty emaciated, the Japanese, they lacked protein

17:30 food, they were living off native gardens, they had no medicine and even their ammunition was running out, but still they kept on fighting.

And so you'd see evidence of that as you were approaching them or trying to take a position in an isolated position of theirs or was that something you discovered after?

Say again?

Was that something you would notice going in to take a position they were in or, in terms of the emaciation and their

18:00 **low resources?**

Not all of them were emaciated, they weren't the best. But you knew they were occupying the villages on the high ground and as you moved up to the village, and they were on ridges, they might have what we would call a standing patrol, on the edge of the village and along the track to warn them if we were coming, that's when you could be fired upon and

18:30 ambushed. But I know, when I was moving with a group, and you had to have a patrol with you when you were moving, and it was interesting to watch these boys, there was the point man and a couple of fellows in front of me and I'd be in the centre and as they moved up to the village or deserted, because I was going forward to find, to make a reconnaissance for the next brigade head-

19:00 quarters, we moved on, to see the signals these boys had worked out amongst themselves. If it was occupied the finger would go on the nose, and if it was all clear, you'd get the all clear signal. But they were just hand signals and gestures which indicated what was happening and what was all clear that the boys had developed and worked out themselves.

19:30 Yeah, the Japanese there were self-contained prisoners but fought, absolutely fought, to the last.

You mentioned yesterday that you saw evidence of comfort women.

Oh, that happened in Lae. The next day we were just pottering around looking, and

20:00 there was, on the side of a hill, there was the remains of a hut and in this hut there were, sort of semi-wrecked, there were cosmetics, lipsticks, condoms and beds which had obviously been used as a comfort station for the Japanese soldiers there but

20:30 well before we got there. They must have evacuated the comfort girls. Which is a well known story about the Koreans and so forth. That was the first evidence I'd ever seen of what was a ….. and the only time I ever saw it, was probably a brothel at Lae.

Did you know about it? Had you heard stories at the time?

I hadn't heard stories but you kind of realised what it was.

21:00 It couldn't have been native girls. Interesting. It was obviously, I thought, they must have had some Japanese prostitutes, that's what I thought at the time. It was only in the postwar years, that you learnt about the Korean comfort women. Yep.

21:30 **How, you mentioned that the desert fighting was much more dangerous than what you were experiencing, how so?**

Well, in the desert you had… Tobruk wasn't too bad, there were Stuka parades, you were dive bombed. Not too much artillery shelling.

22:00 We did most of the shelling in Tobruk with the Royal Horse Artillery and the 2/12th Field Regiment in Tobruk. There was a little bit of shelling and a little bit of mortaring on the outskirts of Tobruk. They had 'Long Tom', a big German gun which used to shell us. But it was mainly the Stuka parades, the Stuka dive

22:30 bombing that was the worst thing. But there was very little, after the early stages, two major breakthroughs, early in April and then later on. My battalion was in April around about Easter and the other break-in by Rommel wasn't with my brigade, it was with another brigade so I didn't know too much about it because it was in another sector of Tobruk. I didn't know too

23:00 much about it. Very little about it really, until after the war and I read about it. And it was the 2/17th Battalion. But there was little hand-to-hand fighting, or no hand-to-hand fighting. No flat attacks with fixed bayonets walking across flat to attack a German or Italian position in Tobruk. At Alamein it was completely different. At Alamein, heavy artillery and mortar bombardments

23:30 going on on both sides. Mine fields, dangerous mine fields. A lot of patrolling that had to go on, a lot of attacks that had to, reconnaissance, aggression by the Germans with their field artillery and with their mortars and with their machine guns when you were doing an attack.

24:00 So it was much more……and then I wasn't at Alamein but talking with the boys when I rejoined the battalion, what had happened at Alamein. As I say, we lost every company commander and two fellows went through Alamein, Bill Vines and the colonel were the only two officers that went through. All the platoon commanders, everybody was wounded, fierce fighting, hand to hand fighting. Thank God I missed it,

24:30 being selfish. So it was much more dangerous, when I say dangerous, you had a greater likelihood of being killed or wounded at Alamein than there was in New Guinea. It wasn't as intense, there was no artillery, no mortars, it was snipers up trees or being ambushed, and the casualties, of course, in New

Guinea were lighter on our part, although I think we inflicted more casualties on them,

25:00 on the Japanese, than they did on us. So, the desert was comfortable, it was dry, a bit cold at night time but you could always dig a bit of a doover. The interesting thing, both at Tobruk and at Alamein about nine o'clock at night, fighting would stop, there would be complete silence

25:30 on their part and on our part, the reason was, our food would be brought up to us, you'd get your wounded out, carry your wounded out, go to the toilet with a spade out of your little sangar or something, and they were doing exactly the same thing, getting their food up. And

26:00 very seldom, after about eight or nine o'clock through to about eleven o'clock, there was little or no shelling, machine gunning or fighting. Then about after midnight, both sides would start mortaring or shelling, it was quite interesting. That was the same in Tobruk, you could get up and walk around after eight o'clock for a couple of hours.

26:30 And in Tobruk, General Morshead used to, he did, he was magnificent, came up to see us post haste, right in the salient, came up, and he went around every forward platoon, which of course, and I'm jumping all over the place, endeared Morshead as the divisional commander of my division, a quiet man, to the whole division. Everybody thought he was great.

Were there any similarities in that

27:00 **way, in terms of predicting, with the Japanese? Did you observe any routines?**

No. They were unpredictable. They were unpredictable. They would attack. They knew where you were or thought they knew where you were. They would creep up and get as close as they could to your booby trap position and

27:30 charge at the eleventh hour, or maybe when they were reasonably close to you. But not all the jungle is impenetrable, it's just not all impenetrable, and you were usually in a wooded area. It was pointless trying to make a position impenetrable jungle, you'd try to find a clearing or reasonably clearing, and they'd start to blow bugles

28:00 just before they started, start to sing out 'Banzai!' and alert you that they were. …That happened on a couple of occasions when I was out with one of the battalions. Of course we have fixed lines of fire with Vickers, not Vickers, with the Bren guns readily mounted,

28:30 firing enfilade and defilade and in the morning, very few of them got into it. And I remember, just down the slopes, because we always tried to occupy a bit of reasonably high ground, which was cleared, you'd find dead Japanese quite close, within fifty feet of you or even thirty feet of you, lying dead, that had been killed by our fire. That only happened on isolated

29:00 occasions, on two occasions to my memory. But I can only talk about what happened to me. What happened to other fellows, particularly down on the coast, with the other two brigades, probably had quite different experiences. I know they did a couple of amphibious landings, moving around behind the Japanese. But we were, as I say, in the centre of New Guinea, in the Torricelli Mountains.

29:30 One interesting thing that happened, it was amusing, we had a fellow called Bob Cole. Bob Cole had joined the army and before the war he was a patrol officer in New Guinea, and when he returned from the Middle East they set up ANGAU, which was ex-patrol officers, to control the native population, the porters, provide them with tobacco

30:00 and rations, while they carried out our wounded and carried supplies and ammunition forward. And only ANGAU officers ever gave instructions, because they spoke perfect pidgin English, which we all picked up a bit in the end. But nobody interfered, you were polite, you were nice to them, but you didn't fraternise with them, you smiled

30:30 at them and were pleasant to them but only the ANGAU … So Bob Cole and I were sent, we wanted to probe the flank down on the Sepik River, so brigade commander particularly, wanted to know where the Japanese flank was. There were hardly any flanks because they were in pockets as we were in pockets, in villages. So Bob Cole and I and six

31:00 police boys set off down to probe this flank. We'd been gone about three days and we carried with us two canvas strips to put down as a cross, if we found a bit of clearing for kunai and we had a radio back to brigade headquarters, so they could supply us with food. So anyhow, we found a clearing

31:30 and we put down our strips of canvas in the form of a cross so the biscuit bomber would know where to drop some food to us. And we just sat on the edge of the clearing, and over came the bomber, and drop some food and were jumped, I didn't realised it, by twenty or thirty Japanese. So of course, the police boys and Bob Cole and I fled into the jungle to get out of the road,

32:00 left our canvas cross strips there which we couldn't pick up and tried to flee to get away from the Japanese and hide. And all that one of the police boys picked up, was a case, and why it was dropped to us I'll never know, a case of asparagus. And it was three days' back to, walk, back to brigade head-

32:30 quarters. We got some bananas and things, but boy, if you've ever lived on tinned asparagus for three days, you never want to have asparagus again. Sorry, it's a silly story.

So the Japanese were in pursuit of you?

They out numbered us. They out numbered us, Bob Cole and I and six police boys, even to try…., no they didn't try and pursue us because having the police boys

33:00 with us was absolutely marvellous, they could talk the talk to the odd native they'd run into and they'd put us onto the track between villages. No there was no point. Bob Cole was decorated. And subsequently, when I went to, doing some research at the [Australian] War Museum [Memorial], and looking at the…, I got the Moten papers out from the

33:30 brigadier that he'd sent back, and I noticed he'd recommended Bob Cole for a DSO which he didn't get, he got an MC instead. No, there was no point in us, with the police boys and Bob Cole and I, trying to stand and fight twenty Japanese. There was a bit of self preservation at that particular stage. And particularly as the war was drawing to a close.

34:00 There was a realisation that what we were doing in New Guinea was pointless. There was a realisation that we shouldn't have been there. I don't suppose this is ever generally known, but I would say in the last three or four weeks of the war, I knew, because I

34:30 would move out to the battalions and talk with the company commanders, they knew me, and they said, we're not taking any more casualties, and in the last three or four weeks of that particular time in New Guinea, active patrolling on behalf of the company commanders and the platoon commanders, pushing up track, ceased. They said, we're just not going to take any more casualties.

35:00 And I know, false sit reps. A sit rep is a situation report, which is sent back from the platoon to the company, from the company to the battalion, to the battalion to the brigade, a situation report of what is happening. And I know there were false sit reps sent back, patrol – no enemy sighted, and when in point of fact, no patrol took

35:30 place.

So, you just dug in? So, you just dug in?

They just dug in. Well, they dug into their, just held their position where they were. As I say, I don't know what happened in Tarakan but even in New Guinea, in the last three or four months, boys that had been with the battalion, with 6th Div. from the first desert push, some of them were killed, just ……as I've said before,

36:00 New Guinea and Bougainville and Borneo were completely unnecessary, absolutely unnecessary. Fighting and mopping up self-contained prisoners of war. Yep, I do know. I don't suppose it has been ever recorded or known but particularly in the last two, three weeks or four weeks of the war, amongst the company commanders, they weren't going to take any more

36:30 casualties. And everybody was becoming exhausted and feeling, everybody was, feeling – running out of luck. And in those days, particularly, at that time, there was the point system. If you joined up at a certain time and if you were married, you got so many points. And you could elect to return to Australia and leave the army. But even at divisional brigade headquarters, a number of fellows who had the points,

37:00 the brigade divisional commanders, didn't allow them to go back. Some of them elected to stay on, I know. But there was a general feeling, particularly, in the last few months. As far as my brigade was concerned so bloody pointless and unnecessary. And we were thinking of going home, we wanted to

37:30 get back to our mums and our girlfiends and our wives.

Where you when the news came through that it was all over?

When it was all over?

Yeah. Where were you?

On a stretcher. After VP Day I went down with malaria for about the tenth time and Dicky Smybit, who ran the field ambulance, close by, said 'you've had enough' and I was really bad by this time.

38:00 And they flew me out of Yamall, that's right, in this little converted Auster aircraft, back to the coast, to the 2/11th Australian General Hospital. And the war was over by that time. Interesting, at the 2/11th Australian General Hospital, by this time, Verity Vines,

38:30 it's only a coincidence, Bill Vines' cousin, was matron of the second, previously at the 2/6th AGH in Palestine, she was known as the housekeeper, second in charge, and she nursed me in Palestine and again when I got to the hospital at Aitape, she nursed me again, which was a coincidence. Then I came out on a stretcher,

39:00 was evacuated by air, from Aitape to Moresby, sorry to Lae, to Lae. Which by this time was a big

administrative base.

Excuse me Ken, sorry, out microphone's dropped.

Tape 6

00:32 **Ken, throughout the story that you've told us, you've been promoted several times, within the army. And I just wondered, I guess, what you thought about having been, 'cause it was quite a swift promotion, I wondered if I could get your thoughts on how promotions took place and how they made you feel.**

Well,

01:00 promotions, I'd joined as a … Having been in the militia, in the tanks, and being a corporal in the tanks, I'd had some army training and some army experience. And then when I walked in and joined the army in the second world war, after Paris fell, and walked into Royal Park as a private, I expected to be a private, I had no idea that maybe I

01:30 might be a corporal or something. Anyhow, because of the relationship with George Milne, I was subsequently, very quickly, made a transport sergeant. And that's all I ever aspired to be, that's all I ever wanted to be. I hoped, because, you had a sergeants' mess and you had eating off plates, and you had some privacy, rather than just sitting around on your haunches and eating out of a dixie, that was rather selfish.

02:00 Then, I was commissioned, luckily, because the fellow who was supposed to be my subaltern in the transport platoon, couldn't get a transfer, and I think out of desperation, at the last hour, I was asked 'could I hold down a commission and take over the transport platoon of the 2/23rd Battalion?' And this I did, without any formal training, to be

02:30 an officer and I was commissioned just before we sailed and I sailed as the junior subaltern of the battalion, right at the bottom of the regimental seniority list. And with an infantry battalion, you start as a junior and you move up the list as officers above you are killed, captured or repatriated out. And I slowly, and because in an infantry battalion, if you're

03:00 lucky enough to live, you move up the seniority list. And after Tobruk, at Alamein, I went to Alamein out of Tobruk as a lieutenant platoon commander, started Alamein as a platoon commander, casualties in, fairly heavy casualties, early Alamein in July, and of course within the battalion they need somebody,

03:30 run out of company commanders, you're a lieutenant, you're promoted to be second in command of a company, then when more casualties, you're given, become a captain and take over as a company commander and there you stay. There are about four majors, I think, right up at the top, and more casualties among the company commanders. At the final Alamein campaign all our company commanders were either killed, wounded or captured,

04:00 not one of them, so…… And as I was fortunate enough not to get back in time to, I regret it, sometimes I regret it, that I wasn't there for that final campaign. And on the other hand I feel selfish, I just feel lucky that I wasn't there because I mightn't have got through it. So then you move up the regimental seniority list. Then

04:30 to the staff school. Then you become a major. And it doesn't seem so quick. It doesn't seem so quick over nearly five years, four years. Four years is a fairly long time for it to happen. And also within the battalion, there are privates who become corporals who become sergeants who are commissioned in the field who become company commanders and one doesn't

05:00 seem to take much notice. The only joy about it is, you get extra pay, and extra responsibility. The greatest joy, I found, was being a lieutenant platoon commander with thirty-four to thirty-six fellows in a platoon. You're intimate, you're close with them. Then you get to be a company commander and you're a bit remote, you haven't got the intimate

05:30 contact with all the….., you know, you hope to know everybody in your company but it's not a day to day content, you've only got your small company headquarters. And then finally, when you do a staff school and become a brigade major in an infantry brigade, that's rather isolated. You certainly have the brigade intelligence officer and a few people around brigade headquarters.

06:00 But it's a little safer being back at brigade, not quite as dangerous. To accept the promotion, you just accept it, you don't look forward to it, but it just happens to come along.

What qualities do you think made you a good leader, in that situation?

Well, I hope I

06:30 was a good leader. I think….. When you become a lieutenant in an infantry battalion and become a

platoon commander, you have an intimate and close personal relationship with thirty-plus wonderful fellows, of all

07:00 shapes and sizes. And there's a bond that develops between you. And you have a great affection and a great respect for them and you feel, by chance I am their leader, I mustn't let them down because I'm fond of them, because I respect them, and whether that makes you a good leader or not, because you're

07:30 quite determined that you'll do all you can, to see none of them unnecessary casualties. Although you're frightened, and apprehensive, you wont let them see it, because they're really have got faith in you to lead them, to direct them, particularly in an attack or out on a patrol, and that gives you a strength, and I've said

08:00 before, so much easier to have a commission and be a leader than to just be a …….. the ones I admire are the private soldiers who look to you and their corporals, and even their corporals and sergeants, for you to give direction. In our battalion, when I look through the subalterns and the company commanders, if you like to use the expression 'good leaders', I won't use that

08:30 expression, I'll just simply say – there were no bad leaders in our battalion, when I look around at my colleagues. And at the battalion reunions, immediately after the war and during the war, the lovely affection that we all had for each other and members of your own platoon and company and the other fellows who were commissioned,

09:00 a great warmth that everybody had for everybody else indicated that the private soldiers, who were to salt of the earth, had also a respect and affection for their platoon commanders and their company commanders. There were no bad leaders, that I know of, in our battalion, ever.

How important were the relationships that you

09:30 **made during the war, after the war?**

Unbelievable. Unbelievable. Anzac Day. We're fading now, there aren't many. But going back ten years, fifteen years, to see, twenty years ago, after the war, irrespective of socio-economic position of the fellows….

10:00 We had a battalion association and meetings and reunions. You had tremendous affection and respect for all the fellows that you knew in the battalion. Rank meant nothing after the war except seeing them and the joy of seeing them and reminiscing with them, and the funny things that happened

10:30 at the particular time. And the confession some of them made to you of the naughty things they did on leave. The relationship is unbelievable. When you spend four years with a number of fellows, starting off with thirty fellows, and you spend two years with them, at times under frightening conditions and at times

11:00 under personally unpleasant physical conditions and seeing how they respond and put up with it and do it, it's unbelievable the relationship that you still have. Now I know in our battalion, one particular fellow has become quite famous, Sir William Vines has achieved great things, chancellor

11:30 of universities, on the board of lots of companies, British knighthood, Australian knighthood, the joy at a battalion meeting, you see it, he's remembered as a platoon commander and as a company commander and the boys are very proud of him and they say 'G'day Bill', and he's known as Bill. The same with other officers who are

12:00 left, most of them are dead now, but Neil Gilmour and others who were great, in my opinion, great leaders, the relationship and the feeling and the bond that you have, nothing like it. After the war you joined companies and work as managers and eventually as you older, you semi-

12:30 retire and you get directorships on the boards of companies, nothing like it. There's nothing like the relationship that you spent in those four years. Very hard to explain but it's so deep and so meaningful and when you see, as we had last year, a luncheon, and the faces have become older and different but there's something about the face that you remember and say

13:00 'I've just forgotten your name' and they say 'oh, I'm Bluey or I'm Okker or I'm Snake' with the nickname and you see them and then you remember. It's just incredible, just incredible. And you don't have to explain anything. And the same thing happened after the war in Legacy. After the war I joined Melbourne, I joined in Mildura as a matter of fact, joined Legacy - am I talking too much? –

13:30 and in Mildura, the Legacy Club was made up of first world war diggers from around Mildura and Red Cliff, wonderful men, and you could see the relationship they had with each other, as we had. And I joined Legacy, and then eventually left Mildura and came back to Melbourne, and in the Melbourne Legacy Club there were people like, great people, like Donovan Joynt VC, Hugh Brain,

14:00 Sir Alfred Kensey, everything was Christian name, rank was forgotten. All these first world war diggers had started this thing and handed over to us, the second world war diggers. And those first world [[war?]] diggers, while they lived in the immediate postwar years, helped us. I received help and advice commercially and in business and opportunities because of

14:30 them. They had the same relationship that we had. So, I only continued on in the battalion, with the friends you made but also in the immediate, in Melbourne Legacy were a mixture of first world war diggers, none of them are left now, and it's gone on for nearly forty or fifty years, relations, friends I made in Melbourne Legacy

15:00 were just as endearing as the ones I made during the war. They came from different units, air force, and different battalions but there was that common bond of having served and a common bond of working with young widows, with young children, and trying to help them. So to answer your question, I can't answer it except to say it's just an incredible relationship.

You've mentioned nick names a lot of

15:30 **the time. What was your nick name?**

In the platoon, gosh I'd just about forgotten this, never to my face, and I don't know why but I was I was referred to, my name was Clarke, and I was referred to always face to face in the line as boss,

16:00 out of the line as sir, but behind my back, Shallartie, I don't know where it came from. No idea. But it was Shallartie, Shallartie do this or Shallartie did that. Not sir or boss, it was just Shallartie said we should do this, he must be off his bloody rocker. Sorry, just memories.

16:30 **If we can go now to post war? You spent a lot of time in Japan after the war.**

Well, rapid fire postwar. Came out in an ambulance, out of Lae, in an air ambulance, and eventually evacuated down to, through the Concord and through the Heidelberg Hospital. Interesting, the air ambulance before mine, crashed with everybody, so how lucky can you be

17:00 at the end of the war's over. Then the war's finished, cut to Royal Park, discharged. A rude joke, not rude but one used to say in the unit, when you get back to your bride or whatever, 'what's the second thing you're going to do when you get home?' and the answer was 'take off me pack'. Then, housing was

17:30 difficult, very very difficult and having, starting at the beginning of the war, I marched into the army, I was on £4 a week as an oil company representative, paid all my bills and had £11 to my name when I joined the army. Came out with deferred pay of about £1100 which was a great help and war service loans to help you buy a house at forty five years at two and a half percent was a

18:00 great help. Governments have been marvellous to returned ex-servicemen. Sorry to ramble. Then rejoined the oil company, having had £14 a week, £2 a day as a major, to go back to £6 a week. Jean must have been pregnant in the first two or three weeks after I returned because I managed to get a little car as 'tools

18:30 of trade', that's, returned servicemen, and we decided to go up to Mount Buffalo to have a holiday and driving up she said 'I'm feeling off colour' and I said 'what, are you carsick?' and she said 'no, I'm pregnant'. Anyhow, that's beside the point. Found it difficult to get accommodation and I was sent to Mildura by the oil company and the sales manager there, I think, rather

19:00 resented the fact that I was an ex-serviceman because he didn't go away. And I was allowed to, Jean had to stay at home with her family because she was pregnant, I couldn't get housing up there, and I was allowed to come down from Mildura at my own expense, once every three months. And eventually we got a house. A little fibro cottage in Mildura on an unmade road, three rooms, twelve by twelve and she came up, where the first two children were born. Again the ex-service men in Legacy

19:30 Club there were marvellous, they really were marvellous men, who worked together building great blocks, and a couple of them said to me 'look, you shouldn't be here, you should get back to the city otherwise you'll be an oil company representative here for the rest …' and they rather persuaded me to resign and go back to Melbourne. Went back to Melbourne. Again another ex-service man who became Sir Alfred Kensey

20:00 said 'what are you doing' and I said 'well, I'm back in Melbourne and I'm living with my parents and my wife and two kids are living with her parents', how wonderful parents were in those days, 'and I'm looking for a job'. And he said 'well, Reg Ansett is looking for a sales manager and I'd like you to see him'. So I went to see Reg Ansett. At the oil company I was on £6 a week and Reg Ansett

20:30 said 'well we've got problems, we've got buses and airlines and hotels and nothings …..' And I wasn't too frightfully keen on all this. And I said 'well you haven't got a problem, Mr Ansett, you haven't got yourself organised'. 'Oh', he said 'do you think you can fix it?' And the staff school was wonderful training, later I went to Harvard University for an advanced management course, but the staff school was the most magnificent training I've ever had.

21:00 So having been with the oil company at £6 he said 'what sort of a salary would you want?' and I said 'seven fifty a year' which was £15 a week. So I stayed with him for three years and thoroughly enjoyed it. Again, I was head hunted by Sir Alf Kensey, and he said Australian Motor Industries are looking for a sales manager. And Timothy Ryan

21:30 would like… So I went to see Timothy Ryan, again an ex-serviceman from the first world war. And I was

employed as sales manager, again not at seven fifty, but at fifteen hundred a year and this gave us our big break through. And all the way through it was the first world war diggers who helped the second world war diggers. Now this might sound

22:00 immodest, I don't mean it to sound immodest, but it's only in the last few months, when I think back on the commercial life, I realise that the fact, and this does sound immodest, the fact that I was decorated gave me, and I didn't realise at the time, it meant nothing to me, because so many other people……., had given

22:30 me, in their eyes, an identity which perhaps is rather …….. I didn't realise at the time, but it did give me an identity and in the postwar years it did help. And I've only realised this, as I say, this is the truth, in the last few months. It never occurred to me at the time. It didn't mean anything to me at the time because I've said before, there were so many boys

23:00 that weren't recognised that deserved to be recognised and it didn't mean that much to me, it really didn't, the only thing it meant to me was for my mother. It meant something to her, I think, when it came through. So then I was asked, would I go to Japan. Sounds like nepotism doesn't it? Sir Bill Vines, by this time, who had been posted to London as

23:30 managing director of --- was headhunted by Sir William Gunn, to head up a newly formed and reorganised International Wool Secretariat. Bill rang me from Tokyo and said 'Bill Gunn and I are here in Tokyo, wool is losing out to synthetics in Japan, how about thinking about coming up here for a couple of years and setting up an organisation because wool is losing to synthetics'. I

24:00 went home and talked with Jean and the kids and by this time we were financially comfortable, I was financially comfortable, and if you'd said to the kids 'will you go to Alice Springs' they'd have said 'yes'. I'd been travelling over seas every year to Stuttgart and to Detroit and to Coventry placing forward orders and travelled a great deal. And I thought it would be interesting for my family to spend a bit, a couple of years, overseas, for the children. And I said 'yes'. So we went up there,

24:30 went to Japan for two years. At the end of two years we introduced a wool mark, and then I had to stay a couple of years longer, to get that up and running. Then I opened a branch in Korea with Nationals, then in Taiwan with Nationals, then in Hong Kong with Nationals, then in Bombay with Nationals, then in Tehran in the time of the Shah. And we were thoroughly enjoying it. Life was comfortable in Tokyo. The kids were in school there,

25:00 and subsequently went on the universities in the state. So we stayed there for eleven years. I've been asked – what was my attitude to the Japanese when I first accepted the posting to Japan. The war had been over a number of years. You tend to forget the initial feelings that you had. I remember in the immediate postwar years a Japanese

25:30 dance concert team came to, ----, dancing thing came to Melbourne. And someone said 'are you going' and I said 'wouldn't walk across the road to see it'. That was my attitude at that time. Having gone to Japan, I went to Japan, I was asked to do a job, and I went there to do a job of work and I was quite prepared to do the job of work in spite of the fact with whom, the people with whom, I had to deal. To

26:00 my, not dismay, I suppose it's a word, when I went there I was in my forties, early, yeah, just forty. The men I was doing business with were all sixty plus. Managing directors and presidents of great spinning mills, Japanese -------, trading companies. They met me with, they treated me with great courtesy. I met…….

26:30 And some of them, particularly in the Japan Wool Importers Association, were ex Australian, Japanese men who'd been wool buyers in Australia. And they were very helpful to me. I worked hard at the language. I could mention some of their names, it wouldn't mean anything - ------ and others, -----. And there's lots of souvenirs around the house that they gave me. Their commercial morality and integrity

27:00 was undoubted. Their word was their bond. My family met with great courtesy and with great kindness. I wont use the word 'affection' but in the end they held my respect and complete trust. And I mentioned before, I don't condone what they did, the army did, during, the soldiers, during the war, but I understand

27:30 why they did it. Because of the brutality, even within the Japanese army. So to put it, we enjoyed the time in Japan. There were only about forty or fifty Australian there, they were an expatriate community. Tokyo Lawn Tennis Club was interesting, half foreigners and half Japanese. And I was travelling. The kids were happy at school. And then subsequently, I was posted to

28:00 London, to take over, again nepotism I suppose, from Bill Vines, who'd returned to Australia to be chairman of the Australian Wool Corporation. And I was Managing Director in London and we had some twenty three or twenty four branches around the world. So was there for six years and decided at sixty, I would retired, on the basis, I reckon at sixty, hopefully I'd have ten good years until I was seventy. And I've been lucky, I've had a little more up to now. '87. Came

28:30 back to Australia, took a couple, several board appointments. Because I was decorated by the Japanese emperor, and because of my language skills, it meant that a number of companies, Dalgety Australian, New Zealand Dalgety, Canada, when they were going up to Japan, Goldfields of Australia,

29:00 they would ask me to go with them and just to help them in their negotiations with the Japanese. And that's what I did until I was about 72. Lived comfortably and at 72 decided it was time to go sailing and play tennis and enjoy the time that Jean and I had together. End of story.

Sounds like a great idea. Can I ask, when you were in Japan, did you encounter any

29:30 **of their war veterans?**

Yeah. I was interviewed by a Japanese woman's magazine about my background, and I'd mentioned that I'd been a soldier in New Guinea, and phone call came to -----, who was a Japanese girl who became my secretary, she's in her sixties now. You never ask a direct question in Japan, a direct favour,

30:00 ever direct, because it would force the Japanese man or me to say 'no I can't' and you cannot say 'no'. So a phone call came to her from a man called Mr Mieda, who was managing director of Mitsui Bussan, the trading company, that he was in New Guinea, and that he would like to meet me if I agreed. So ---- (secretary) told me about this and I said 'yes, I'd be happy

30:30 to meet him' and back it went to him and eventually it came……..would I meet… Yes, he'd like to take me to lunch at the Mitsui Club. Well the Mitsui Club was in -----, a magnificent building, beautiful dinning room and facilities for executives of the Mitsui group of companies. Met him there, first thing I said to him 'well' his English was pretty good and my Japanese was pretty good, and the first thing I said 'well, Mieda-san, neither of us were very

31:00 good soldiers, otherwise we would have killed each other'. So then we met, had a pleasant lunch and reminisced and he said, 'there's about six or seven of us left from', they were in the same area that we were in, 'and we meet once every three weeks, would you like to join us?' So I went to join them and I had maps and photographs of New Guinea, which they didn't have. And there was not hatred on my part and there was

31:30 certainly none on their part. They were kind and pleasant. Then one day they said 'you'll be interested in our next meeting, General Yoshihara is coming to our next meeting'. I nearly fell off my chair because General Yoshihara, who was second, Lieutenant General, who second in command to General Adachi, who commanded the Japanese 8th Army, had come to our quarters and had surrendered at our

32:00 headquarters. And so I met him, he didn't remember me of course, but I was just a major in the headquarters. And I met him again, which was an interesting coincidence. And so, I had a lot of maps and things, and he was amazed at the maps and the facilities that we had. And then he subsequently wrote his story of his campaigns in …

32:30 …, called Under the Southern Cross [Southern Cross: account of the eastern New Guinea campaign] I had them translated and I found they had already been translated by a lady called Heath, at the Australian War Memorial and I got a copy of those and some of his rather crude maps. So that was an interesting aside in Japan.

What could you reminisce about, I mean obviously having been in New Guinea, but, I

33:00 **mean …**

We didn't get into any great detail about the actual fighting. We talked more about, when we were together and having a meal, how unpleasant it was, about the natives, the New Guinea natives, and upstairs in the library

33:30 I've got a story written by a Japanese marathon runner who became quite famous as a Japanese raider in New Guinea. Taking raiding parties, and at the end of his book he mentions me, it says, I've heard of Ken Clarke who was up there, I must meet him and find out. So we talked mainly about the natives, about the food, about the conditions. Neither of us wanted to touch on the actual

34:00 fighting and killing of that particular stage. They were interested in what our back up was, they had no great knowledge of where, of what was happening on Bougainville, I had a faint knowledge. And what subsequently happened in Tarakan and those places, they had no great knowledge of that, so they used

34:30 to ask questions about that. But generally, it was just a pleasantness and talking about and reminiscing about the unpleasant conditions there. We put what was left on Mereshoe Island, and some four or five thousand died even after supplied with berri-berri and malnutrition and no many of them got back to Japan.

35:00 **Just finally, I wanted to ask I guess, coming home, and looking back over the war, did you talk about it with anyone other than ex-service men. Was it, was the war something you talked about?**

No, never. Only talked about it with ex-servicemen and with the girl that I married because the girl that I married, wrote to me,

35:30 not love letters but just friendly letters, as others did, right through the war. I always replied or explained, if anybody asked me, but nobody asked me about it. Even my children, would occasionally raise something on Anzac Day and say 'where were you Dad' and they would…. We used to have

battalion association

36:00 meetings at my place sometimes, they were aware of it and that we always had reunions, and marching on Anzac Day. Occasionally they would ask a question. No, but we didn't talk about it once. And the other thing, that to me is remarkable, Frank Hiddlestone and Lindsay Orr came back from the Burma-Thailand railroad, they were part of a group, all the blokes from my battalion,

36:30 different fellows I knew, and I can tell you honestly, one month after we all got back, everybody was back doing what they did. There were no counselling. There was no problems. Everybody was so pleased to be back at home and pick up where they left off. So, we find it difficult to find out now in newspaper reports, when anything traumatic happens, why people have got to be

37:00 counselled. Maybe that's selfish or unfair, but there was none of that. Just people picked up, all of us, of all the fellows that I know, as though the war had never happened. One month after it was over, you were back at the oil company, or back doing whatever you were doing. I remember Frank Hiddlestone, who was from a wealthy, very wealthy, family of jewellery importers, said to me one

37:30 day 'Ken, I've learnt that I can exist with just a loincloth and a handful of rice'. So pleased to be at home as though, honestly, as though the war had never occurred. We were pleased to see each other on reunions and things but the war was over, it was finished, it was an incident in our lives. And I'll be criticised for that, I know, but the counselling, I just can't understand.

38:00 **Do you remember, just the final question, you've mentioned your mother a lot through this, do you remember when you saw her for the first time, when you came home?**

Yep. I've got a photo there of when I came home. I had….during the war Jean said she had promised to marry me. When I came back after, from the Middle East, she said 'well I tried to join the VADs', I'll come back to my mother in a minute,

38:30 'they've found a spot on my lung and they wont accept me, it's not dangerous and I think I should tell you about this, and it's not fair to marry you', and I thought, oh my God. So, then I had to go up and see my mother. My mother and father, by this time, had moved to Sydney where my father was working at Bonds Industries and they were just in a boarding house on the edge of

39:00 Centennial Park. And I saw my mother, I was delighted to see her, absolutely, and my father, more my mother, it was just fantastic. And I spent a week with her and then her friend, Mrs Eskall had a son, Stan, and there's a photo of us taken as we all spent, the four of us, his mother, Mrs Eskall and my mother, and Stan and I, taking our mothers out to lunch at the Princes. Yeah, it was great to see

39:30 mum. And then subsequently, after the war, they moved back to Melbourne and the investiture of the MC took place at Government House in Melbourne by the Duke of Gloucester, who was then Governor General. And I was very pleased for my mother because Jean, my wife came, but I was more pleased for mum

40:00 because she was pleased. Okay?