

Australians at War Film Archive

Basil Catterns (Wilfred) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:36 **All right Basil, we'll start with what I said, just try and give us a brief summary of your life?**

A brief summary. Well I can start at the beginning, back in 1917, Basil Wilfrid Thomas Catterns, Wilfrid F-R-I-D,

01:00 and born in Clayton Street, Balmain down near Moore Park. Can't remember anything of that, but my first memories are waking up one morning in my cot in Barr Street, Balmain. Barr Street's a big, wide

01:30 street, all rough, not covered, no bitumen. And I'm in my cot on the street, and a fire engine's there, and I don't understand what it's all about. But I now know that what happened was there was a fire in the cooperative bakery's

02:00 shed about that far away from where I was sleeping, and the first thing that the fireman did was put me in the street. Stables up against the side fence, the big boiler and firewood stock about that from

02:30 where I was sleeping. And fly catchers all hanging up from the roof and all sorts of weird things. Senna tea and...

03:00 **We'll just move on, we'll get all those details later, just keep moving on, summarise your life.**

Yeah, that was a rented house like the one in Clayton Street was, but a small - but they belonged to my - an auntie, so it was a very small rent,

03:30 but we had to move. And by this stage I'm now nine and ten, and I've been out on the baker's cart every day and before that on the rubbish dray, because there was a council rubbish dray up there. And the horses

04:00 used to be brought down to my place with had a great big yard with plenty of grass. And my mother didn't like me working on the rubbish bin because I kept on coming home with all sorts of little silver things that'd been in the rubbish, but she didn't object to me being on the baker's cart. And it got to the stage where the baker's

04:30 cart would wait for me outside of Birchgrove School, and soon as I came out of school I'd rush in, out and get up on the baker's cart. And first of all there was this house, and another rented house, in - I'll think of the street in a minute.

05:00 Anyway what I remember from that house was the bite of the Depression, my father, which I rarely ever saw because he was a master mariner away on a boat and now he's lucky if he can get one week's work

05:30 on the ships that are laid up in the Depression. Rose Bay are down, Cove Street, Balmain, one at Birchgrove, two or three ships together. And the rule still applies to this day, that a ship - which is a vessel - which is at anchor has to have a certified officer

06:00 on board twenty-four hours and a light up the masthead. So I polish the kerosene light and I put 'em up, and did all that.

We need to just keep moving a little bit quicker, just give me dates and what was happening. I'm just trying to do this in a few minutes and then we'll go back and get all these details about everything you did. So just move on from here and say briefly

06:30 **when you left school, when you joined up and so forth, in brief kind of...?**

To put an actual date on it, I was at Birchgrove School and it's the day when the school knocks off very early because they all go out onto the playground which goes down

07:00 to the water, Cockatoo Island across there. And it's the launching of the first and only aircraft carrier

that Australia's had, Albatross, and so we saw that being launched. And to this day I've got a very fond affection for

07:30 Cockatoo Island and I'm heavily into the Cockatoo Island restoration now. I wrote a thirty-four page document which I gave to the Federation Trust, they keep on sending me all sorts of letters and things, but still no action on their program for the island.

08:00 **What was Balmain like then compared to what it's like now?**

Well it was certainly horses and carts and very few cars. There was talk of there being a rail, an underground railway station

08:30 out in the park there at the end of Evans Street, but it never came to anything. But I remember the buses which had a foegel, F-O-E-G-E-L, something like that. And all hand gears in and out, and they just gravitated

09:00 out of solid tyres into some blown up tyres. I finished up, after the war, being advertising manager of Goodyear Tyre Company, and finished up turning on demonstrations of our big, our fast drivers, over, up over a ramp and down on a bed of nails

09:30 to prove that the tubeless tyre was safe to drive on. And it's been there ever since.

What sort of class of people lived in Balmain?

Definitely maritime oriented. Moore Park, Woolichstock [?] and all around there, all around there

10:00 were sailmakers, engineers, slipways and a working port. And there was no concern about having parks or anything at all like that. My mother for instance was Australian,

10:30 my father was English, master mariner, he sailed before the mast in sailing ships and was fully qualified in steam. And but my mother was Australian born and

11:00 the name Greenwell, Emily Rose Greenwell. And Greenwell is Greenwell Point down the south coast, the Shoalhaven River, because my grandfather on that side was also a master mariner. And he

11:30 came out from England and was operating a ship, a passenger boat with sails and oars from Lavender Bay, and that was a sort of life that it was. And my mother was always talking about

12:00 home, home to her was England. She'd never been to England, I haven't been to England. But my name Basil comes from my uncle who was a wounded artillery officer in the First World War, BG

12:30 Catterns. He's somewhere in that box, I've got a fifty pound note signed 'BG Catterns' as the Treasurer. And therefore my mother would egg me on to start an accountancy course

13:00 and she saw me going to England and knocking on the door of the Bank of England. "Yes, what did you want?" "I want to see Basil Catterns." "Who are you?" "Basil Catterns." So that was in my mind inherited from my mother when I was making the

13:30 decision to join the army, right at the beginning.

How much did you see of your father?

Very little, very little, he wasn't a - he didn't read any stories to me, he didn't. No he was, he tried to teach me to play cricket, but unfortunately he gave me a full size bat

14:00 which spent its life sitting up in a saucer of, what's that oil, linseed oil, linseed oil. And when there was an old wooden roller which came with the house, a rented house, which I had found in the bread cart at the age of ten

14:30 or eleven, I went across the Iron Cove Bridge when the Balmain Co-op started, to sell bread over there. So told my mother and she bought - well not bought, I've never lived in an owned house until I bought it myself. So I went to

15:00 Drummoyne School and that was about ten eleven, eleven and a couple of years and then Port Street. And I had an opportunity to go on the staff as a messenger boy, copy boy they call them, in The Sun newspaper. And so I was a clerk in the war, in The

15:30 Sun office in 1939, knowing that war is coming. My birthday was August, August the eleventh so I had taken my holidays knowing that it looks like war's going to come. And I am

16:00 now a sergeant in the militia battalion, the 1/19th Battalion which was in Bore Street, Paddington at the back end of, the down hill part of Victoria Barracks, joined on to barracks.

What do you recall of your school days?

Right.

- 16:30 Well the Birchgrove School, Balmain. I was a late starter there because I had an eye problem and I had to go down to the Balmain hospital and lay there in agony when they put a, what's that iron stone,
- 17:00 green stone and roll it round my eye, dracona, dracerno [trachoma]. And then with my eyes shut down I'm allowed to leave after an hour and I could walk along by feeling the fence. I wouldn't take that risk now of course the way the traffic is. So I would arrive at school, quite often late
- 17:30 and then we went out to, on Friday to, down the sports field and so it's cricket. So I spent all the afternoon squatting on my haunches, sitting up against the wire, the white picket fence around Birchgrove Oval and chewing a bit of grass,
- 18:00 and I didn't see much at all. So there was another option that I didn't have to go to sport, I could stop at school and read. So since then I've been an avid reader, and I've got a room up there which is just full of books, full of books. And I still can't resist picking up
- 18:30 something and reading it. And so much so that although I've got the usual problems that you have with your eyes, and I've got to put drops in them every morning and every night, I still read the newspaper without the glasses, I've got the glasses here in case the type's a bit small.

And what was the discipline like at school?

Right, now school.

- 19:00 I went to Drummoyne and I did very well there in the QC [Qualifying Certificate], and but somehow or other a 'no entry' into high school. So I, my mother eventually, after a couple of weeks, gets on to the Education Department
- 19:30 and they can't find my papers anywhere. But then on, later on, and the (strength...UNCLEAR) when they looked everywhere again, they couldn't find what had happened to my papers. I go out to Fort Street School and it's Depression time, I'm three weeks late starting
- 20:00 and I sit down on a butter box in the middle of the hall because there's no seat anywhere else for me. And they're already saying, "omani a ga are in tres padre duese reste..." and French. And then, "A plus B equals C or minus
- 20:30 ZY - " or something, which was all over my head, I didn't like it. And all I wanted to do was to write and I've been writing, and there's some samples in there on the thing. But that got me the chance to go to The Sun office as a boy. So that when war came, twenty-two,
- 21:00 I'd been away on holidays and I'm expecting war to come and I'm working back to make sure that I'm on top of my work, cause I've had three week's holiday. And I was there on the night of the first of September 1939
- 21:30 when it's just about six o'clock, everybody's gone home, they're over in the pubs or something. And I'm in the telephone exchange, three telephone changes, but only one operating there because she's left back on her own. A red headed girl called,
- 22:00 I knew her name last night but I don't know it now. And, SE Gorrick, SE Gorrick, that's her. So she's on the phone and then the next minute she says, "It's on, it's on!" And she gets, and the button has been pressed,
- 22:30 'Stop Press' flashing light, 'Stop Press' and the run, brrrrm, that you can hear from down below, has stopped. And she starts phoning up every hotel in the vicinity, the Australia Hotel, Largs Hotel, Waterweeks Hotel and another one around the corner, and emergency,
- 23:00 all staff, Sun newspaper, required for a special edition. And I join the crowd in the sub-editor's room, there's the teleprinter and it's got 'German troops have gone, have crossed the border
- 23:30 at so and so' and 'German planes have bombed such and such'. And in the editors' room, I go in there, it's jammed with people and the editors, the sub-editors are getting their briefing from the editor and
- 24:00 there's the radio and it's Hitler screaming away and a translator simultaneously English, into English, English, English. So it's obvious that there's going to be a war and I was there long enough to see
- 24:30 the first edition of this special war one.

What was the atmosphere like in the office?

Oh electric, electric, electric, yeah. War! But of course it required Mr Menzies on Monday, on the Sunday the third of September 1939 to

- 25:00 say, "It is my melancholy...therefore Britain is at war and so and so is at war, and as a consequence Australia, is now my melancholy duty, we are at war." So I've got the,

25:30 the call up from Victoria Barracks.

At what point did you join the militia, when did you join the militia?

Four years before.

Why did you join the militia?

Why'd I join it? Because my mother wouldn't let me go to the, join the sea scouts, I was always a boating man I had a canoe, or the navy cadets or anything like that, anything to do with the water,

26:00 no more mariners going away. But it was all right for me to put on britches and puttees and carry a thirty-three rifle in the tram all the way from Drummoyne to Victoria Barracks, yeah. Anyway call up first of all to,

26:30 for the 1st Battalion, to report to the drill hall, and they just, when they had a bus load, a truck load of us they would take us out to Long Bay, Maroubra Rifle Range. And I'm on the

27:00 beach as a sergeant with the troops and we're playing around with this barbed wire which we'd never ever seen before, but we've got this concertina stuff on Maroubra Beach. And the adjutant gets a call to me, I'm required up at battalion headquarters. Got to headquarters and

27:30 out there there's some people who want to speak to you, brigadier, colonel, captain and general or someone, about four, five of them, and they ask me all sorts of questions and I answered them as best I could. And when they'd gone I went to see the adjutant, I said, "What was all that in aid of?"

28:00 He said, "Oh that was an examination, they want to make you an officer." So I decide, the 6th Division is being formed, AIF [Australian Imperial Force] being formed and I was in the 1/19th Battalion Militia, which had followed on with all the

28:30 history of the 1st Battalion. And to this day all of that gets repeated, there's on a Pozieres Day when I put on my uniform and go out and read the lessons in the bloody Bible. And there's the cross from Pozieres and the first

29:00 1st Battalion story up there on, in the church.

When you were in the militia in 1/19th Battalion, what sort of training did you do in the militia?

It was good,

29:30 it was good. For instance one of the things that general what's-his-name, the boss of, the head, Mr Howard's favourite of it, he did the campaign up at

30:00 West, at East New Guinea. Anyway he said, I went out to hear him launch the policy for the military and I was

30:30 absolutely shocked, It was like a student at university telling his story, "Reserve this, reserve, ready reserve, unready reserve, a reserve, a reserve, a reserve," and not one word about people's involvement. Now all of the wars that Australia had

31:00 fought up till this time had that element all the time that there were volunteers supported by the local community. It's only in the case of the Light Horse, which they're going to turn on, as you know, in Martin Place very soon, ready reserve, but the,

31:30 the horses were one hundred per cent community supported, so there was that. And the other thing that we had in the training was the AIC [Australian Instructional Corps], the Australian... Cosgrove's the general I was thinking about.

32:00 And I told him this, I had a luncheon with Paul Cullen on one of his, General Cullen. He was my CO [Commanding Officer] in the war and I was his 2IC [Second in Command] so I'd lean, we'd lean on each other every now and then. And I said, "Look I'm very disappointed with you, what you're doing, you've

32:30 disregarded any involvement of the community at all. And the other thing that I don't approve of is that you have killed the AIC." And Cosgrove says, taps his, one of his officers alongside, and said,

33:00 "Get a handle on this." I don't know whether he did or not. But I said, "The AIC was the key," because every militia battalion had a Duntroon [Royal Military College] adjutant and a Duntroon warrant officer who

33:30 was a member of the Australian Instructional Corps, and they made all the difference. So here we are in that big drill hall, that's now, the band practice in it at Moore Park, at the, where the, Victoria Barracks. And I well remember the

34:00 sergeant saying to me, he's been watching me, I'm a lance corporal and I'm trying to teach half a dozen other new recruits how to use the Lewis gun and take it apart. And then when I'd finished, he

- 34:30 called me over and had a little chat with me and said, "Look," he said, "you know your gun drill and that's all right, everything's right, but what is wrong is your delivery, you're just talking to them. It's not a conversation, you've got to be delivering command, and what you've gotta
- 35:00 do is lift your voice. Go out to the beach and order the waves around and put a bit of punch into it." And that's stood me in good sense ever since. So much so that the neighbour across the road, I was up at the, there's this Isurava
- 35:30 caper last, two years ago. And at the last minute they say, "Oh no Basil, you're not gonna put a wreath on, what I want you to do is to do the Ode [The Ode to the Fallen]." So no rehearsal or anything at all like that, I walk around the monument, Mr Howard's [Prime Minister] just got off the lectern, and I step up to the lectern and I deliver
- 36:00 the Ode. And I put beef into it, "We shall not grow old as he, they which who are, as we that are left grow old. Age shall not weary them, lose, nor the, every..."
- 36:30 in the going down of the..." you know. So when I come back I get a visit from the bloke across the road, and he said, "That Ode was terrific." He said, "You put so much meaning into it." So that was the AIC. And they also did other things, for instance, there was a gun
- 37:00 shop selling guns and rifles and pistols and everything in Elizabeth Street and his name popped up in the paper a few weeks ago, and I didn't keep it though, Utz, something like Utz, something like Utz. Anyway this bloke, this expert, brought out, now they're all expert soldiers but now they've
- 37:30 got this bloke out there. And all the army has been saying is, you know, "Hand and pistol up like that." And he said, "That's silly, you point at your target, now what do you do, you pull your hand down and if you close your eye and see where your finger is, it's right on the target. So all
- 38:00 you do is to make your pistol an extension of your finger and you point it at the target." And that was a, one of the many instances of where the professionalism of the AIC was present. And of course they had, they were all
- 38:30 Buckingham Palace and everything. A marvellous example, so I carried all that with me overseas.

How did it

39:00 make you feel to be selected as an officer?

Oh well good, good of course, good. But then of course I was yet to find the agonies of being an officer. For instance one of the stories that I would take,

- 39:30 would give you, would be Eora Creek where I got a Military Cross, and I'd been wounded, I got a big hole in my back and I've helped carried down back the
- 40:00 path, till we can find a stretcher bearer or something. And I'm holding his feet and picking up the spaghetti of his stomach that's falling down all the time, putting it back in his stomach. And my batman is hanging on to his other, his shoulders and we carry him back there.
- 40:30 And then it comes for the first time where I've just been ordered, "Take over 2/2nd Battalion," they were up there, "Now you go up, take them up there, and attack." It's now dark,
- 41:00 so I got to attack in the morning. So here I am, we heard the Japs, can't hear them now, and I've now been told to attack. How do you do, how can I attack something I can't see, don't even know where they're there or not.
- 41:30 So my notes, which are in the shed or some of them have gone out to the Victoria Barracks, were under the title of Gethsemane [garden of Jesus's betrayal in the New Testament] because now I've got this great big problem, what do I do? All the lives of these
- 42:00 men of mine....

Tape 2

00:32 to the AIF.

Right. Now the, we've started off with the war being announced and the formation of a division to go overseas, AIF, is going on, and out at that Maroubra Camp

- 01:00 we were all talking about going together. If we had been allowed to, we would've joined up as a unit but Victoria Barracks, we found out later on, wouldn't be in that at all. And then when I told them about my problem, "What problem," if

- 01:30 I think they're gonna make me an officer. And they said, "Look, what you can do is sign up, now fix up the paper work and not put the date on and we won't process it until we hear from Melbourne. And then as soon as it's gazetted in Melbourne I will, I'll get in touch with you straight
- 02:00 away." So here it is, January, the first days of January, and in the meantime they've kept me busy by being a sergeant in charge of training up at Liverpool.
- 02:30 The battalion was being formed in, a little bit further along in, what's the name of the... the next army camp,
- 03:00 up the line past Liverpool.
- Holsworthy?**
- What?
- Holsworthy or Ingleburn?**
- Enoggera.
- Holsworthy or Ingleburn?**
- Ingleburn, Ingleburn, Ingleburn, that's right, Ingleburn. So I'm there going, get them out of the train, march them down across the bridge and in, going into the shed. And I've
- 03:30 got a doctor there and a corporal who's holding a lantern and a doctor sitting on a chair to the entrance to the, with a ruler. And everyone has to line up and undo their fly, drop their trousers and come up and the doctor goes
- 04:00 phht, with the, a ruler, and flicks it round. "Next." "Next." "Just a minute, how long ago since you had sex with a woman?"
- 04:30 "About fifteen minutes, she got on at Singleton." Yeah. Not Singleton, that's where my daughter lives. Anyway it's that station up there before Liverpool. So I'm spending my time there training these blokes and then they'd go out to Ingleburn
- 05:00 and where Colonel Eather is now forming the battalion. Eventually I get the word from Victoria Barracks that I'm now gazetted as an officer and that they're sending me to join the 2/1st Battalion
- 05:30 and that your number will be N-X-3-4-2. And so I say goodbye to everyone at The Sun office, take all the girls into the big lock up room and kiss them goodbye, and then a couple of good samaritans, I didn't have a car,
- 06:00 I couldn't drive, and they drove me out to Ingleburn. And Colonel Eather did not appreciate being woken up by the orderly officer and told Basil Catterns... so in that bad mood he didn't like very much what he was being served up with. And
- 06:30 we exchanged a few words and that was all because the battalion is sailing the next day and we're all up at three o'clock in the morning, now I've just got out there at one o'clock. So we went off in the first convoy but my company that I was with then, was Headquarter Company
- 07:00 and it was on a different boat to the whole of the battalion. I was on the Orcades with the 2/3rd Battalion and my, this Battalion Headquarters that I was with, but off we went. Three
- 07:30 big liners, the Orcades and the Orphid [?] and the Trantou [?] and a very moving experience which I've written in words, I've got 'em in there, words, words, words. So I'm waving to my
- 08:00 mother and my sisters, they're in a boat, a launch, and off they go. Off we go, out to sea, join up with three boats from New Zealand together with
- 08:30 a navy vessel, and outside Melbourne we pick up another troop ship which has brought them from South Australia and Victoria. And then we go in alongside at Fremantle and
- 09:00 more troops are taken on, loaded on another ship. And then it's the Ramillies, a big war ship that's coming in this convoy, across the Indian Ocean, first stop Colombo. And a
- 09:30 few incidents on the way, one of them was that someone evidently had fallen off one of the boats. Whether it was one of the New Zealand boats or one of our own, I don't know which one. But I do know, well know, remember the Ramillies, to see a big battle ship, full steam ahead, doing over twenty knots, straight up
- 10:00 the lot of us with a great big bow wave, out there everywhere, and its lights going, brr, brr, brr, brr, bp, bp, brr, brr, brr, brr, bp, bp, and I couldn't read what they were saying, but I'm sure that they were angry words. But every, but the whole convoy had to stop. So Colombo, went ashore and then Aden

where

- 10:30 we waited, one at a time they had to go up the Red Sea, to the Bitter Lakes and Aden was a refuelling place and that's where we fuelled. And then up to
- 11:00 the Red Sea to Qantara and we're able to go across the river, ah the canal, onto the railway train and up the coast of Palestine, now Israel there.
- 11:30 **How long did the voyage take from Sydney to the Suez Canal?**
- At the Victoria Barracks Museum, the material that I've given them is day by day, day by day, day by... and I could tell you exactly if I had that,
- 12:00 but I haven't got it.
- What sort of things did you do on the ship to occupy your time?**
- Well, rifle training and drills and lectures and there were things like gas that had to be talked about. And
- 12:30 there was one incident early on when the troops went on strike because of the terrible English food that they
- 13:00 turned on. And I well remember the, Colonel England I think it was, 2/3rd Battalion saying, "If there are any nurses listening to this order,
- 13:30 go below, there's not one soldier on this boat is worth a -" something or other. A terrible diatribe. How not to learn troops if you want to do something really hard,
- 14:00 you have to be a leader and they... anyway those little things don't loom large in my memory. And we did, we're up in Julius Camp which is south of Gaza
- 14:30 and we were there for months and months and months. I had our platoon out on the track and we would bail up everyone that's going along and see what they're doing on the road to Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. And
- 15:00 I well remember an - not an aborigine, a Palestinian Arab, big fat man, a tiny little donkey that he's on, and the poor little donkey has got a back that's shaped like that.
- 15:30 And a woman is running behind with a parcel of something on her head and she's trotting along behind him. So you know what our boys did, they just pulled this Arab off his donkey and tried to get the woman on the horse, on the donkey. But
- 16:00 she turned on a terrible, terrible screaming performance, hysterical. So we had to give in and he's just standing on the side of the road, "Ha, ha," laughing his head off. Told us, that was telling us to mind our own business in a country like that. Another thing was, early on I had a horse before the war
- 16:30 which I had out west that I would go riding on and I was looking forward to what I thought were Arab horses. So the troops knew this, that Basil was interested in Arabian horses. And one day, soon after we arrived there, one of
- 17:00 my troops says, "Oh Basil there's the horses out there." "Where, where, where, where?" "See, go out there and you'll find them there." So out I go and I'm trooping along the desert, up and down, up and down, up and down. And I can see the horses coming up on close, and then I get up over the mound and down.
- 17:30 And next thing I see, that not only, there's the horses, and they don't look like beautiful Arab horses to me, they're horses, that's all. And a carpet with, what looks like a carpet, with broom handles keeping it up, a Bedouin tent and an Arab bint ['girl'] woman. And
- 18:00 all her black clothes, who, soon as she sees me and we're up close, she gets down and starts shovelling ashes and dirt and everything up, under, between her legs. There was going to be no rape. Now, I don't know whether that was because I had a gleam in my eye,
- 18:30 or whether she had been warned to beware of these Australians, they've got a reputation for rape. I don't know. Anyway that was one incident. Another incidence was when I was invited to an Arab wedding which went on three days and they were on horses and they organised a horse for me.
- 19:00 And I didn't stay the whole three days but I gave up when I found that the last thing that would happen now, was that they would show the sheets after there had been sex. And she was either a, if there was no blood,
- 19:30 no wedding.

Basil, sorry, I wanted to ask you something. The 6th Division and the 16th Brigade in

particular had a reputation for being, having some rough characters amongst the ranks, what was your impression of that?

Well I know for instance that when the, we left Sydney

- 20:00 that the Chief of Police had said, "Well hooray, hooray, hooray, they've taken six hundred or something of Sydney's biggest criminals and roughed up men." And during the, my time, I had a, because I was, filled in the form of calling myself a,
- 20:30 a clerk, employer: Associated Newspapers Limited and occupation: clerk, I finished up being on court martials [courts martial] and salvage officer and all sorts of wearisome things like that. And I was also sent
- 21:00 very early on, up to Jerusalem with the platoon, that was the first Australian guard set up in Jerusalem. I don't know what they did in the First World War but certainly the first now. And I was in Silverstein House and the men
- 21:30 were down the road in this one, and like all the way through the sojourn in Palestine we were following the Black Watch. The Black Watch had a brothel in
- 22:00 Haifa and when we went through there I didn't enjoy being duty officer in a brothel. And so now I find that I'm taking over from the Black Watch again and there's evidence of women being there
- 22:30 and there are the back steps down the hill to the hotel that's down there. So there's been women coming up, and I've gotta guard there, I've gotta have someone on duty outside like the... So I say to these troops of mine, "Out the front, one hundred per cent Buckingham Palace, hundred
- 23:00 per cent. I will not swoop on you without giving you any warning, particularly if someone else is coming with me but otherwise what goes on down here is none of my business, as long as out the front, Buckingham Palace." And I also went to a sheikh's dinner.
- 23:30 I might say that with the, being there as in charge of Australian troops in Jerusalem, seeing the police commander, and in his office when I had this interview with him, he whipped out a few photographs out of the,
- 24:00 his cabinet. And the Jews and the Palestinians were at war just like they are now, except that they did terrible torture things. They
- 24:30 cut off penises, sewed them in the mouth of other people there. And this bloke, this police bloke said, I said, "I've got the invitation to go and have dinner with Sheikh so and so. And he said, "Oh yes, he's
- 25:00 okay, he's all right. Yeah, you'll be hundred per cent safe with him, but when you come out don't linger around the place, just go for your life." And I well remember this sheikh produced the gold watch given to him by
- 25:30 a great English, they made a film about him.

Lawrence?

Eh?

Lawrence?

Lawrence, yeah, Lawrence of Arabia, Lawrence of Arabia and it's engraved with that on the back of it. Anyway

- 26:00 all speak perfect English, living in a nice modern cottage, could be even in Sydney, that cottage. And I was intrigued all the time, there are little peep holes in the walls. Women not allowed but they're allowed to be in the kitchen there and look through the holes.
- 26:30 And the steward brings in a great big gold platter with a complete sheep on it and he goes and wipes a, grabs a leg and completes to tear it apart by hand. And there's stacks of food all over the place and stacks of liquor being
- 27:00 poured out every now and then. And eventually I escaped and went out to the bathroom and I lift my head up from the sink and there is Aladdin himself with shoes turned up like that and turban and he's got a squirter and he squirts it in my
- 27:30 mouth you know, disinfect it or something, yeah. So they're all sorts of things like that.

What training were you doing at this point?

Well the usual military training, marching around, there were , you had artillery, not artillery, but rifle ranges and you'd do rifle range shooting, and

- 28:00 marching and digging holes and weapons and so on.

What was your opinion of how you were equipped for the desert?

No problem, no problem there, we had problems later with the jungle. Anyway we

- 28:30 were there for the whole of 1940 and then we go to Egypt. I am now in charge of an anti aircraft operation, they've suddenly
- 29:00 decided that there's a lot of aircraft in the war, and every unit has to have its own anti aircraft thing. So, I can't drive a car, I certainly can't drive a motorbike, but there's my motorbike and it's a great big heavy, what's the name of the big heavy motorbike?
- 29:30 **Enfield or Harley Davidson?**
- Harley Davidson, oh yeah, Harley Davidson, a big Harley Davidson. So that's delivered there and I'm being taught how to ride it. And so I've learned how to start it and then I could, there, and then I go like that and the next thing I'm standing there holding the damn thing up in
- 30:00 the air. Anyway we go down on the move to Egypt and I rode that bloody bike over hill and down there, through Mersa Matruh. And I might say that in the times that I've been in Israel there I had seen
- 30:30 everywhere, everywhere... talk about following in the steps of the Master. I, following in the steps of the Master and Moses and everyone of his disciples, it's just absolutely loaded with Biblical and historic crusaders for instance, and passed. Anyway, off we go to
- 31:00 Egypt and then we go to, up to Alexandria and then we start heading west. And I've got the, this bloody motorbike still and I've got Ford trucks, utilities with a Bren gun
- 31:30 sort of tied up to a tripod in the air. And we haven't gone far out of Alexandria before we've stopped and, for the night, and the alarm goes, someone's banging a
- 32:00 forty-four gallon drum with a bit of iron. And it's late in the evening and all the officers are saying, who are gathering for dinner, saying, "Oh, go on, Basher, go on Bas," you know. I get on me, I've already told my troops what to do, where to be, up the rest of it, and
- 32:30 pointed out their areas, all hills and so on. So now emergency, so what'll I do? I drive me Harley Davidson flat out up the hill to Number One Post. There's one small thing which I have overlooked.
- 33:00 They've, what've they been doing, whilst I've been down at battalion headquarters, barbed wire. I came up on the rise and then suddenly front of me is a barbed wire fence, so in the Harley Davidson I go right into the barbed wire fence. I tell you a barbed wire fence is a good place to land because it's, it arrested me very much, it slowed me down and
- 33:30 stopped me and the only injury was when I went over and I burned my ankle on the exhaust pipe of the bike. So move it on, eventually we got Hell Fire Pass, into Libya
- 34:00 and the Italians are owning that country. And our mission is, get 'em out of there before they invade Egypt. So Bardia and Tobruk. Bardia
- 34:30 was a very hard thing, I was very frightened but nothing that I could do about it. First time I'd been in an artillery bombardment where artillery from our people, bang, and artillery from the enemy,
- 35:00 here. And all through the night advancing, advancing in formation. Four hours to go, Northern Star, keep going, keep going. Then ten minutes to go,
- 35:30 keep going, and then two minutes to go and now, and vroom!, the whole of the world goes mad. Guns, guns, guns. And we're marching along and I, troops were
- 36:00 going down on the ground, which always happens when sudden fire comes and there are no grass strong enough to hide under. And I've had a - officer in charge of an officers' mess or something - and I've got a bottle of whisky and I walk along the three
- 36:30 lengths of my Platoon and sip, sip, sip, sip, sip, sip, sip, sip, sip, sip. And then on we go and then someone's found a flask of chianti, so sip, sip, sip, sip, sip, sip, sip. So I'm walking along to the Northern Star along with the whole of the battalion
- 37:00 and the rest of them, 2/3rd Battalion, the 2/1st Battalion, ah, 2/2nd Battalion, 2/3rd, that I didn't know anything, who was who. And then into the action, and through the barbed wire that's been, the engineers have done it.
- 37:30 They've set off torpedo blasts that've shattered the barbed wire and we finish up inside. But the Italians didn't want to fight
- 38:00 Mr Mussolini's war. And I thought I was lucky I got two shots of my revolver but didn't hurt anyone. Three days later a repeat of the same thing,

- 38:30 assembly way back and then the march forward, in the night, march forward. And this time we've got the big tanks, British tanks, that are rolling in. So we rolled in to Tobruk and there were, anyone who got injured or wounded
- 39:00 was unlucky. I remember an officer in our unit, Dick Mann, he got shot right through there but it didn't kill him, it sort of just missed his heart but he finished up being a three tit man and he survived. Dick Mann. Anyway we get to, on the third
- 39:30 day, it's all over and the 1st Battalion is ordered up into Tobruk township itself, so up I go and my platoon is detailed to take over The Albergo Tobruk, The Hotel Tobruk.
- 40:00 And I finish up having to turn on a real hotel operation, I've gotta get the bar going, I've gotta get the dining room going. And then the next day I've gotta get the - there's a distinguished guest coming and we've gotta have
- 40:30 a special officers' mess party. And I solved all those problems by getting Italian volunteers and my men who took them over, we didn't lock 'em up or anything, they... We raided the naval
- 41:00 stores just down below on the water front. And they, everyone had a white uniform, no badges or caps or anything, that was... And the distinguished guest turns out to be Robert Menzies, minister -
- 41:30 ah, Prime Minister of Australia, who's just come from England. The Battle of Britain is raging and this is the first victory in the whole war and it's Australian and it's 6th Division.

Tape 3

- 00:31 **Okay Basil, so were you surprised to see Menzies?**
- Yes and very disappointed. And I've been most of a Labor man, I certainly am with Latham now, ever since, because here we are, the Battle of Britain, the war's being going on for a whole year and
- 01:00 no victory anywhere except the 6th Division in Bardia and Tobruk. And I've got this officers' mess set up and I've got a team and the two corporals come in and say, "Now who's
- 01:30 for soup?" But we got through it all right and course the head of the table is Menzies and CO and brigadier and any other high officers they could get. And the rest of our lot is there and
- 02:00 then Mr Menzies gets up, I thought he was gonna get up and say something. I thought that he was gonna get up and say, don't, just like John Howard, he does it very, very, well. I don't like him but I think he does these things very well, he speaks very
- 02:30 sincerely, and says, "You've done a good job of work, thank you very much." Now he could've said something like that, he could've said, "I'm be back in Australia in a day or two and I will tell the people of Australia what a wonderful job you've done here." He told us nothing, not a word.
- 03:00 He just said goodbye to the senior officer he was talking to there and off he went. So in the meantime, all the officers I see are picking up pepper and salt and that, "Oh that knife," they're looking at it, looking at it, and it's starting to disappear. And
- 03:30 hanging up inside there is some things with Albergo Tobruk on them, Albergo Tobruk, in the next room.
- Can you tell us...?**
- And so we move on, days later, days later... I've neglected to mention that out in the harbour there is a
- 04:00 vessel, a number of vessels, and one of them is an oil tanker that's on fire, and that's spurting out flame in front of it and frame of it. And we're wondering what happens when the tide comes in or goes out. And there is also a big ship which we know is ammunition but
- 04:30 nothing happened, nothing happened. So the next thing I know we're back in Alexandria and Colonel Eather, having told me before what a good job I did on the - in Tobruk, that he's sending me back to
- 05:00 Palestine because there are now the Queen Mary and other ships, big ships, coming up the Red Sea with reinforcements. And that I have to be part of a team that goes down and gets those boys off the ship,
- 05:30 take 'em up to Palestine and train them as reinforcements for the three battalions of the brigade. So it would be the 16th Infantry Training Battalion. So I was very upset about that but I had to do what I was told. So
- 06:00 off I went, did that, and I cried tears, real tears of course then.

Why?

Because the battalion goes with the rest of the brigade off to Crete, Greece. So as I say I cried real tears but now I

06:30 dry my eyes when I see the terrible, terrible thing that happened to our battalion and the rest of the brigade in Greece and Crete. They were massacred. Division of Luftwaffe [German Air Force] planes and parachutists, parachuted right down

07:00 on our people and they didn't have a chance. So now my task was to train reinforcements for the 1st Battalion and we set up these facilities in,

07:30 in Palestine, like we were at Julius before. And we get a new commanding officer, Tommy White, who is all Duntroon and all English and Indian Army and wanting to do training, believing in the

08:00 reality training. And he was, and so we're now reforming the 1st Battalion and I'm a captain now. And I've got a hundred troops that've come from the training

08:30 unit that I've just been working with, and there's a hundred troops that've come back from Greece and Crete, and there's a hundred that've been transferred from 2/2nd or 2/3rd Battalion.

What did the men who returned from Greece and Crete tell you?

What's that?

What did the men

09:00 **who came back from Greece and Crete tell you?**

Tell me? Well they tell me what a terrible thing it was. Oh yeah. One of them was, is Colonel Eather, ah, Colonel Cullen and he distinguished himself there.

09:30 He was 2/2nd Battalion, came to Australia, came to 2/1st Battalion when we get to Ceylon. Now the rule is that an officer cannot achieve high rank,

10:00 like full colonel or brigadier or general without having served six months in a unit of the line, that means infantry or artillery or engineers. So Tommy White is doing that, he didn't say, "I'm only coming here for six months," but that's all he was.

10:30 But I well remember two things. One, he called me in and said, "Oh Basil, I'm pleased to know that we've got a reporter in the unit because I want a magazine." Now I

11:00 rocked my head around, but all I could say was, "Yes sir." Because my form, when I joined the AIF in Victoria Barracks at the beginning was, Associated Newspapers: employer and clerk was the occupation. So I copped all of the

11:30 jobs like some of them I mentioned there, salvage officers and officers' mess management and salvage officer and all that clerical sort of thing. And

12:00 now on account of Greece and Crete we've lost all our records and we have to fill these forms in again. So this time a small change, Associated Newspapers, Occupation: journalist. So outsmarted, Colonel White said, "I'm glad to see I've got

12:30 a journalist in the battalion, I want a magazine." Now I didn't have the strength to say, "I'm sorry, I lied." So since then I've, you've seen First Post magazine, which still staggers along

13:00 and is used by the veterans in the battalions. But also now the first, the City of Sydney Regiment, 1st Battalion, and now the people from Korea and the people from Vietnam and everywhere else are all involved.

13:30 Anyway here we are in Palestine and then the next thing we're on the alert, the Vichy French [German supporters] are fighting and we have to go up to Syria and fight them, and now there is action going up there. And we go up to Syria

14:00 and we're in Damascus and out in the hills, the camp, and a lot of snow. And I hesitate now, talking about snow because

14:30 my mother and I reached an understanding before I left, and that was that if I would not be able to say whether I was in war or not, whether it was action or not, but I would also help you along to understand what's happening by not talking about the weather. If I said anything about the weather, it would be the action.

15:00 If the weather was hot or it's going to be a hot day tomorrow or it's very hot or it's getting a bit warm or something like that, my mother would know how far I am from the real action. So here I am up in Damascus, and I want to talk, there's been a blizzard and I look all round and tents have fallen in with

15:30 the snow and I gotta be careful, I can't talk about the weather. Anyway we don't have much time up there but I enjoyed the opportunity to savour the wonders of Damascus.

What was wonderful about Damascus?

16:00 I'll tell you what, how. The beautiful mosque that's there, which has got, put on your slippers, instead of your shoes, go in, it's the third largest mosque in all Islam.

16:30 And there's a building inside, you padded across these beautiful Persian carpets and there's a building inside and it's all marble and gilding and lapis lazuli and gems and all sorts of things. That is the tomb of John the Baptist. And in all the books that I've read, I've got

17:00 them up - a lot of them upstairs, no-one says that that's not the tomb of John the Baptist. Out into the courtyard, Minaret Alariche, Eastern Minaret, Jesus Minaret because Jesus is a prophet just like John the Baptist and

17:30 all the... and, no, no-one seems to dispute that that's where Jesus is coming back. I don't think I'll live to see him coming back there. But I've got all the books upstairs that I read, and with the discussion that's going on now about

18:00 Passion of Christ, Nina is lending them to other people...

Can you tell us...?

because I don't agree with it at all.

Can you tell us where you went after Damascus, Basil?

Heh?

Where did you go after Damascus?

Right, we're up there when the seventh of December 1941 happens and that

18:30 means Pearl Harbour, that means that America is now in the war. So it's only a few weeks later that we're on the boat and we're going down the Red Sea again to Colombo and we get off loaded at Colombo. Because the

19:00 Japanese have gone through Malaysia and Singapore has fallen, and where they were going to send us eventually I don't know. All I know is that here we are, down in Colombo, and I'm, we're down a few miles, down the coast and I'm

19:30 assigned to look after Katukurunda strip, it's a strip amongst all the coconut plantations. And I might say that I've got my battalion, my office in the pancillar, which is the

20:00 'Sunday School' of the mosque. And I've loaded all the monks in yellow clothes and sent them up the mountain up to Kandy. I didn't wait to find out that they were all

20:30 English speaking, well educated people, and I'm ashamed of myself. Anyway I'm now living in Kitten's Kennel. I might say that when we were in, reforming the battalion in Palestine, that the - and

21:00 I said that I've got a hundred men here and a hundred men there, and a hundred men are there. And then I get out in front of them when they're all lined up and say, "Some of you know me, some of you don't know me and some of you don't want to know me, particularly you two men in the back line who want to have a private chat, you wait'll

21:30 I've finished." And I went on to say amongst other, what I would do, but I said, "I also answer to the nick names of Blinky Bill, Basher and Wild Cat Catterns or Kitten and take your pick,

22:00 but that's all the same to me." So now I'm at Kitten's Kennel in Katukurunda and remember we've got Tommy White, the new colonel and he has, calls a meeting soon after arrival in the village hall.

22:30 And a terrible story that the, not only Singapore's fallen but the Andaman Islands have fallen and ships are being sunk and there's a lot of aircraft, birds with no place to

23:00 nest. So this is exactly the same as what he said back in Palestine. On one occasion we get wakened up in the middle of the night and I go to the company commander's conference and he says, "The Germans have bombed Haifa, they've

23:30 done this, they've done that and they're expected to land at Tel Aviv," or something, terrible story. So out we go and take up positions out in the desert nearby and it's only about fawn, about dawn that we realise that this is a bloody exercise. This Colonel's made this

24:00 up in the mind, there's no action anywhere. So now we are in Ceylon and he's saying the same sort of

- thing so I go back to my platoon commanders and I say, "We've got a
- 24:30 terrible sad story of all the troops coming and the aircraft, so first thing in the morning, we'll get cracking and we'll do this and we'll do that, you take this and you do the other." So in the morning I'm standing there with a mirror and a coconut palm and I'm having a bit of
- 25:00 a shave. Brrrrr, aircraft, aircraft, aircraft. Didn't know we had as many as those, but they're not all ours and there's fights going on up there, and one of them comes down in flames. And I saw a few days later and it's still
- 25:30 in, at the front steps of the Galle Face Hotel, the flash hotel that's got a polo green in front of it and then the steps, and here's this Spitfire that's half way up the steps. And the story where the aviator gets out, he goes in
- 26:00 and there's no-one in sight in the hotel, but he's an experienced man and he just thumps on the bar and kicks on the bar and says, "Come on, come on out," that's where they're hiding, and they came out and they gave him a drink. So Katukurunda 'Drome and I'm shaving and all that goes on
- 26:30 and then I start to realise that there are, I've got an aerodrome and it's got lines of bins, you know 44-gallon bins, I don't know whether they're full or empty, but all across it and all this. So here I am running around at the last minute getting them ready for
- 27:00 all the planes that are going to come but there weren't many that came eventually. But it was true that the Renown and the Rodney and other ships had been sunk and the aircraft had nowhere to go.
- 27:30 So next thing we know, I've got to say two things I remember about Ceylon. We were trying to get used to jungle work in case we had to do jungle wear, jungle fighting and I take the platoon out
- 28:00 and I see a snake on the path in front of me. And not being a country boy, I didn't try to pick it up or do anything about it, I just stood there and passed the word back, "Snake, snake, snake." But then a terrifying thing happened, the snake turned
- 28:30 into a, what is a tai - taif, what's the terrible name of a, it turned, a cobra. I didn't realise that it looks like an ordinary snake, but when it sits up on its tail and goes like that with it's big cobra bit there, it's a bit of a fright. Anyway one of
- 29:00 my country boys knew what to do with it, and we chased it away because it was protected under the rules of Ceylon. And we filled our boots, in marching all around with, what are the blood suckers?
- Leeches?**
- Heh?
- Leeches?**
- Leeches, yeah, leeches everywhere.
- 29:30 Every time we went out, we have to pause and pull them out. Although sometimes when I got a sore leg like I have now, I would welcome a few leeches if they could...
- Did they help cure...?**
- They'd do the job and I know they were used in medieval times. Anyway we gotta get on, there's a war coming up. Next thing we're on a boat
- 30:00 coming back to Australia and I land on the day of my birthday, the eleventh of August 1942. And I'm able to get a phone call through to my home and arrive home in time
- 30:30 for my birthday party, there's a whole birthday, people there. And I'm realising that Australia is in a state of panic. Submarines in Sydney Harbour, bombs have fallen on
- 31:00 Rose Bay and Bondi, and Townsville is, had similar experience and Darwin has had experienced. And the papers are talking about a Brisbane Line, that's where they're gonna - and we're gonna defend Australia on a line that runs across a mountains near
- 31:30 Brisbane. So our two weeks leave is reduced to one week and then we're off again. And this time we go by train up to
- 32:00 Brisbane and Hamilton Wharf. The ship, Annui, is a Chinese company vessel, and as the boat
- 32:30 that we're gonna get on and our - we've unloaded our gear off the train, but the wharfies have walked off the job. Unless they're gonna get one and a half per cent payment they won't go, one and a half
- 33:00 rate of payment they wont work, so they've gone. So Paul Cullen, colonel, calls for volunteers and so on and then he details one platoon, "Right, you do the loading," and off we go.

- 33:30 We've gotta go, by three o'clock we've gotta be out at sea to rendezvous with a convoy. So we have, starting a routine of putting an officer on the bridge all the time, a signal officer and a trained signaller to intercept every message coming or going from the boat.
- 34:00 So up we go, up the coast and by the time we get to Townsville we realise that we are, we've created a federal affair and our orders are to come alongside the wharf and that anyone who wants to leave should be allowed to leave. So we pull alongside the wharf and all
- 34:30 the crew goes, everybody, no-one left, no-one left. There was no captain, I never ever saw him if there was one. So we put our own stokers in, we put our own engineers in, we put our own cooks in and we
- 35:00 do everything ourselves, and out we go and join the convoy. And from then on we head to Port Moresby. We are slow, in the morning we've fallen back in keeping up with the convoy,
- 35:30 but during the day we get enough stoke hole, we get enough steam up to catch up and get up to our right place. We arrive in Port Moresby shocked to find, it's late in the evening, shocked to find that the place is all
- 36:00 alright, there's no black-out of any kind and the Japs are only forty miles away.

What did you think, what did you think of the Japanese at this stage?

Well we haven't met 'em yet, we're gonna meet 'em now, we're gonna meet 'em. And might - I didn't mention the fact that one of the things we had on

- 36:30 the vessel was a, what's the thing that people get, appendicitis, yeah, appendicitis. And so a sheet is put on the deck, on the bridge and he's laid out down
- 37:00 there and there's someone to hold his hand on each side while the doctor operates on him, because what he's got in the way of chloroform is not very good at all. Anyway, we have that. And then another
- 37:30 sad incident is that one day there's a terrible, dd-lll-rr-up, and someone has pulled the trigger on a Bren gun at the wrong time, pointing the wrong way and half a dozen men have been killed, so we have to stop for a burial at sea.
- 38:00 And then we arrive at Port Moresby to find that we can hear firing coming from Eorabaiwa, Imita Ridge and the navy frigate that comes out to ferry us in, is able
- 38:30 to cheer us up by telling us that Colonel Eather, now Brigadier Eather is defending on Imita Ridge. He has defied orders to come back no further than Eorabaiwa
- 39:00 Ridge and he has said, "I will come back to Imita Ridge where I can have a complete defence," and I get my artillery in action. So there's the story of the twenty-five pounder that's taken up there and by man power and cutting trees down
- 39:30 and building steps up there, they now call it the Golden Walkway. But that was where they got the twenty-five pounder up on Imita Ridge so that they could shoot high powered twenty-five pounders onto Eorabaiwa. And Eorabaiwa is where the Japs were stopped.
- 40:00 The Americans can never understand why we babble about Kokoda, because the fact is that Eorabaiwa is where the Japs were stopped. Now there were two reasons why the Japs were stopped. One is that the twenty-five pounder is the first time that real fire power is brought in to the
- 40:30 operation, and all the withdrawals of all the young 39th Battalion and other battalions that were up there with the Japs and had to come back. And so now real fire power where Eather's been able to say, "You can come back to Eorabaiwa
- 41:00 and stay there, stay there until I say go, and when I say go, you've gotta do it like they did at Gallipoli, very quickly and very quietly." And so that fire power was one thing. The other thing was that the Japanese were buggered, they were
- 41:30 sick and they were starving. They were hoping to get to Port Moresby where they could take over the stores, but they never got there.

Can I stop you there Basil, that's the end of that tape.

Tape 4

- 00:31 **So Basil if you could explain to us how a burial at sea happens?**

Bodies wrapped up and sewn up with a canvas overall bag and a heavy weight in the foot of it.

- 01:00 So up on this, on the deck and the, what's the railing, you're talking to a sailor man and steam ships and all that I've been on, and a, the gunnel [gunwhale]. So a board
- 01:30 on the gunnel, there out on it, and weren't all done at once. And a flag over, the flag, but the flag tied up, that didn't go over, just so the body bags with the money, with the weight in them, went over. So they went in the water.
- 02:00 So we arrived in Moresby cheered by the fact that our, the CO had done such a wonderful job in Bardia, Tobruk and so on, Ken Eather who's now brigadier, he's got the situation under control. So we
- 02:30 go up to Sogeri I think it was, a suburb of Brisbane - of Port Moresby, twenty-four hours notice, but we've got a lot of things to do. We've got to dye our khaki uniforms because
- 03:00 it's gotta be camouflage, and we can't camouflage them like all the other soldiers get camouflage clothes. And we have to run round in the nude, the whole battalion, while we boil the dye, the green dye in bins
- 03:30 and it dries within two hours of being hung up. And we're able to, with battalion funds, we're able to get some good things to eat and drink and we quickly get the word
- 04:00 to move. There are other units out in front of us but we've got to get going and we get carted down to Owers Corner and down through Owers Corner and we're in Imita Ridge, up to Imita
- 04:30 Ridge and down to Eorabaiwa where we can see all the evidence of a war.

What could you see?

We could see bodies, bodies, Jap bodies, Jap holes filled with bodies. Sometimes,

- 05:00 for instance there's a story of the battalion, of two people laying down on the ground with a cape underneath them, you know, the gas cape which we always carried as a rug, as a,
- 05:30 for rain. We didn't keep it long. Anyway, and then they woke up in the morning and found out that they'd been sleeping on two Japs who'd been buried, and only a couple of inches of dirt. But from then on there was all the evidence, remember that in addition to the native
- 06:00 villages that didn't have any sewerage, that there's been, our troops that've fallen back and the Japanese that've come and no toilets anywhere. The Japs were very
- 06:30 uncareful of what they did and where they did it. And you just couldn't sit down or even on a log or something without checking that it was all right. But all the time there's a stench, a stench, a real stench.

Stench of what?

Of

- 07:00 death, and see anything that's in the, left, got any life in it, any flesh in it, attracts the insects immediately and they go to work on it, so there were skeletons with some flesh on them and unfinished. And
- 07:30 I think all the Australians had been moved by then, but I was worried about it later on, particularly when we come up to our chance contact with the
- 08:00 Japs. In jungle military work it's on the rotations, you do this for a while then you leap frog forward, and then you leap frog forward, like that, that was common place. So now we're up against the Japs at
- 08:30 Templeton's Crossing and just past Myola to Eora Creek and now we come under fire from the mountain gun. I call it mountain gun because they, I think they did believe,
- 09:00 use, they used two mountain guns, not at once, but it also, they used mortars, and I found it very hard to tell if it was a mortar firing or a gun firing. And we have our
- 09:30 first action where we come under fire, because the Japs have retired. They never retired, they advanced to the rear, there's no such thing as withdrawal in the Jap language, and they were very, very
- 10:00 tough fighters. So I get my action and when I, have you got the piece where I say that I've, Gethsemane?

Tell us about that.

Yeah. You haven't got it on there, right. So now

- 10:30 I've been wounded in the back but I'm carrying on.

How did the wound happen?

Heh?

How did you get wounded?

- I'm just coming to that. The weather, webbing straps, pack of everything that you've got behind you
- 11:00 and I'd long since found out the way that I could solve it by having a piece of rubber, foam rubber, tied with string around one, string there. So webbing and that much of. And into a hole with my
- 11:30 driver, no vehicles for him to drive in the jungle of course. But shell explodes above us on a tree and phht!, down, and in my shoulder
- 12:00 a - as big as that, has been flying and twisting and has hit the webbing side on, so the hole through the webbing is side on,
- 12:30 along. And it continued going around through the rubber and then sticking in my back, sticking in my back about that far, so sticking out. So the boys were able to pick it out, were able to pull it out. And I had it up in the garage
- 13:00 here until recent times, and somehow or other I got mad and cleaned it and threw all those sort of things out. And so I get a bit of bandage, I forget what they call it, the gear for this from wounds in the army pack and
- 13:30 it's a bit hard, but they tie it round my back and all the rest of it. I got blood here and blood there and all the rest of it but that's under control. But there are other more important things to do is, that my driver is badly wounded.
- 14:00 He's got wounded in his stomach, which has ripped a big hole on him. So what we've done is my batman takes his shoulders and I take his legs and every now and then I gotta bend down and pick up
- 14:30 his stomach which is falling out like spaghetti, packing it up and pushing it back. And someone's given him a cigarette. I never smoked then, I gave my batman or someone else my cigarettes all the time. So they're able to put a cigarette in his mouth, not that
- 15:00 he's very conscious of it, but he's got a cigarette in his mouth. And we keep on going back along the track, I guess about five hundred yards before we find someone who looks like a stretcher bearer and I leave him there then. And there's nothing that I can do and I don't take up their time by doing anything more about my
- 15:30 back because I've gotta get back. There are other things such as what the boys are digging a hole to bury one of our members in it. And they've dug a trench just off the track and they've put him in it and we've put in
- 16:00 some brushes and some grass on top of him, and then what do you do, what do you say? The boys are around and I fall back onto Rupert Brooke, the 'lover's
- 16:30 poet', who was also a soldier in the First World War. So I say, "If I should die, think this of me, that this will be,
- 17:00 a piece of England." I say, "A piece of Australia." I've lost a line somewhere of the Rupert Brooke poem but I knew it off very well then. And then the
- 17:30 the well-known Lord's Prayer, and push all the earth back on top and bit of a cross stuck on the top of it too. So,
- 18:00 then I've got the big problem, I'm up against the Japanese, I've taken over from the 2/2nd Battalion who've gone up the hill somewhere. And this is my, what I call my Gethsemane, because I get the telegraph line,
- 18:30 signaller's line brought up to me in the jungle, in the, just as the dark. And Paul Cullen says, "I want you to attack first thing in the morning," and I can do this and I can't do that. And all the time I'm thinking I will go behind that tree and cut my underpants
- 19:00 out. Fear, which is always with a soldier, always sitting on his shoulder, had taken over my stomach, so I went across the tree and cut my underpants and threw them away, and that was Gethsemane. And in the morning
- 19:30 no Japs, they'd gone, they'd gone. But then we've gotta go through the night again and this time Paul Cullen has arranged a, that we go on and go down the gorge, over the edge of the mountain. I might say that we're up
- 20:00 in about nine or ten thousand feet, it's well above Mount Kosciusko. And we are now, because it's a

moonlight night, and we're not in the jungle, we're out,

20:30 going down the face of the cliff, steps, steps, steps. Rushing Creek, which is a wild river and two bridges, and people have already been down there and there are dead bodies around the place. And Paul Cullen,

21:00 I didn't see him do it but he would've done it, he'd thrown a grenade and it was a pit that the Japs were in, right at the river, and they didn't know that they were being attacked. So anyway now we go in the night, moonlight night, Jeff

21:30 Cox the adjutant and Paul Cullen are leading it down there and we go across. And then as soon as it becomes daylight and I'm going around,

22:00 the track is feeding around to the left and Rushing River is down on the right. And I'm up front with two scouts and the next thing, voom, machine guns, machine guns. So my company, down there,

22:30 digging there. And that starts beginning of the way Basil held up MacArthur's advance for five days because he wasn't taught, what do you, what do they call that, crawling up mountains? There's a

23:00 word for it.

Abseiling?

Abseiling, yeah. Never heard of - the word was an invention. And the Japs are up there and the path's there, you walk in the path, I get shot, and you can hear, there's the machine gun, the mountain gun. And it

23:30 was definitely a mountain gun because I could hear the orders and hear the machines of them locking, and could send the word back, "Gun, gun, gun!" to people behind me so they could get out. And the Japs know that I'm dug in there so they keep on dropping things.

24:00 They drop stones, they drop grenades, they dropped empty tin cans where they'd eaten rice or something, all went down this. And they did things particularly to wake us at night by throwing something down, a grenade right amongst us so we're all up and up. Now in that five days,

24:30 Brigadier Lloyd comes up with Paul Cullen and I come back to meet them and he, being a First World War veteran, starts to lecture me about what they did in the war, "Basil, in the Pozieres," or somewhere. "We, the Gurkhas, did this and we did that and they charged up the

25:00 hill with the, with their knives and you've got bayonets." And after this I stood smart to attention, and then stood eye to eye to him and said, "Sir, if you order me to advance and engage the enemy that I now am up against,

25:30 I will withdraw from the land that I hold now and I'll go up the hill and go round the back." Now what I didn't know is that he already had done that and there's a battalion up there that are going, been going up around. So came the day, that was after five days, this is the twentieth, about the twentieth of October 1942,

26:00 and this morning we can't hear a sound. What are they up to? What are they going to do? Are they gonna attack us? Did they, up there, are they gonna - they can't jump down that cliff, they could come round there. And then I realise that they have in fact gone. So

26:30 I pass the word back, "Japs gone, we're moving." So I start moving and I go up the hill just around, the path goes round the left where we were, two scouts were shot and I was shot then, and a terrible

27:00 sight that I saw.

Can you describe that?

And I, we're on the march and I say, "Corporal, you go back and see Colonel Cullen and say Basil Catterns says emergency, cannibalism,

27:30 and you bring him forward and show him and I will, and then pick us up later on." And I gave evidence in 1943 in the court, in Justice Philip, the

28:00 Crimes Court in, enemy crimes, in Brisbane on cannibalism.

What did you do with the body?

Heh?

What did you do with the body after you'd seen that?

I didn't do anything, because now Colonel Cullen's gotta see, there. They've been cut in

28:30 slices off their backside and other fleshy parts and here is evidence of a leaf, no plates, and there's the

fire where they've good evidence of flesh food in there. And I couldn't, can't stop, even if they were alive

29:00 I couldn't do anything, or if they're ready for burial, I couldn't bury them. I'm leading with the whole of the brigade behind me and I need to move it, so I move it. And down the hill we go and pass through places where there'd been action,

29:30 a lot, Isurava and so on. And eventually we get down on the track, which we could call a road, it was called a road because it carried traffic. And it was quite clear that that was Kokoda that way and it was Sanananda going to Buna

30:00 that way and it would carry a vehicle, obviously been going along. And the Japs have gone and taken all of their things. And Paul Cullen, we stop when we get to there and Paul Cullen calls me up and says, "Basil, I want you to go out to bldle-ldle-up, the name didn't mean

30:30 anything to me then. There's no map, he's not showing me a map, there's no map to show, there's no maps. The only maps I saw were dated 1943, printed by the Americans, so there wasn't even a sketch. Now I didn't - all I gathered was there was out there, there was another junction and another native

31:00 village and that he wanted security out there. And I knew that it would take a lot of time to get there and it's now almost pitch dark. And I say to Paul, "Paul, the men are buggered." Now I didn't get a

31:30 chance to say anything more because Paul Cullen was just as buggered as me and anyone else, he was... What I was going to say, if I'd been allowed to, was, "Paul, the men are buggered, and if with your concurrence, what I will do is, I'll go as far as I can go

32:00 along the road now until it's impossible to go any further in the dark and we'll dump down there, and then at crack of dawn I'll be on the way out there." I didn't get a chance to say anything because Paul was just as... He said, "You are, Catterns, you are ill, see the doctor."

32:30 So I saw the doctor who said, "Look, back along the track, Kokoda, there's a field ambulance setting up a, some kind of a depot there and I'll write a piece of paper, take that, and you've gotta go out there."

33:00 So another ordeal. Along a track towards a place where I don't know where it is, except that it's out that way, that way, that way. And I just keep going, but it's dark so I

33:30 don't like wandering around in the jungle in the dark, I get scared stiff very easily. So I just slump down on, beside the track and went to sleep and then as soon as dawn had arrived up I get and go on. And sure enough it comes to Kokoda, and this wonderful

34:00 Kokoda that everyone was talking about, I couldn't see any aircraft, just a lot of plantation, a lot of trees. Yes, the field ambulance have got a tent fly and a number of bunks, canvas over sticks and a blanket and that's the

34:30 hospital bed. But the main thing is that I've seen a doctor and he gives me sulphur guanidine and Atebrin for malaria, we've all got malaria but there was no, nothing anyone could do about it. And but the main thing was I had a meal,

35:00 had a dixie [mess tin] with some kind of stew in it, stewed up bully beef with something and that was lovely. And I slept like a log all night.

What was wrong with your stomach?

Heh?

What was wrong with your stomach?

Well we all had dysentery, all had dysentery. And so I

35:30 waited until the doctor arrived and he came round and I said, "I want to go, I'm all right now." He said, "No, you've gotta take a, have a sleep more." Anyway I finally got away and started looking for the battalion.

36:00 Now how do you know where to go? Who can you ask? There's nobody. You can't thumb a ride, there are no vehicles. So I start walking, walking, walking, walking, back to where we were before and then where would they have gone from there? And I eventually, I find out where,

36:30 which way they've gone and then I go Oivi, and they've been having a battle in the meantime, I've missed out on it. And they, what I read about, Oivi there, and it was in the newspapers recently, in recent years, that the Australians were accused of being,

37:00 of shooting the Japanese prisoners. And I wasn't there but if I was there I would know how my men felt who'd had their mate eaten by them up there and they would show no mercy at all, it would be revenge.

37:30 And anyway they, everything's on the move again and I'm still trying to catch up with the battalion and

then I find we're just getting over the Kumusi River and the engineer's done a wonderful job. They've had

38:00 heavy wire dropped by planes and fly gear across and they've got a heavy wire and sticks, sticks, sticks, making one big stick to walk on, and

38:30 hang on, and something over your head to hang on, and over this raging river of Kumusi. Which has, I learned later, that the Japanese commander was killed there, drowned trying to cross, get across there. And ...

Can I ask you what the symptoms of malaria...?

39:00 What?

What are the symptoms of malaria?

What are they?

What did you feel?

Oh giddiness, very tiredness and feeling not good, not good, not good.

39:30 Anyway, and this is when there's a big action comes up now. I finally get over the river and go forward and find out that the 16th Brigade has been ordered to the sea, "Advance to the sea."

40:00 And that 2/2nd Battalion and 2/3rd Battalion, the 2/3rd Battalion in that order are advancing. So I was able to catch up to the battalion and I

40:30 go forward and Paul Cullen calls for Basil Catterns. So Basil Catterns comes forward and there is Paul Cullen on a horse, on a horse. "Ah," he says, "oh Basil,

41:00 Jim," second in command, "has gone," he's now lieutenant colonel on one of the, another battalion, "so you are now 2IC of the battalion and I want you to stay close to me because

41:30 there's a lot I have to tell you." Now this is where it starts,

I'm gonna...

boom!

Basil I'm...

Tape 5

00:34 That is certainly something that I don't forget. Incidentally, I know the poem that I quoted from Rupert Brooke, "If I should die, think

01:00 only this of me, that there's some corner of a foreign field, which is forever Australia." I cross out 'England' and put 'Australia.' And so that's what I used in that instance.

Hang on a moment. We've got up to the point where

01:30 **Cullen was on the horse.**

Right. So, and he has, says, that, "You are now acting as 2IC of the battalion and there's a lot of things I want to discuss with you, so stay pretty close to me," boom! The horse goes down,

02:00 Paul Cullen goes down into the, a ditch there, and I run round behind the horse to a ditch over, a hole over there. We're in the line of fire of the, a machine gun, of the mountain gun. It's, and all I need to say is that: what's Paul Cullen riding a horse up there

02:30 for, because we're not up in the front, there's the whole of 2nd Battalion and 3rd Battalion ahead of us at that time, and they're our own troops. So it wasn't, Paul wasn't to know that this particular spot you were under supervision of, view of the

03:00 the gunner at, where they've got the gun. Up a tree these blokes are, not the gun up a tree but the... Anyway so, horse in the middle on the tree, on the path, the track, the road, Paul in the ditch and I'm in a hole

03:30 on that side. And after about five or ten minutes I see Paul's head start to pop up, and he goes like that, and I go over to him, get down in the, it's only a ditch at the side of the road. And his words were,

04:00 "What do you think, Basil?" "I think we've gotta get that bloody gun, we've gotta get that bloody gun."

And we've gotta go about five hundred yards off the track, off the road and about

04:30 about a couple of thousand yards parallel and then come back behind them. And I will need two companies." Now I've suggested the tactics, I have volunteered to do the job

05:00 because I knew it was my turn, and whatever was gonna happen that he would detail me to do it. So, and I've nominated two companies because our strength was down very, very low, casualties and sick, illness. And

05:30 two companies still didn't add up to the strength of one company, normal number of a company is about a hundred and thirty and on this occasion the two companies only add up to ninety officers and men, together.

06:00 So, anyway Paul says yes and then talks to me about what he can do and get some para [paraphernalia], get some, a few more automatic guns that are, he could get hold of and so on. And the two companies come up and I say that, "What I'm going to do is

06:30 I'll be up front with you, Corporal Albanese, you Tony, and we'll, I will have the compass, I will count the steps and find out where we are." So, and we will be doing the, this is to the Platoon Commanders too, the Platoon Commanders

07:00 that were boy scouts, corroborree, stop, down and so on, easy. So off we go. It's round about nine a.m. now and I'm counting the steps and Corporal Albanese is just there reading, ah, leading.

07:30 And I'm a slow learner. It takes me an hour or two to realise that I don't need a compass, there's nothing that I can hook on to, there's no mountain that I can get any course on.

08:00 And I know where the gun is, it's not just only the mountain gun, it's machine guns and all kinds of action because the whole brigade's involved, and we know exactly where it is because it's there, you can hear it and you know where it is. So we press on and it's, we know exactly where we are, we reach the

08:30 stage where we've turned right to come back now to the track behind the gun. And we haven't gone far before Corporal Albanese, I signal, 'Stop,' and step forward and our jungle which has been holding us back,

09:00 the while, wait-a-while vines that grab you, all your clothing all the time. And Corporal Albanese doesn't have to point it out, I can see exactly what he's looking at, and there is a little sand beach,

09:30 a little river running through it, gutter size river, but it looks like clear water, How did it come to be, oh, clear water, oh, and look at the ground, foot prints... The unmistakable foot

10:00 prints of the Japs, they had a split toe boot. And I can see a lot more than where we are, I can see over on the left, native hut,

10:30 Japanese boiling, cooking little tea, little fire, outside and there's the track and the vehicle on it, and right over on the right is a big, big fig tree.

11:00 All the rest is plantation with latter-day shrubs and so on growing in it, but an outstanding feature, that big fig tree, bigger than any one that's in Sydney Domain. And you can see, even from where we were, the big roots that go on. And

11:30 of course we can still hear the gun fire further to the right past that one to where the action is going on. Now that's got to be our objective, it still is our objective, it was in the first place and we've gotta go there. What do we do with these? We can't ignore them, we can't, there's no phone, I can't discuss it with Paul Cullen. There's no

12:00 way I can think of going to lay down in the jungle and put in the attack in the dawn or something, all too risky. So we've got ten minutes, that's all, and then it's dark.

12:30 We will attack. "Platoon commanders, there's Japs there and there's the track and there's the big fig tree and the gun we're looking for, the mountain gun, is further to the right."

13:00 "So what we're going to do is go to the left and attack this group of Japs and get out on the track, turn right and go along the track until we come to the big fig tree. And we will

13:30 form a perimeter defence around that tree and wounded can be dragged along and propped up in between these great big roots." So all this in a one minute brief. "But here we're going to go

14:00 line out, a couple of paces between each man, and one company there and one company there, all in one line, and we go right through that Japanese position. We do not stop to go into the huts and see who's hiding in there, we just go right through

14:30 and onto the track, and then quickly go along and we dig in at that fig tree." Now all of those would

have been two thousand yards.

So you were saying you had about two thousand yards to mount the attack?

Yeah, yeah. And

15:00 off, and the other part of the order was, "Dead quiet, don't do anything, don't shoot, we've got surprise, keep it to the last minute. Don't do anything until something happens, when something happens,

15:30 fire." So off we go and when we get to about a hundred yards away they spot us and immediately, broom!,

16:00 and everyone's firing, everyone's firing. And I'm with Gordon Blainey, company commander, he's lieutenant but he's sure to be a captain, after this. And so he's only a couple of feet over there, I'm with his company

16:30 and very quickly he slumps down, he's been hit. So I go... that door's open out there isn't it.

Yeah it is, do you want us to close it?

Right. So I go down on my

17:00 knees behind him, cause he was a lovely, lovely young man, and he was, had so much potential in him. And I lift him up under his arms to pull him back and all I do is lift him up in front of me and voopt, and he's shot again. And all I've done

17:30 is hold him up so he could get shot again. So I was so upset about that, that I grabbed the grenade I had in my hand and raced forward and hurled it at the sound rather than the sight of where they were, because it's a,

18:00 a fence made of vines wound together with path, the object is to drive us into a line of fire down there. So anyway I was so upset that I've

18:30 thrown this grenade, it's gone right up to the fence and thrown the... what it did, I'm not quite sure. And I know then that I've got troops all over the place going down onto the road, which is only a hundred yards away, and starting to go along the road, to the right.

19:00 And I will need to be at the fig tree to have command of this and it's now really dark but we go. And as I'm going along the track, the road,

19:30 the enormity of the situation tells, grabs me for the first time. And that is that all the signal lines laying on the road, it would have been a dozen of them, they were black, they were green lines, they were yellow lines coaxial cable,

20:00 there were a whole lot of them, and I knew then that what I'd stumble-bummed onto was a big event. So now we found out how big they were, we've, I sort them out and get 'em, get Lieutenant Murray who's a

20:30 a great man and Bakerston and other platoon commanders. And they, we dig everything, all the holes everywhere, and me to. I might say we don't carry shovels, we wear tin hats,

21:00 so you dig a hole with a, with the, your hat and more often than not it sort of fills up half with water before you go farer, further. Anyway we do that and then the Japs coming looking out to find out where the

21:30 break in the phone system is but they come along the road, yeah, the road chattering without any security at all. Instead of tip toeing along when they could've probably surprised us and pounced on us, but they didn't, they're bll-ll-pp

22:00 boom, boom, boom, bll-ll-pp as they're walking along. And the next thing one, one of the boys on that side of the tree has hurled a grenade and later on we found that there were twelve or about fifteen Japs on the, dead on the road. And then there was all sorts of incidents that kept us awake all

22:30 night. They started to circle around and find out where we were, and probing and calling out in English, "Hey Bill, Bill, where are you Bill?" And once I copped a grenade which luckily fell short, when they said,

23:00 "Righto sir, where we are?" They just used the 'sir.' Slow learner. Right I've learned it again. So later on they used, tried to use that device of using English to get up to us. Again I'm a

23:30 slow learner and it's round about eleven o'clock in the morning, going on to midday. And I realise that the reason the Japs aren't attacking us now is because what was a plantation with latter-day

24:00 shrub trees in it, is now a football full of - football area filled with trees laying on their side. All the continued machine gun fire was

- 24:30 cutting through all these trees, and in order for anyone to come to us they had to go through this barrier of trees laying on their side, which gave us all the warning we needed for anyone it was. Anyway they kept on behaving like cowboys in a
- 25:00 Red Indian wild west story, circling us, circling the caravan and machine gun fire, keep heads down there and try this side and then try that side, so we had a miserable day all day. And then
- 25:30 late in the evening a voice calls out, "Where's Basil? Where's Basil? Paul wants him to come back and report straight away." So I answered that one pretty smartly and went out, came out there, not on to the road but in,
- 26:00 in there. And it's the 2/2nd Battalion, Captain Gaulle's company and they're gonna, he's gonna take over from me or something, but I gotta go back and talk to Paul. So, I get taken back to where Paul is,
- 26:30 and I might say that there was a small track which they'd used, which is probably what the mountain gun people had been using. And I go back and see Paul Cullen and he's got a big dixie of hot stew for me and
- 27:00 he says, he gets all I can tell him and it's what I told you. And there've been other lost souls that'd got, lost their way and didn't get right to the target, who've turned, you know, showed up. And they've found the mountain gun
- 27:30 because the Japs had buried it and it was easy, very easy for them to find. So Paul Cullen talks to me in his, in the tent and then he says, "Now when you come back I want you to come back and to,
- 28:00 come into this tent, you've got to act as battalion commander. I'm retiring to the RAP [Regimental Aid Post] with the doctor and I'll be there if you need me for anything."

What was wrong with him?

Heh?

What was wrong with him?

Oh same thing

- 28:30 with all of us, all with... if you got scrub typhus you'd die, if you got malaria, all right well you got malaria, it won't kill you, not all at once, and you get other things like dysentery and so on but that's all.

I just wanted to, I just want to go back a bit and talk a little bit more about that action against the

- 29:00 **mountain gun? When Paul Cullen got knocked off his horse, how long did it take you the make the flanking move?**

All day. We started off at nine o'clock and now it's, it was six o'clock p.m. that we put in the attack. So we were going through the jungle, through the swamp, through

- 29:30 the jungle and on and up and down and all around, but still going to get behind that gun and get the gun which was what my objective was.

And when you came across the Japanese position and you had to advance over the open ground, what was going through your head as you advanced over that open ground?

Well,

- 30:00 your mind is full of the action, picturing what you should be doing or what you shouldn't be doing and how can you help the boys, they're got a job to do and I've got to have a job too. So then
- 30:30 Paul Cullen says, "Right, well now will you take Paul Cullen, ah, Captain Gaulle out and his men, they're ready to go. Do you feel up to it?" Phoow, and I said, "Yes Paul of course." I wanted to ask after all that I'd been through and it's now eleven o'clock
- 31:00 at night and I gotta go back. And it's only possible because there is a big electrical storm, very little rain but a tremendous flash, flash... of lighting, which meant that I could see where we're going.
- 31:30 And what I'm looking for is trees laying on their side and I know that I've reached there. So along I go and we reach that area. Now what do I do? There's John Gaulle with a company of troops behind
- 32:00 me and they're gonna take over, all I can do is take him to that spot where the trees are laying on their side. Over there in the dark is a tree, a big, big, fig tree, bigger than any in Sydney Domain, and that's where our boys
- 32:30 are, what's left of them, hanging down there. Now what do I do? I've handed over to him, and I've been criticised by other people, I went to an officers' school in Beenleigh at one stage when we got back and they were all critical of this.

- 33:00 And what they would have wanted us to do, me to do, is to have realised that that was the main camp of the main event of the Japs and that there was over a thousand troops there. Now that would be silly, what I've got is a
- 33:30 poor little exhausted company attacking a, over a thousand enemy, and I would've gained real ground. But they even felt that I shouldn't, I should've taken him right up to the tree and said, "Righto, this fig tree's yours," sort of thing. Because, and I keep on saying, "But
- 34:00 that wasn't a position at all, it was all that we could do at that time in the middle of the action," but that there's no future in it. And I wouldn't recommend that anyone took over and got in to the hole that we were just left behind. And how they sorted it out, I don't know, that was Captain Gaulle's job. So,
- 34:30 I do all of that and then go back, as I say, only possible because it's this electrical storm. And I go into the tent and Paul Cullen's left and I'm out
- 35:00 to it, asleep. So I spent most of my time, most of my time there talking to the people that wanted to be talked to. There were Americans coming up and I felt like going and speaking to them,
- 35:30 but I didn't and I'm glad I didn't. Because I know in the history books that we've already given them advisors, given the Americans advisors, and to follow them and all that kind of thing. But I was particularly saddened to see that they're all standing up
- 36:00 behind trees, coconut trees only about that high, and they're standing behind them everywhere and the officers are in there behind them telling them what to do, and they don't move. So I formed the opinion that there are
- 36:30 no troops, no good troops or bad troops, there are only good officers and bad officers. And the Americans are un - were untrained officers. They might've been trained in something and I'm sure that their training was, bring down the artillery and send over a few planes and all this kind of thing, but not in jungle warfare.

37:00 **How did you get your training then. You were a very junior lieutenant at the start and now you're an acting battalion CO? How did you learn your lessons? So how had you learned your lessons as an officer?**

Well no-one taught me, I did have the experience of the Middle East

- 37:30 and a little bit of jungle in Ceylon but otherwise it was, "What's the right thing to do?" And other people can say, well what you did was the wrong way and I'll say, "Well that's okay but that's the only way I knew."

How did you cope giving men

38:00 **orders that you knew could put them in danger and indeed kill them, how do you cope with that burden?**

Well, look with a, we've got the, I'd had experience, four years in the militia and all that Middle East

- 38:30 business and I'd learned the hard way of, to be a leader and you have to lead from the front, you don't have to be on a horse. I might say that the Japs had a lot of horses and mules and vehicles and the 2/3rd Battalion

- 39:00 in particular took over that area where they were and Paul Cullen bought that one for five dollars or something. And I've been to recent Pozieres campaigns, ah, church services and I see Paul arguing

- 39:30 with what's-his-name, Bill Jenkins, 2/3rd Battalion, "No Paul, you owe me ten dollars," or what it is, you know. And Paul says, "No, not that, I didn't say I'd, wouldn't say I'd pay that for the horse that you gave me." And that was that, so.

When you went up the hill to the Japanese position, you had ninety men with you,

40:00 **how many became casualties in that attack?**

Twenty-four came out.

Twenty-four came out of it?

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

What was it like laying there all night with the

40:30 **Japanese circling around?**

Scary, I can tell you, but I mean you're forcing your brain to figure out what you can do and what you can't do. And the options are pretty well limited. Anyway

- 41:00 as I say Paul is gone to the RAP's tent and pretty soon he's gone. And I bring the battalion back to Popondetta where we get on the plane
- 41:30 and taken to Port Moresby. And the number one general said, "There's, you've done a marvellous job, now your - there's a boat in the harbour
- 42:00 now, and I want you to get your troops...

Tape 6

- 00:35 finish it up back at, up on the Queensland island out of Cairns, Wondecla, and we set up the camps there.
- 01:00 And then eventually Paul comes along and he details me to do a lot of things that are going to take a lot of time, which he's trying to do to help me, you see, because I'm just as sick as he is. And so far I haven't gone to hospital
- 01:30 although I've got malaria. If I spoke to a doctor, first thing he'd do would be, "Righto, you're off to hospital mate," but I soldiered on. That reminds me a piece that I forgot, Eora Creek and I'm wounded and I said that the boys fixed me up.
- 02:00 And but then eventually a stretcher bearer came along and he took the crude dressing off and put a better one on and I should've realised he's writing it in his diary. And sure enough back in
- 02:30 Drummoyne, my mother opens the door and falls in a heap because the sight of a, there's no telephone then, the sight of a telegraph man
- 03:00 meant bad news. So she's all of a heap. There's a gathering of the clan and across the road is Saint Mark's church which we're not of that faith but the priest saw a
- 03:30 problem. So he went over and said, "Show me the telegram," and the telegram, and he read it and said, "Oh no, he's not dead, he's not dead. It says, 'regret to inform you your son Captain Basil Catterns has been wounded in action and has remained at his post'.
- 04:00 That means he's alive and remained at his post, not that he's dead." So now we're back in Australia and Paul Cullen is
- 04:30 anxious to rehabilitate me again. I've gotta go to Brisbane and give evidence at the War Crimes Tribunal about the cannibalism and the medical tent being bombed by,
- 05:00 attacked by the Jap airplane. And there's a Beenleigh Officers' School where I have to go out and tell them all about it and they, they weren't as gentle in their remarks as you. "Why didn't you do this?"
- 05:30 What did you do about your casualties? I've had a war, I've gone through there, I've dug in around the tree and, which is not a very good thing because they're being picked off one at a time and dying because they're wounded, not being attended to. What about, what's on out there in the, where I, where we attacked?
- 06:00 I should have been out there. But what do I do, get meself shot straight away? No. We saw the Japs were moving their dead, they had a vehicle with the lights on going round and we reckoned that's what it was, they were picking up the,
- 06:30 their dead. Anyway so here we are back in Queensland and I'm to go back to Sydney and he's going, wants me to go to Bathurst where there's a training battalion and a
- 07:00 BCO [Battalion Commanding Officer] of the training battalion up there for a while. And also buy some machetes, and that's a sample, which my batman kept and gave me at the end. And wrote out a cheque for,
- 07:30 I think it was about five hundred pounds and gave me the name of the, of where the office was in Pitt Street of military acquisition or requisition or building or supply or whatever it is. And so I go to Brisbane
- 08:00 and then to Sydney and I see my mother and my sisters who are at home, knew I was coming. And when I'd seen them all I said, "And now I'm going to see the doctor,"
- 08:30 I said, "and I'm going to take my pyjamas because I know the first thing he'll say is 'Concord Hospital'," which he did. "Sit there, stay there and the ambulance will pick you up." So I go out to Concord Hospital, spent a whole month there, the malaria and

- 09:00 whatever else I had with, wrong with me. And then I also followed up, on the hospital's insistence, that I go to the officers' convalescent home at Waverley, so I went, I was taken there for a month. And now for the first time
- 09:30 I'm free to do things, like call on this girl who I've only got the photo of from the sergeant major. And he gave me, only when we were getting off the boat in Melbourne had given me
- 10:00 the detail of her address up in Strathfield. So I went to see her and it wasn't long before we got married. And that's what this story is that's out there, that was one, the Mariposa trip.
- 10:30 And then I went up to Bathurst and took over this battalion and
- 11:00 I seemed to be doing all right because the general came up one day and said, "Oh, that's good, thank you, thank you, Captain Catterns. Come and see me when you can, I'm down at Parramatta." I called in to see him, I
- 11:30 don't know whether he wanted to get me on his staff or something but he wasn't there and I just said, "All right, well tell him that I called."

What battalion was it that you were training with?

Heh?

What battalion was it you were training with there?

The 16th, the 2/1st Training Battalion, yeah.

What lessons could you give new recruits of what you'd learned?

Exact, well they've got

- 12:00 not just new lessons, but the lessons, they're recruits, they're at ease and salute. General comes out and I say, "2/1st Battalion will come to attention and present arms,
- 12:30 general salute, pre-sent arms, one, two, three," I include that in you see cause I'm training them. And then present arms, we do all that sort of thing and as I say the general seemed to be pleased with that. And another thing that I did up in Bathurst
- 13:00 was on Anzac Day I've been invited by the mayor and a few other people upstairs to come out and speak to the children. So the Bathurst Hall is full of kids
- 13:30 and I couldn't think what of homework I could do, how, what I could talk about. But I had a flat of inspiration so that I was able to step forward on the platform and say, "This sergeant major..."

Hang on Basil, we'll just...

- 14:00 And I said, "Look at all these medals, he's got military medals, he's got this," and all the rest of it, he'd had English experience too. I said, "He would be a hero, wouldn't he?" "Yes," they all say. I say, "Well look I'll tell you something, a few minutes ago in the hall there, in the passage there he said, 'I'm scared,
- 14:30 I'm not gonna go up on the platform and talk or say anything or do anything'." I said, "He was scared stiff." So then I went on that and made it the theme of being scared stiff and talking about Tobruk where roll over, the attack over the ditch and the guns going and all the rest of it. And
- 15:00 people laying on the ground and you think, oh no, he's dead, and then a hand comes up and says, "Keep her rolling, keep her rolling." I said, "Scared stiff but they're not bad, wasn't scared stiff," and I kept on saying things like
- 15:30 that. And afterwards they were all thrilled and generous in their praise and say they'd never heard anything like this before. But I didn't say, "But I'm gonna live in Bathurst, or Orange."

Basil, how do you deal with that fear, when you're in action, and it all starts flying around, how do you deal

with it?

Well, it's always on your shoulder, but you've got to, you've got to carry, you've got to be strong enough to carry it right through and do the right thing. And the lives of other people are involved in what you do about the right thing.

- 16:30 So I've killed a lot of Japs, I've killed a lot of Australians but I haven't got a conscience about doing the wrong thing. So we've got to jump now, I go... oh yes,
- 17:00 Paul Cullen, I told you about the knives didn't I, the machetes, yeah. So Paul Cullen, I got a phone call from him and he said he's going to promote me to be a major and you know, when will I be coming and so on. So

- 17:30 eventually I go up to Wondecla and the hardest thing of all that I was scared about, but I was prepared for it, I knew that the major, second in command of the battalion, was the only officer
- 18:00 who was allowed to go into the sergeants' mess without special invitation. Indeed he was responsible for the right progress of the sergeants' mess. So it's gone up on the board, Major Catterns.
- 18:30 So I go down to the sergeants' mess and I know they're waiting for me and, "Congratulations. Good on you Basil. Good on you, Kittens," and Basher and all the other nick names that I've had. And they up, lead me up to the bar and
- 19:00 what are these two litres, big jug full of beer, full of beer. So amid cheering, "Go, go, go, go, go," I stand there, I drink it all, put the table down. I'd passed the test but I made sure I hadn't been drinking anything in the morning
- 19:30 and I was able to quietly nose my way to the door and go out the door without falling down the steps and, 'phleagh,' with the lot in the garden, in the tree, and so I was the
- 20:00 2IC. And the other thing that happened at that time was that we've got a rifle range out there and now I'm 2IC. I'm supposed to be supplying the food but I know that everybody's doing their own thing without me getting in the act. Anyway I,
- 20:30 I'm able to step up to the CO who's down at the rifle range and the whole battalion's there. And he said, "Oh don't worry about the lunch Basil," he said, "they know, all know what to do, but we've got this people here from headquarters who've got a
- 21:00 new anti tank gun and they want us to try it out, so want you to have a go." So in front of the whole battalion I line up and there's a stick out there, painted white, in the ground, a hundred yards away. And he says, "Now with a rifle you would be laying at an angle with your legs
- 21:30 apart. But no, behind this one it's got a pretty heavy punch, you've gotta lay right behind it." So I lined it up and went
- 22:00 bang on target. So I felt pretty good about that, yeah.
- What rifle was that, was it an anti tank rifle?**
- An anti tank gun, an actual gun yeah, not just a rifle, it had a heavy duty tank piercing
- 22:30 shell. I didn't see one in the war anywhere but it was a good idea at the time, the Americans I guess had figured it out.
- Basil, at what point were you awarded the Military Cross?**
- Eora Creek. Eora Creek.
- 23:00 Cannibals and all that. After that Sanananda Track caper we've just talked about, Paul recommended me for another Military Cross there. It was not awarded.
- 23:30 And Paul says, he said, "I put in a very strong recommendation about that," and he said, "I don't know where it got stopped, but it got stopped somewhere, headquarters, they probably thought you had one and that's enough for anyone."
- Did you recommend some of the men underneath you for any**
- 24:00 **decorations?**
- Well Paul would be disgusted, ah, would discuss with me, unfortunately they didn't, not too many of them lived. Corporal Albanese, for instance, he didn't live. And Gordon Blainey, he would've been a captain
- 24:30 but he didn't live.
- What sort of acts of heroism did you see while you were fighting there in New Guinea?**
- 25:00 I can't, can't think of one. Everyone seemed to be doing the right thing.
- Did you ever see men who were not doing the right thing?**
- 25:30 Yes. I saw the, I was going past headquarters one stage and this lieutenant was coming out of the CO's office and he was crying real
- 26:00 tears and saying, "I thought I was doing all right, I thought I was doing all right." Now that's the only incident I know anyone, thing like that. But I know that some senior officers
- 26:30 are very hard, hard men, and Paul Cullen is different, he leads from the front. And the history book tells

the story about

- 27:00 how he got out of Greece and Crete and how he was loading up one of the row boats that was going out on the last boat, to go out. And he was about to get in and then the navy bloke said, "No, no more, that's too many, no, no, no, no, can't go on." Paul said, "Okay,"
- 27:30 and then he pushed it off and then he said, "now you've got to rescue a sailor, a soldier in the water," and he threw himself in the water and grabbed the trailing painter of the boat, and went along.
- What about at a higher level than that,**
- 28:00 **what's your opinion of General Blamey for example?**
- Very poor, very poor. Particularly, I wasn't there, but the particular one was when the militia people had come out, backwards. Backwards, I use the term backwards. And
- 28:30 Blamey gets out in front of them and gives a terrible, critical speech to them about rabbits, rabbits run, soldiers don't run. And I know that there were three men who were on the verge
- 29:00 of going and killing him on the spot. That's the word that was passed around. It wasn't us, we weren't involved, that was the militia people. But they did marvellous work in doing what they did, they held up
- 29:30 the advance of the Japs until they were relieved and that the Japs could be stopped by other means. Right, well that's all that I know there in this bit. And now back to
- 30:00 1940, I got married in 1943 and now we're, I'm going off again, there's another war for us to be in. And we go to Cairns,
- 30:30 get loaded on a ship and ship, get shipped up around the north of, coast of New Guinea to Aitape and the action is going to be Aitape to Wewak. And the
- 31:00 navy, American navy were on the spot and they were going to take us ashore off the ship that's anchored there and we were held up a while, while that was done, but eventually we got to shore. It's gone again.
- 31:30 Yeah. And I'm now head, I'm in charge of Headquarters Company and
- 32:00 it was a very odd war. We were going along the sea shore, there's some action going on up in the mountains and at one stage they put me in a Beaufort fighter and
- 32:30 take me up for a ride over there which was a total waste of time as far as I was concerned, because when you're flying at speed over jungle, what, what's what, how can you tell what's what, how do you know? If you've got the instruments that the aviator has
- 33:00 and you know it that way theoretically, but you can't identify anything there. So I just did what I could but I can't feel any time could be thought about because I wasn't very involved at all
- 33:30 in what was going on. And what was going on was a lot of actions up there, up there, up there, up there and it's only at the end that I'm in control of the situation. Paul Cullen has to go to a, some kind of a
- 34:00 an officers' school or something and he goes off and I'm administering command of the battalion. And we're going along the coast towards Wewak and we're just on the outskirts of Wewak
- 34:30 and I'm getting signals, a signal which says that we have to be prepared to attack Nambut Hill and attack, to Wewak and I just don't know what that all really means.
- 35:00 And then it got worse, I got a signal which said, "Be prepared for, to join up with the rest of the division." Now, where's the rest of the division, I haven't the faintest idea but I believe that they're up the mountain somewhere. So that's Kokoda all over again isn't it?
- 35:30 So I wasn't happy about that. And then a few days later I get another signal which says, "Be prepared to attack a launch on an island." All I could think of was Rabaul, which was still under the hands of the Japs.
- 36:00 And I now know that they didn't, they decided not to send us, they'd send another militia battalion, which included my young brother who was a captain in charge of artillery, of transport. And as far as he's concerned he was just a jailer for the Japanese.
- 36:30 Anyway it starts to get interesting. A - one day early in the morning signal says, "War ceases." So, and then at eleven thirty, I remember
- 37:00 that very carefully, another signal says, "Cease fire." And then the, what do you call the speed of vocal word to word communication?

- 37:30 We knew that that would've been an atom bomb on Japan. And then they started to get very good, like a surrender of Japanese would be held on the sixteenth of September on the Wewak Aerodrome,
- 38:00 and all units are to concentrate on their training for this ceremonial surrender. Now for heaven's sake, a lot of our men are wearing four stripes, been in action all that time,
- 38:30 all those years, and now they want us to do drill. So our, here we are out in this jungle green there and I got the battalion out in front and I say, "Now look, this is my order and I feel
- 39:00 that you people, there are so many of you who are veterans who are well experienced, if you want Buckingham Palace, we can turn that on too. Right. Now all I'm going to do is to ask you to present arms three times and after that we'll knock off."
- 39:30 So, "2/1st Battalion will come to attention and general salute, pre-sent arms." Bang. Bang. Bang. "Good, again." Bang. Bang. Bang. "Good, one last time." Bang. Bang. Bang. So,
- 40:00 dismiss the parade sergeant. Now, what do I do with these men? They're going to get in to their little tents or whatever they can get into and put photographs on their chest, there's only thing in their mind, S-E-X.
- 40:30 So I came up with a program that we could do where I would have experts on all subjects, real estate, engineering, local government and
- 41:00 whatever thing you could think of, teaching. We could have someone in the battalion who would be able to talk a little bit about it, so it's like a university or a high school.
- 41:30 But I talk to the doctor and I say, "I want you to talk to them about sex." "No way, no way, I'm not going to do that." I will interview every one of them, one at a time in my tent and I will talk to them then but I'm not going to talk to
- 42:00 everybody in front of everybody.

Tape 7

- 00:31 **So will you tell us about the Japanese surrender?**
- No, I got to the S-E-X didn't I?
- That's actually where you did get to.**
- Right. So doctor won't do anything at all except individual discussion with them in their tent. So as far as I'm concerned, it's the number one event in this
- 01:00 university type discussion that we're going to have. And now I think, well there's no good asking anyone else, the thing would quickly develop into a giggle
- 01:30 situation. So I said to the doctor, "Have you got any book you can give me about it?" And he said, "No, but I think you might be able to get one if you go down to the Wewak, they've set up a hospital there now, and there are nurses there and they always have a library and I'll write a little note and you go down and see so and so."
- 02:00 So I go down, hop down in the jeep, down the track and all that they can find is the eighteen hundred and something book of...
- 02:30 I'll think of him now, but a famous name. And he wrote this book about sex in terms of art, art,
- 03:00 art. So I finally finished up with this book. I would read one chapter at a time and go into a huddle with the doctor and the doctor would tell me all about it. The word foreplay wasn't invented in those years.
- 03:30 And I did it and my reward came years ago but also years after that in George Street, just after
- 04:00 1970 something. And a bloke bales me up, "Oh Basil, Basil Catterns, I've been looking forward to seeing you, I haven't seen you since we were up at Wewak, up there. And I well remembered the lectures that you gave and I implemented them and my wife and I had a very happy marriage
- 04:30 and I've not got three teenage children." So that was the best reward that I've had for doing that. So comes the day that we go down on the aerodrome, march down, all
- 05:00 Buckingham Palace and line up and General Herring's gonna take the surrender. And when we're at fixed arms for a general salute and the vehicle with the

- 05:30 Jap leader comes up and stops and he hops out of the vehicle, but then he's got difficulty in getting his sword out of its scabbard or whatever it is he's got it in. And right behind from me there's a word calls out, says, "Help him get it orf." And anyway they did
- 06:00 help him get it 'orf'. And everything went all right and as a result of the end of the war, there are over a thousand Japs came out of the mountains up there. I don't know exactly who counted them or
- 06:30 where they all came in but I do, I well remember that you knew where the Japs were because there was a light up there, there was a fire up there alongside that mountain, there was a fire up there alongside that mountain. That meant, that's where the Japs were, now they're - that the war's all over and they've surrendered.

How was it for you to know where the Japanese were and for, and to not chase them any more?

- 07:00 What do you mean, how...?

How did you feel about the Japanese at the end of war?

Well, still hate them, oh yes, oh yes. No, I don't, I've never wanted to go to Japan. I could've gone to Japan, I would've had a, you know, with the units that they formed that we sent up to

- 07:30 look after the things in the people, in the prisoners in Japan, but I just wanted to come back home. And it wasn't long coming because the British aircraft carrier Vindex on its way back,
- 08:00 called in to Wewak and more or less said, "We're going to Sydney, we want to have a leave in Sydney, so anyone want a ride?" Not exactly like that but that was the way it worked out as far as we were concerned. So I finished up on board Vindex as commandant of about two thousand
- 08:30 Australian troops including mine and others and we were in Sydney quick smart and how wonderful it was. I could go anywhere I liked on this ship, I had a very nice officer's berth but I wasn't allowed to sit in the admiral's chair which was up there on the bridge. So I'm up on the, the big
- 09:00 turrets, the bridge, and I get a marvellous view of Sydney Harbour Bridge, as I come in through the Heads up level with the lighthouse and the cliffs there, looking down on all of it. And remembering what it was like when I went in 1940,
- 09:30 it was a wonderful experience. And I went down the gangway having signed that I'd, the customs document, that I personally investigated, checked everybody's kits and there was nothing that, I knew they weren't bringing any cobras or
- 10:00 any rugs or anything.

All right Basil, can you tell us about arriving off the boat in Sydney?

Yeah. So I'm on the Vindex, the British aircraft carrier and I'm

- 10:30 able to roam anywhere on the ship and up I go of course, up on the top, but I can't sit in the admiral's chair. But it's all right for me to stand up there in front of the admiral's chair and see the entry in to Sydney Harbour where you're up high and then the cliffs, you go past the Hornsby light and it's down, very much down on you and same with the Macquarie
- 11:00 light. And we berth at Woolloomooloo and I've signed the document for customs which says that I've personally inspected everybody's bag and we haven't, no drugs and no other terrible things with us. And I go down the gang way
- 11:30 with a brown paper parcel and in it is a petty cash box and five hundred and something pounds which is the battalion funds. You may know that the canteens all over, particularly Australia, were
- 12:00 contributing all the time to a fund for all the troops that were away and that they would have a credit, money all the time. And so this was what we have, five hundred and something dollars. So I go down with that tucked under my arm and the next day I phone up Paul Cullen who is in Sydney and
- 12:30 he phones up Major Embrey who's in Sydney and we meet in Sydney and put this money in the bank at the Royal Exchange and that is where the 1st Battalion Association was born.
- 13:00 That was the beginning of the 1st Battalion which is read the, in the history book and done all sorts of other things down through the years. So I go to, I think it was Marrickville, Erskineville, hazy on that now, but one of those places
- 13:30 where a military establishment checks me over, medical check. In particular, pay, pay, deferred pay, worth quite a fair amount of money, and I get a cheque for that. And all sorts of things are
- 14:00 offered for me, I could have gone to university. I sometimes feel so sad that I didn't, but I wanted to be a civilian, I'd forgotten what that was like.

How did you find adjusting to civilian life?

Oh, bit hard yeah, bit hard yeah.

What was difficult?

Well the, what to do,

- 14:30 and how to do it. For instance Paul who was keen on soldiering on, he's a general now and as you know generals don't ever retire, they're on the pay for life. And I joined him
- 15:00 down at the militia battalion, the 45th Battalion which was Arncliffe, and I was his 2IC there for a year or more. But quickly realised that I had to make up my mind, are you going to be a soldier, which is what Paul did, or whether you're going to be something else.
- 15:30 So I did carry it on and I went back to The Sun office where I was, where I was clerk before the war and they took me on as a clerk or something in the advertising department. And then they finished up reviving something which they had
- 16:00 going before the war, and that is a motor editor. Now there's only one thing wrong and that is that I didn't know anything about motors. I didn't know anything about motors, I didn't drive any motors during the war, so here I am now motoring editor. One of the good things about it was that it gave me a piece of paper which enabled me to go to York Brothers and
- 16:30 buy a brand new Chevrolet. And I soldiered on there, when I say soldiered on, I mean I kept on doing the best I can, but knowing that I wasn't going to be a motor editor for future. And then
- 17:00 I was head hunted by Goodyear Tyres, and managing director offered me the job of advertising manager. So that suited me on account of we were living at, not far away, we were living at, the wife and I, we were living at Strathfield then, that was her home town and Goodyear Tyres at Roseville
- 17:30 is just further along the road. So advertising manager for Goodyear and got picture out there where I'm lecturing the sales men and saying that advertising never bought, never sold anything, advertising makes people want to buy things. And I quickly became the
- 18:00 President of the AANA, the Australian Association of National Advertisers, and they sent me up to St Lucia where they were having a convention and I gave a lecture up there and all this sort of thing. And in the meantime I'm getting to know
- 18:30 a bit about film, because Goodyear had films and I had to get some of them smartened up, so they could be used in Australia. And I learned a lot and I got to know Peter Whitchurch, film producer, and also what's his name,
- 19:00 the boss of the Cine Sound film. Anyway 1950, 1976 comes up quickly and Peter Whitchurch, who has been for years
- 19:30 following the tennis all over the world and putting it on film and has now contracted with the Melbourne Olympic Games Committee to produce the film of the Olympic Games. Now
- 20:00 I knew Peter Whitchurch very well, and he was a very lovely personable man anyway. And he coaxed me into turning in my Pontiac car at Goodyear and going down to Melbourne. And I was, he was number one on the filming of the Games
- 20:30 because he was director, I was technical manager, or some words like that, and I did all of the desk work. And I picked a nice easy time to do it because the Americans spark a
- 21:00 back log, what do you call it, a black wipe-out, because they want to come out here and make their own, with their own team and film it, like they do now. But there was no way that we could allow them to do that because we've got a problem of who's
- 21:30 going to pay for the filming of the Olympic Games. And we could, we adopted a policy, Whitchurch and I, that we would let them, that they could, we would film everything and they could take whatever they wanted and pay for it, footage.

Can I take you back for just a...?

Hey?

Can I take you back a little bit,

- 22:00 **Basil. Did you feel in the war that you were following an Anzac tradition?**

What's the Anzac tradition?

Did you feel that you were part of an Anzac tradition, being a soldier?

No, no, no, no, no. No, I've never been attuned to Gallipoli because I know it was a disaster from beginning to end

- 22:30 and it was a straight out withdrawal and they did it, the best thing they did was to do that, they did it very, very well. But what about Mersa Matruh, what about the 1st Battalion that came from Gallipoli, went back to Egypt, got their horses and then rode them into Palestine and the Mersa Matruh, the battle there.
- 23:00 And I was more attuned with that than anything else. So I'm down in Melbourne for six months, and Nina hasn't forgiven me for that, she came down at one stage but I was working very, very hard. And
- 23:30 I didn't have a wild time, I didn't have any mucking about at all because every night I would meet Peter Whitchurch and we'd have dinner round about ten or eleven o'clock at night and discuss what we've done and what we're going to do, and we did it. And now Will, Peter
- 24:00 Whit, ah, oh yes, one of the jobs I had to do with this black balling of the networks, that we had to get camera men. For instance Cine Sound, I was going to have camera men from, are now not available because they're
- 24:30 overseas owned, and they won't help out. So I've got advertisements in this, in papers, word of mouth, and there's a long line of people out the back into King, Queen Street and where Prince Alfred Park is, where the, now a race way. But
- 25:00 there was a queue a mile, not a mile long, about three hundred yards long of would be camera men, camera woman. And I would have first crack of 'em and then we would discuss them with Hill,
- 25:30 David Hill, the director of photography and/or Peter Whitchurch. And we would give them a roll of black and white, sixteen mill, we've decided, gonna be done, go down to
- 26:00 the city and get some shots of the lights. Here's some, a new invention, Kodachrome, go out to the airport and get some footage there, and to the degree that they put a tripod down and went shot, shot, shot.
- 26:30 We would say, "Righto, that's good, that's what we want." But it's the ones that go up the building, show all the lights, along the top and wave it down here, the hand held camera, anyone who was a hand held camera, out, out, out. And one day a man, the chief down below who was the head
- 27:00 accountant and runner of the Olympic Games in everything except the film, phoned me up. And he said, "Oh Basil, there's, I've got a young man here, he's, I recommend that you see him, he doesn't want to be a camera man but he could do, you could fit him in I think and do some other things." So he came up and saw me and I
- 27:30 liked him, particularly when I said, "What do you do when in your spare time?" "Oh I go sailing on the bay," and talking to a sailing man, that was great. And he'd been to an officer cadets school and I said, and
- 28:00 speaking to an army man of course, I said, "Oh that's great." And then the next thing I asked is, "What...?" I've forgot the third one, there were three questions. And then I said, "Righto, you've got the job. And he said, "When
- 28:30 do I start?" And I said, "Well you started at nine o'clock, there's your desk."

Basil, can I ask you, cause we don't have a lot of time left, a few more things about the war. Did you ever return to New Guinea or to the Middle East?

Did I what?

Ever go back to New Guinea or...?

Oh no, no, no and I never got to England either. No, oh no.

And what do you think when you watch war films

29:00 **now?**

Well there's been some real horror ones with the dictators, Stalin and Hitler and I'm, that depresses me. And I agree with General Herring is it, I think I've got it out there,

29:30 who says that, "Those who have endured the agonies of war are the ones best - are the best ones to suit the peace, they, they're the best ones for the peace."

30:00 And it's true, you know. I'm agonised when I see Howard sending troops to Iraq. Here we are inviting a country that, we shouldn't be there. People would

30:30 say, well what about Saddam, he was a dictator, what, will we get rid of him. And I would say I would sooner see Saddam back there in his own country, doing his own thing, with his own people and not being

- 31:00 attacked like they are now, the country's been ruined, ruined, and I would sooner have Saddam Hussein there. Sure, he was tough but would you like me to tell you about all the other dictators around the world that are still doing it? Are they going to go to Africa, there's half a dozen of them there that you could,
- 31:30 you could lock up and say oh they're dictators and they're cruel and they kill their people and so on, and so on, and so on, of course they do it. But I mean United Nations should be allowed to operate and try to do what they can do to clean it up. Righto, we move it along, move it along. We've
- 32:00 got as far as 1976, I think that was the Olympic Games, and that boy that I spoke about, I put on, is now Rob McCauley, lives across the road here at Gladesville,
- 32:30 a real friend of mine. And he's produced all those films, The Liners and The War Ships and he's releasing in a couple of months the last film he made which is now The Air Ships, that'll be on ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] in a few months' time.
- Basil, did you**
- 33:00 **have a lot to do with the natives in New Guinea?**
- No, none at all, none at all. If we had any bearers I didn't see them. I'm not saying that what went on back at, along the line, but certainly up where the war was, there were no natives at all.
- And what sort of a message would you have for Australians about serving their country?**
- 33:30 About saving their country?
- Serving?**
- Well there are, for instance Mr Costello is saying, "You shouldn't retire, you should carry on to a ripe old age." But, what is
- 34:00 a factor that's not being realised is that there are a number of people, a great number of people that are doing wonderful things, voluntarily. So that when I got, down loaded, whatever it is in, at the age of
- 34:30 fifty-nine, within a couple of years, I'm heavily into the Sydney Maritime Museum, and I invent this magazine, not because they said, do it, I was a mover and shaker in the museum and have been and still am.
- 35:00 And I was on duty with Angela down there at, alongside James Craig, and the next thing you'll see and I'm been promoting it is, it gets called the Clan McLeod. Because back at the beginning when we got James Craig up from Canberra, from Hobart,
- 35:30 I had them, people writing letters to the editor about the name being restored to Clan McLeod, and I think that that's what it's going to be. And I'm still soldiering on, I use the term 'soldiering on', I don't mean army, Cockatoo
- 36:00 Island. Seven years ago, thirty-four pages, complete with a big map, all identified, 'Proposal for the future of Cockatoo Island as a self funding heritage park. The need now is to apply imagination to our heritage and culture, to get a different experience.' That was a quote from
- 36:30 Sydney Maritime - from Sydney Morning Herald, which appeared round about that time. But I could never find this Mr Greg Young who would, won the prize and went off to Italy or somewhere, the Max Gillies Scholarship, spend four months overseas, as far as I'm concerned, he's still overseas. So I'm heavily into Cockatoo Island and I'm heavily into the Sydney Maritime Museum,
- 37:00 I've been director, I've been always a mover and shaker, I've served as supervisor for years when we were down in Darling Harbour and also when we were at, in Balmain, and I don't have any spare
- 37:30 time. But that is a contribution as a volunteer, all volunteer, I've never worked so hard in all my life. Now even today, I have no computer. I saw, just before I retired,
- 38:00 I was with Hanson, (Rim...UNCLEAR) and McCann Erickson, I saw the computer for the first time, and it was as big as this house. It was on the twelfth floor of Caltex House and took up as much room as their accounts department that we had on the eleventh floor. And I knew that if we put something
- 38:30 on the phone and hooked it in to the computer in... America would solve the problem for us and we'd have the thing come back overnight. So I'd been retired for many years before I saw a laptop or a desktop computer and I
- 39:00 read the books and then I decided that I didn't have the money, and I didn't need because I write, write long hand and I kept on doing that. So all those magazines, you'll find that I've got the, upstairs I've got all of the writing, where I did it,
- 39:30 able to do it. Because Nina was still working with these people, although I prepared that and they willingly agreed to having me put that in, and she has had to type it on a big long carriage type

40:00 writer that I bought for ten dollars. And so I'm not a modern boy.

Did you keep a diary of your time away at the war?

Most of it is over, I certainly wrote, wrote, wrote all the time and it's now with the

40:30 Victoria Barracks Museum and this is recent years, last, before Christmas and since. For instance that magazine that you've been looking at, in order to get it I had to ask them to get it back to me, Burbank

41:00 Film and for your film, that it's back from the museum - but then it's gotta go back to the museum. And the ...

What else is at the museum?

What else is happening?

Of yours, at the museum?

Well, all of these, I often thought, what a pity it is, you didn't bloody well

41:30 keep everything and pin them together and say, now that's a book. But I'm a mover and shaker of what's gonna happen now.