

Australians at War Film Archive

Geoffrey Boucher (General) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:36 **Geoff, as we discussed before can you just introduce yourself and then step through your life for us please?**

Okay. I'm Geoff Boucher. Late of the First Light Horse Machine Gun Regiment, First Royal New South Wales Lancers,

01:00 CMF [Citizens' Military Force] and the 2/2nd Machine Gun Battalion, 9th Division AIF [Australian Imperial Force] and later of the RAASC/CMF [Royal Australian Army Service Corps/Citizens' Military Force].

Just step us through where you were born and so on.

I was born in Corowa down on the Murray. My father was a bank manager and we moved out to Balranald and up to Taralga near Goulburn and then to Campbelltown.

01:30 It was at Campbelltown I joined the Boy Scouts and also joined the CMF and the AIF. After the war I was married. We lived in Sydney, several suburban places around Sydney until I got transferred to Fiji and back to Sydney and out to the country again, up to Nauru. And back to Sydney.

02:00 I was in Sydney when I retired after -

When did you retire?

43 years service for the Wales [now Westpac Bank]. That was 1982. Not long after I retired my first wife died. I remarried soon after. We lived in Perth Avenue just up the road from where we are now in Lindfield Gardens and I've been here for 15 years.

02:30 **Nice and concise. Okay. What I'm going to do now is we're going to start right from the beginning of the Geoff Boucher story. What are the earliest memories you have of childhood and whereabouts was that?**

Corowa. My father was accountant at the bank at Corowa. That's where I was born. My early memories are of climbing in a pear tree at the back of the house and falling out and breaking my arm.

03:00 Another occasion I was trotting along a brick gutter. The brick gutter was built with a longitudinal brick at the bottom and two sloping sides. And I put my foot wrong on the side and tripped over and broke my arm again. There's another incident at Corowa. The front door had a wire door on it which had a lot of holes in it. One day I saw what I thought was a snake crawling through the door and up the

03:30 passageway. But I later found out it was a slow worm. A big thing about a foot long. Corowa, Dad was Scout master. At one stage I went out camping with the Scouts. That's pretty well my memories of Corowa, I think. Except that every now and then at the weekend Dad used to go to the All Saints

04:00 Vineyard, Winery at Wahgunyah across the river and collect a demijohn of something which I think might have been sherry. Went back to that All Saints some years later - not very long ago - and it's still there. And the sherry is still just as good.

Your father served in the First World War.

He was. He was in the 4th Division 52nd Battalion. And he was wounded. He gained his

04:30 pips as a lieutenant - I don't know the date - and then he was wounded about a matter of a few days, a weeks or something after he got his pips and sent back to England and eventually invalided out to Australia.

Whereabouts did he serve in the First World War?

They were training in Egypt and then went to France and serving

05:00 on the Western Front there.

Did he ever tell you any stories of the First World War?

Not very much. He didn't like to talk about it apparently. I don't blame him, because I read his diaries. He kept a fairly regular diary and there's some pretty nasty times in that and the First World War was not the place to be.

Do you think it affected him?

I'm sure it did. He had a lot of wounds. He had a hole in his shoulder.

05:30 He was gassed at one stage and it didn't really slow him down, he managed to do things all right, but I'm sure it must have had some effect on him. There was no counselling in those days as there was in the recent wars and not even the Second World War did we get any counselling for what we went through. But nowadays they get it very easier, counselling.

Were there any other male relatives

06:00 **you had who served in World War I?**

A brother of my mother's. He was in the Light Horse and he was killed at Meggido I think it was in Palestine. He's about the only one that I can recall.

Your family moved around quite a lot with your father's job as a bank worker when they were young didn't they?

Yes.

06:30 **What were some of the other places that you stopped around at?**

Balranald was the first move from Corowa. Dad was born in Chiltern. Balranald, we were there for six years. It was a very dry country. Dust storms would come in and blow every now and then. I can remember Mum shovelling the dust out of the house by the shovel full.

07:00 That's where I started school. I didn't like school very much. I wagged a few times and I used to go down to the newsagents and get behind the counters and read comics. Until they caught up with me.

What didn't you like about school?

I don't know. I just didn't like the - maybe the teachers weren't the best. Can't recall why it was I didn't like it. I've never been one to mix with other people really.

07:30 I didn't mix with the other kids very well. I had a few friends, but not that much.

So what did you do for entertainment in your free time then?

I used to wander round the countryside. I played golf with Dad. He gave me a cut down golf stick when I was about seven or eight years old I suppose. He started a golf club up there. They built a

08:00 golf course around the showground and one of the holes went down into a quarry. I can remember hitting balls down to the quarry from up on the edge. Used to go round with Mum with this little stick of mine. We went fishing, lie on the bank with a string tied to a toe waiting for a cod to nibble. I learnt to swim on the Murrumbidgee and

08:30 I remember Dad coaxing me to swim right across the river there at one stage. That was our main pursuits at Balranald. Fishing and shooting. Yanga Lake was a very popular spot outside Balranald. We went fishing for cod and catfish I think in the lake there with a spear. Part of a shears,

09:00 grass shears tied on the end of a stick. You'd see a swirl in the mud. Lake was only a couple of feet deep. See a swirl in the mud and you'd jab for it and you might come up with a nice big fish. Went duck shooting a few times out on the other lakes around the district.

In a country town like that, what sort of status did the bank manager have?

Very high. He was held in

09:30 high esteem in all the country towns really. He was invited to places, friends of the best people in town. It was a good life.

How old were you when you moved on from that place?

About 10, I'd have been, when I left Balranald.

10:00 Might have been a bit younger than that. We went up to Taralga. I remember moving out of Balranald. The place had been so dry the whole time we'd been there, when we moved it started to rain. It poured like hell. We couldn't drive out. Had to put the car on a train and go by train to Goulburn which was quite a long trip from Balranald. We got to Goulburn in the middle of winter, freezing cold. Friends met us there

10:30 and took us to breakfast. It was about 7 o'clock in the morning I think we arrived. They took us up to Taralga and the car turned up later. Taralga's about 28 miles over at that time, a very rough gravel road. Just a tiny little town. But it was an interesting spot to be.

Why?

I liked getting out in the bush. It was – I had a dog there, got a

11:00 dog. We used to go round chasing rabbits around the scrub. It was not far from Wombeyan Caves. I had a friend who was the son of the caretaker at Wombeyan Caves and spent a couple of weeks or a week or so out there with him one school holidays going through all the caves in the place and we got into places the public never knew about, never got to. Most interesting.

11:30 **Was it dangerous?**

I dare say. You don't think of danger when you're a kid. Some of those places if you got right up into caves at the top of the grand arch where the public – you could see the public wandering way down below and you'd come out in a little hole on the edge of the cliff up there. Could be very dangerous.

And you continued your education in

12:00 **Taralga?**

Yes. Had a very good school teacher there. Headmaster Harold Ashton. It was only a very small school. We only had two teachers and about five classes. I did very well at Taralga and went for my Intermediate Certificate there which I got through quite well. Not intermediate, the

12:30 high school entry. Moved on to Hurlstone Agricultural High School. I was there when we left Taralga and moved up to Campbelltown. I was boarding first and then became a day boy.

At Hurlstone?

At Hurlstone.

What was a boarding school like for a young man in those days?

Very good. I suppose the food wasn't the best, but it was good

13:00 enough. We had a fair bit of free time. We used to wander round the district quite a lot. As an agricultural high we had to do our share of milking the cows and ploughing and looking after the horses and the pigs and the poultry. And gardening. Had a good orchard there and vegetable gardens.

Why did you go to an agricultural high?

Because Dad felt

13:30 that was a good thing. He was grooming me to be a bank officer and he felt it was a good start for someone who's going to move around the country and know what things were about.

Were you aware of your father's ambitions for you in a bank?

I suppose so.

How did you feel about it?

It didn't worry me. It seemed to be a good life to me.

How strict was the boarding school?

Fairly

14:00 strict, but there were gaps in it. I remember at certain times we used to have dorm parties and there was a storeroom down underneath on the ground floor of the dormitory building that had a broken window. We used to get that window open and store stuff in there and we'd build up food and all sorts of things in that storeroom until the night of the party and then suddenly it'd all come up

14:30 into the dorm and we'd have a real good party. The housemaster would – I don't know whether he knew he'd better stay away or we were just warned if he was coming – but he never seemed to appear at times. So we had our party in the dorm. It wasn't a bad school.

Sounds like perfect preparation for the army – finding the gaps and moving around the authorities.

Yes.

15:00 They didn't have any cadets there at that time. They have since got a very good cadet group out there. And they've gone co-ed since I left.

So what contact with girls did you have when you were there?

I can remember one girl in Balranald lived next door to me. We used to get together down in the back corner of the block – and I must have been about six or seven I think –

15:30 and play doctors and nurses. Nothing in Taralga. Oh yes I had an incident in Taralga. There was a big fat girl used to sit in front of me at school. Remember the old steel pen nibs? When you broke them off they had two sharp prongs on them. One day I got annoyed with her for some reason, I stuck this pen into her bottom. She showed me

16:00 at one stage later. She had two dark little spots on her bottom. Campbelltown, girls started to get a bit more serious there. Had a couple of regular girlfriends. They're still around and they're still friends of mine. Ours, I've got to say now.

Why did you change from boarding to being a day boy?

Because we were

16:30 living at Campbelltown which was close. Virtually quarter of an hour by train. And it was a lot cheaper. Money was not easy in those days. Dad had a lot of struggles. At one stage during the early thirties was the big what did they call it then?

17:00 Can't think of the name of it. But at that time everyone was losing their jobs.

The Depression.

Depression, that's it. Dad maintained his job all right. The bank kept their staff on, but cut their wages. Things were a bit tight. We were living on bread and dripping for breakfast. Things like that. Didn't get any pocket money. And just a little bit of difference between boarding and day boy was worth saving.

17:30 **Can you tell us what bread and dripping is?**

Yes. Dripping is – used to get it from the butcher. Came off the meat. It's the fat off the outside of it spread on a bit of bread instead of – no butter, no jam, just bread and dripping. It was good. We enjoyed it.

What other effects of the Depression could you see in the community around you?

18:00 I couldn't really pin anything down now. It was our main problem that we just didn't have much money. At that stage I just wasn't very interested in outside community.

Tell us about the end of your school career,

18:30 **then.**

From Hurlstone I passed the Intermediate and I was about to go for the Leaving Certificate and I didn't like the teachers very much there and got a bit fed up with it, so I said to Dad, well what about getting me into the bank. And he did. He got me in fairly quickly there so I didn't finish the leaving certificate.

19:00 Joined the Bank of New South Wales and was there for the rest of my working life.

What sort of position did you have when you began?

Probationer for six months and then a junior over at Camden branch, which wasn't far from Campbelltown.

What sort of duties did you have?

Ledger keeping.

19:30 Writing up the cash book. In those days the cash book was a thing about 18 inches high by about 9 inches wide and 6 inches fat. You wrote up all the debits and credits for the day in it. That was easy in those days. A bit different to the transactions that go through nowadays days. From Camden – Camden was a good

20:00 spot. I used to ride the bike across to Camden. I was a keen bike rider, pushbike. And there was a daily train ran across there from Campbelltown. But most of the time I rode the bike. Just as fast anyway.

What sort of pay and hours did you get at the beginning there?

Seventy-five dollars a year. I'm sorry,

20:30 pounds. That was for the first couple of years, first year at least, and then it went up to 90 pounds.

And how many hours in your working day? What was the schedule?

44 hour week and not much overtime. We usually managed to get through it. The times weren't tight in the bank. You did your work and once

21:00 the work was done, then you could go.

So what time did you start in the morning?

Nine o'clock. Always there at nine. The bank didn't open till ten. Closed at three in the afternoon and then you closed off the books, and you'd usually be away before five.

And who did your training in all this meticulous ledger?

You learnt it on the job. No-one does any training for you.

- 21:30 You just learn it, pick it up - the accountant in the branch should probably have to tell you what to do. He would be the training officer, as you call him nowadays. You just learnt as you go.

Did you ever make any mistakes?

Of course. And the accountant'd be down on you hard. It's a bit difficult for a young bloke to know what's a debit and what's a credit.

- 22:00 Sometimes you get them in the wrong place and things don't balance. Hell to pay.

You enjoyed the work?

Yes. Fairly easy work. It wasn't long before I picked it up pretty well.

Were you aware of you father keeping some eye on you?

No. Not really. I don't know that he asked what I did. He

- 22:30 knew what I was doing anyhow. He was good friends with the manager at Camden.

Assuming the war hadn't interrupted, what sort of career path as far as seniority did the bank offer?

I think I'd have probably got ahead faster if the war hadn't interrupted ,because I lost five years during the war. But it's doubtful.

- 23:00 Because general procedure through the ranks was pretty slow. I might have been a manager five years earlier than I turned out to be. Don't know where else I'd have finished.

Was it a case of once you joined the bank it was accepted that you'd probably be there for life?

Ye. That was the normal in those

- 23:30 days.

And your promotion depended on people retiring?

No. You just moved from one place to another and the idea was to keep people moving so they didn't get too used to customers in a particular branch and couldn't get up to any mischief, things like that.

What did you have to wear?

I always wore a suit.

- 24:00 Suit and long trousers.

What sort of investment did that involve for a young man?

Probably a couple of quid.

Okay, what point did you decide to join the militia [Citizens' Military Force]?

Just before the war when things were very dickie. I was in the Boy Scouts in Campbelltown.

- 24:30 Actually in the Rovers at that stage. A lot of the other chaps were talking about it. There was a unit over at Camden of the light horse. They weren't light horse at that time. They were mechanised. Some of the fellows belonged to that so I thought, oh well might as well get in it and prepare because something's going to happen. It wasn't long before something did happen.

- 25:00 **Might just ask you about the Boy Scouts. What ages were you in the Boy Scouts?**

I joined there probably at about 12 when we first went to Campbelltown. And I don't know when I become a Rover. Not long before, round about 39 I suppose.

What sort of things did you do as a Boy Scout?

We learnt a lot of

- 25:30 things - Morse code, semaphore code with flags, first aid, bush craft, map reading. All sorts of interesting things that stood me in good stead later during the war. We spent a lot of time out in the bush hiking between Campbelltown and the coast across what became a field firing range during the war.

26:00 Watched Woronora Dam being built at one stage. Hiked across there and saw the dam going up. Lot of time out in the bush. Did cycle trips, camping trips on bikes. We had a jamboree in Sydney. Went to that. Had some good fun.

You enjoyed it obviously.

I enjoyed it.

26:30 **And you found it helpful in later military life?**

Yes. Teach you a lot of things that we needed. Course there's a lot to learn in the army. I learnt more when I joined the AIF than I did in the CMF really although in the CMF and 1st Light Horse we learnt how to handle a machine gun, to use it. We learnt a fair bit about

27:00 night manoeuvres. But it wasn't until I got into the AIF that those things really started to get belted into me.

So what sort of things did you get up to in the CMF as far as what your obligations were?

We had camps. We had one camp down the south coast and we were putting up

27:30 barbed wire entanglements on the beaches down there and digging gun positions and in other words getting ready to defend the beaches against all comers. Then after the war we had a camp at Campbelltown, at the showground there, and we were digging trenches in the paddocks. So someone's

28:00 paddocks out at Campbelltown. Did a lot of manoeuvres there and then later on - that was a month's camp, the first camp we had in the CMF. Then there was another three months camp where we went to Wallgrove. We were the first troops into Wallgrove Camp at that time. That was when we got together as a regiment and had a lot of regimental manoeuvres.

28:30 Although a machine gun unit is not really acting as a regiment in war time. It's broken up into individual companies or squadrons and troops to go with various other units. But we got a lot of good experience at Wallgrove.

How did your employer react to this time off on camps?

Very good.

29:00 They gave us leave to go to camps, leave on full pay. And then when I joined the AIF they made up my pay. That's why I had no incentive really to progress beyond the lance corporal that I was during the war. Because they made up my pay and that was very good I think.

What sort of people or men were in the militia with you?

29:30 A good mixed crowd. I can't say that they were the same sort of group as we got in the AIF but they came from all ranks of life. Farmers and in the CMF we had to rely on transport from the people who owned the trucks. They used to join the CMF and bring their truck with them and that was our transport.

30:00 We didn't have army vehicles - or very few of them. Later on I think when we got into camp there were a few army vehicles around but they still had to bring their own trucks in with them. So we had a lot of truck drivers. They were only in those days three ton trucks. Not the big fellas you get around now.

You were about 18 at this stage I think?

Yeah.

30:30 **What was it like as a young man mixing with older men in kind of military activities?**

Not bad. It was good instruction in a lot of things. We found that most of the chaps we mixed with were good blokes. They weren't too crude. A lot of them smoked. I didn't smoke.

31:00 Not at the start. I started smoking at one stage in the Middle East and found that it was such a damn nuisance I gave it away. But no, I think the older fellows were just good role - what do you call them? Role models.

What about drinking?

31:30 Fair bit of drinking of course, but not much in camp. When we had a farewell party up at the Log Cabin at Penrith before the unit broke up its three month camp there was a fair bit of drinking there but there wasn't a great deal around camp.

This was a light horse machine gun regiment. Were there any horses involved?

Not at that

- 32:00 stage. No. The light horse had been given away altogether and it was a mechanised unit then. When we went into camp, it was with a light horse brigade. There were light horse units there. This was in the beginning of 1940. It's amazing how many light horse units were still around at that time.
- 32:30 **What were your NCOs [non commissioned officers] like?**
- Very good. Knew their work generally. Had been some years in the CMF. CMF and the unit had been going for some time before I joined. Most of them were fairly well trained, not bad blokes. There were a couple of cows. You always strike a few bad NCOs who are a bit hard to take. But in the main they were very good.
- 33:00 **And what about the officers?**
- Some were all right. Our blokes were pretty good. Monty Stephens was a Campbelltown fellow. He was a good fellow. He was our lieutenant in the troop I was in. Our major of the company, our squadron commander - I keep getting the light horse and the AIF
- 33:30 mixed up in the ranks. Squadron commander was Macarthur Onslow who was later on commander of the machine gun battalion I was in. He was - we used to call him 'Pissy' Ted. He liked to drink a bit. Not the best, not the strongest sort of bloke.
- 34:00 **What did your dad think of you joining the militia, given his World War I experience?**
- He was all for it. He said, "Oh it's got to be done so you might as well be there and do it." He wasn't very happy when the time came to join the AIF, because I was a year younger than I should have been and he had to sign a paper to allow me in. But he did it. He let me go.
- 34:30 **What do you recall of the gathering clouds of war in Europe at this stage?**
- I just knew that something was going to happen. We were preparing for it. That's about it.
- What are your recollections of hearing of the actual outbreak of the war in Europe?**
- I was with one of my girlfriends at a girlfriend's place
- 35:00 having tea that night, a Sunday night, the 3rd of September. We just heard it on the radio then. Whilst we were all expecting it any day it came as quite a shock when you finally hear that we are at war. That was the stage when we said, what are we going to do now? I didn't race off straight away and join the AIF.
- 35:30 I was in the CMF and stayed with them for a while to get training - six months or so.
- What were your thoughts about that link between Australia and Great Britain at that point?**
- It was the Mother Country. We were tied to it. Quite happy to go along with it. There was no feeling that we should be separated at that stage.
- 36:00 So that was just the general feeling. We're there.
- So you were prepared to defend Britain as well as Australia.**
- Oh yes. We knew that if Britain fell, we would be in a bad way because we depended on Britain for so much in those days. American just wasn't in it then.
- What do you recall of the feelings of other**
- 36:30 **people in the community? Were they feeling the same way as you?**
- I think so in the main. Can't say very much about what I recall of the others, but generally seemed to be supportive of Britain.
- Why did you wait until halfway through 1940 to volunteer for the AIF?**
- 37:00 I don't really know. I was in the CMF. We did our month's camp soon after war was declared and we went onto our three months camp. That was the stage when they formed the 2/2nd Machine Gun Battalion in the AIF and our CO was going to form the battalion. Chalky Whitehead was CO of the
- 37:30 Lancers, 1st Light Horse and so we all decided to go with him. And a lot of us did go into the 2/2nd directly from the CMF.
- Once war had broken out did your training with the CMF change in any way?**
- I think it became more serious. We felt that this is for real, it's not just play-acting as it was before.
- 38:00 That's the main difference.
- Yet I suppose as CMF chaps you weren't expected to be going overseas anyway?**
- No. But we had to prepare.

So your decision to volunteer for the AIF was because a new unit was being formed?

And all our people were going to it.

Okay so just start telling

38:30 **us about that step once you'd joined - how did it progress?**

We decided to join as soon as the 2/2nd was open for enlistment. I didn't. I went by myself, but a lot of the other chaps went independently into Moore Park to the recruiting barracks and signed up there. We got carted out to Ingleburn and into

39:00 camp there.

So you were able to select the unit that you enlisted in?

Yes. Select - perhaps not so much, but there was a recruiting officer at the recruiting depot, one of our light horse officers there who grabbed people as they came through although we knew we wanted to go to that unit, he selected us as we came along and bunged us into that.

39:30 On the spot.

And you said that your father was a little bit dubious about this step?

He was. He felt I was too young to go. But then he agreed. He'd been a lot older than me when he joined up. I think he was 23. I was at that time 19. I think the

40:00 enlistment limit was supposed to be 20 or 21. So I had to put my age up to get in. He wasn't terribly happy about that. But he accepted it.

What about your mum?

She just went along.

What about all these females you were leaving behind, your girlfriends?

They were a bit sad about it.

40:30 I think they accepted it too. Man's got to do what a man's got to do, they say.

Tape 2

00:32 **Geoff, after you enlisted in the AIF, what happened then? Did you go back to your job in the bank?**

No. I went into camp straight away from the enlistment depot. We were outfitted there and we stayed in camp at Ingleburn. We were there for some months, I forget the exact period, doing our basic training.

That please.

01:00 They call bullring training just marching up and down. Learning to use machine guns. Learning gas mask drill. In those days they still fought with gas. Night parades, getting out and getting your eyes used to the darkness and seeing things at night. Crawling round the paddocks and putting hands in

01:30 sloppy heaps as you go. All those sort of things.

What were the living conditions like for you at Ingleburn.

We had a hut with about 30 people in the hut with a palliasse [sleeping pallet] of straw and a couple of blankets.

You were telling us about living conditions in the huts?

Yes.

02:00 We had a minimum of gear there. Our own clothing. We were issued with uniforms as soon as we got into camp. We had our kitbags to stuff things into. Had to make the bed up every morning of course, fold your palliasse up and blankets on top of it. You didn't have pillows. You used your clothes underneath as a pillow. Things were very

02:30 basic. No wardrobes, no cupboards and that was all.

How many men lived in each hut?

About 40.

What was the food like at Ingleburn?

We survived on it. We had to prepare it a lot of the time when we had kitchen duties, KP [kitchen patrol], and peeling potatoes particularly.

03:00 I think the food was pretty good.

What was the uniform you were kitted out with initially at Ingleburn?

We had 'giggle suits', which were khaki trousers and a jacket, lumber jackets style thing which were giggle jackets. Very comfortable and workable, but rather ungainly looking.

03:30 Then we got our uniforms, our serge uniforms which were the same pattern as the First World War and exactly the same style, but there again, comfortable to wear. We got equipment. First World War style equipment, the webbing and axe and everything.

04:00 And a gas mask was issued to everyone. They still thought about gas in those days.

What were your thoughts about going into battle at this stage? What did you expect?

That's a difficult one. We probably never thought about going into battle although we were being trained for it. We just thought, we do our

04:30 and hope for the best.

What was the weather like at Ingleburn?

Generally dry. It was mid summer. We were there from - no wait on when did I went in, the end of May so it was coming into winter, that's right, it was very cold. It can be cold at Ingleburn in May, June, July.

05:00 Before we moved out to go to Cowra. We were up at 6 am every morning in singlet and shirts to do physical exercise.

What did that involve?

Physical jerks, arms waving around and jumping up and down sort of thing. You had half an hour of that and it was back to your mess for breakfast.

05:30 Then about 8 o'clock, 9 o'clock would be on the parade ground - drill - and exercise of various kinds. Gun drill. Whatever was on for the day.

What time did you have lights out at night?

10 o'clock.

And what did you do in the evenings to pass the time?

Read.

06:00 A lot of the blokes'd play cards. I was never a card player. Play poker. We used to get leave quite often. We'd get out of camps in the afternoons and I lived at Campbelltown, which wasn't far from Ingleburn and used to get down there quite a lot although I had no means of transport, but there was always someone that was going down there.

After you

06:30 **signed up for the AIF, did your father open up to you any more about his experience in the First World War?**

No, not really. Dad was in the RSL [Returned and Services League] at that stage. He was running a recruitment room in the headquarters of the camp at Ingleburn. But we never talked very much about what happened and what's likely to happen.

Did he

07:00 **give you any advice?**

I don't think so. Had to learn it all.

Okay. So after a couple of months at Ingleburn you went to Cowra.

Yeah. The whole camp moved up to Cowra. It was the 7th Division at that stage that we were attached to. Most of them marched up

07:30 on the road and we went by truck. Went to Lithgow and stayed the night at Lithgow and there we had an examination of the - inspection - small arms factory where they were making our guns. Our Vickers machine guns. Which was very interesting, to see how the guns were made.

Can you describe what you saw?

All the machinery and the -

08:00 it's a bit hard to describe really. A factory turning out a lot of stuff.

Who was working there?

All the locals. Lithgow was a pretty big town at that stage and there were all local people, a lot of women, working the factory.

What were they wearing, what were the conditions

08:30 **like inside?**

Can't help you. Can't say what it was then.

How long was your inspection of the factory, how long were you there for?

Oh, a couple of hours. The whole unit went through. The unit was two companies. About 250 men, I suppose.

09:00 We went through it there and then it was back on the trucks and off up to Cowra.

What awaited you at Cowra?

Huts in the camp there. It was a brand new camp at Cowra. We had to virtually establish our own camp. The whole of the Ingleburn camp crowd, the 7th Division, was all getting together there. And

09:30 we had to build paths and whitewash rocks around the edge of the paths. We built a cricket pitch and made a parade ground and all those things that were necessary. Quite a lot of stuff to do before we even started on training. We got out eventually. We got some trucks and we used to get out into the country and

10:00 go into training in different groups.

What did you do in those trainings when you went away into the country?

Machine gun training. Carrying our guns and establishing a post, digging in, and getting ready to support the infantry. We were mainly at the start working on our own, but later on we came with the other, with the infantry and we had brigade

10:30 and divisional exercises. All the things that we would normally use if we were fighting in that type of country.

What was the type of country there?

Just open grazing land. A bit of scrub. A bit of rocky hills. It was a variety of country around Cowra.

How many men were in the groups that went out into the

11:00 **countryside?**

Our platoon was about 30. Company's about 120 and the battalion were about 800 all together.

Can you describe for us the setting up and digging in of a machine gun? What do you do?

First of all the platoon commander and his platoon sergeant go out

11:30 and inspect the area. They might have to crawl if it's in sight of the enemy or they can walk up and look around and see where we want to put the guns, where we can get a good field of view and good field of fire. Then they go back and they discuss with their NCOs, the corporals and go, righto we want you here, there. Lay out your guns in this area. And then the gun

12:00 numbers go forward and they dig their gun trench where they establish the gun, get it below ground if possible. And get into position. And all the other numbers are given their place behind them.

What was your role in training at Cowra?

I was just a gun number, that's all. No, wait on, at Cowra I had become a range taker at that

12:30 stage.

What does a range taker do?

A range taker uses a bar and shroud range finder which is a long tube about three feet long with an eye piece each end and another eye piece in the centre. You look in the centre. There is one where the right eye looks through the windows at the ends of the tube and the left eye looks

13:00 at a little set of ranges right in front of it. You twiddle a knob and in the right eye there are two pictures, one coming from each side. Those pictures have got to be brought together so you can get an exact measurement of how far that object that you're looking at is. That measurement shows in your left eye piece.

To do the

13:30 range taking, would you have to be right up beside the gun that was set up?

Not necessarily, no. As long as you're within reasonable range. A few yards doesn't matter at all. But you've got to be able to be able to be in a position where you can tell them the range to a certain thing. If the gun commander calls out, I want a range to such and such, you've got to be able to tell him and he should be able to hear you. And sometimes there's a lot of noise going on,

14:00 particularly in actual battle conditions, so you want to be in reasonable voice range.

That must be quite a high pressure job.

It was. There was one instance, if I can jump now to Egypt in July 1942 when we had just gone into battle for our first time and

14:30 the platoon had gone with other troops across the railway line at Tel el Eisa and established positions just over the railway line. I went out to a cairn of rocks in front of the position where I could get a reasonably good view of what was in front. Trying to get ranges to different places out in front of us. Suddenly I heard, crump, and a shell landed

15:00 about 20 yards behind me. I wondered about this and, crump, there's another shell about 20 yards in front of me. So I packed up and left very quickly. Back into the slit trench. But that's one of the things that can happen. The range finder is a fairly noticeable instrument. Whilst you try and get it set up so that there's a

15:30 bush or something in front of you and the eye pieces are sticking around the outside, just showing, you are hidden basically from the enemy - it's not always possible to do that. That happened at El Alamein when we first went in there. I was taking ranges to an Italian position not very far away.

16:00 And as I zoomed in on this position I saw a bloke lift his rifle up and a little spurt of dust and I ducked quickly because it was pointing at me. And it was pointing at me. It hit the handle of the range finder and the shoulder of the range taker just across here. Just cut a groove across the top of my shoulder. If I hadn't dropped quickly I'd have probably got it caught in the

16:30 body. So it was a very close experience. Poor old range finder, it still worked, but I didn't have a handle on the part that counted most. Had to use the knob without a handle.

How easy was the range finder to move around with you?

Not bad. It wasn't terribly heavy and it slung over your shoulder like a rifle.

17:00 But unfortunately I had to carry a rifle as well and frequently carried a shovel and something else hanging on my back. I was a bit loaded. But not nearly as heavy as carrying a gun. The machine guns, the Vickers guns, were fairly heavy and the boys had to carry those - in parts. The main gun and the tripod were separate parts. But they were still pretty heavy. Tripod I think weighed about 90 pounds.

17:30 In training at Cowra, what equipment did you take out with you for a day?

We had a haversack on our back. We had a water bottle on our belt. We had pouches - in those days we had the modern, not the modern, but the web equipment

18:00 that we wore during the war. Initially when we first joined at Ingleburn we had equipment that they had in the First World War, web equipment. They changed that over for a different style. Instead of having ammunition pouches here they had a larger pouch that carried all sorts of things. It was a different style of webbing all together and that you hooked

18:30 on your pack or your haversack or your water bottle to the belt around your waist. In the haversack you'd have any rations that you were given for the day. Depends on how long you were going to be out. You mightn't need a haversack. You might just leave your gear in the truck and go out and just carry ammunition.

19:00 That'd be in the pouches on your front and the water bottle of course. And on top of that there'd be the haversack - gas mask - which is in a haversack of its own. You'd carry it in front of your chest ready to grab it and put it on if you needed it.

What training did you do with the gas mask?

Quite a lot. We went into a gas chamber which used an innocuous type of gas.

19:30 But you had to get your mask on quickly and learn to breath in it. We did this every now and then they put us through the gas chamber again to make sure we were up to date with what we had to do. Never used them of course. After a while we used to throw the gas masks away and use the haversack for carrying other things.

What kind of rifle maintenance were you

20:00 **taught at Cowra?**

How to strip a rifle down. There's not much stripping with a rifle really. But mainly keeping it clean and nicely greased. Cleaning the barrel after every use and before every use sometimes too. Running the pull through [cloth] through it. That was the main maintenance for a rifle. They're very easy to look after.

20:30 **What's involved in stripping and cleaning a rifle?**

Only the bolt comes out. And the magazine. That's about all. The only things removable.

Where did you keep your rifles when you were asleep?

In the hut. We kept them beside our beds or at the head of our beds.

21:00 But at times we had to put them together in a heap. You'd hook them together with the strap at the top into a pile of all the rifles for a section in one heap so that you can grab them in a hurry if there was ever any immediate need for them. But that was mainly when you were out on the field.

Were you ever woken

21:30 **in the middle of the night for drills?**

Yes.

Tell us about that.

That was fairly common. You'd have to get up and get dressed. After all, we didn't sleep in our clothes. We slept in pyjamas. They issued us pyjamas too. And stagger out and form up, march off or whatever you were going to do. It was

22:00 no pleasure getting out early in the morning or late at night. But it had to be done. Later on we found it was necessary - when you're in the field - you have someone on sentry duty all night long and he'd do his hour stint and he'd wake the next bloke and he'd do an hour and so on. Take it turn about all night.

22:30 **What did you do in that hour?**

Watch very carefully. And make sure you keep awake. It's not easy watching things out and particularly in the jungle you're more listening than watching. You have to be very still, quiet, and attune to whatever might happen around you. In the desert it wasn't so bad.

23:00 But even so you had to be aware that there could be patrols sneaking up on you as our chaps used to do.

We were talking about night patrols in the desert.

Yes. Our

23:30 infantry were very adept at night patrolling. They'd go out and they'd bring back prisoners or kill a few on the way and they were pretty good at that. The enemy didn't do nearly as much. But we still had to be aware that the enemy might be there and so we kept our eyes open and our ears tuned for anyone that might be coming. Basically the desert was fairly light at night. And you could

24:00 see a fair way. Not like the jungle where it was black as pitch, and all you could do was listen for sounds of rustling of bushes. We used to put out strings of tin cans with a bullet or something in it to rattle. If anyone shook the bush or caught the string when they were moving around out there ...

Did you ever catch anybody like that?

Not really.

24:30 We were very lucky. As a machine gun unit we were behind the infantry and generally the infantry protected us from most of those things.

In Cowra were you taught by World War I veterans?

There were a few World War I veterans in our unit, but most of the instructors I think had come up -

25:00 some of them had come up through Canberra, the college down there, the army college. Others had come up through the units and gained their knowledge through a long time in the light horse for one thing, or in the army and other units. There weren't very many World War I blokes still around.

25:30 We had a couple in our unit.

What did they tell you about being in battle?

Not a great deal. They didn't like to talk about it too much, because they might frighten you.

After you left Cowra where did you go?

Straight down to Sydney and joined the [HMT] Aquitania and sailed for the Middle East. We'd had a couple of

- 26:00 leaves from Cowra the time we were up there. The last one was the pre-embarkation leave. It was only - I forget how many days now - 14 days possibly before we joined the Aquitania. Then it was straight onto the boat and sail for Colombo.

What were your thoughts leaving Sydney Harbour?

Not the best.

- 26:30 I was immediately put onto a guard as soon as we got on board, of guarding one of the waterproof doorways down below and I didn't even get to see the Harbour as we left. But my father and a group of friends got the word that we were leaving. Of course all this is hush hush, moving down to join the boat and when the boat sails, because they don't want
- 27:00 the enemy to know that we're coming. Might be a submarine waiting for us outside. But despite being 'hush-hush' [secret], people at home knew when we were going and Dad and these other people chartered a boat and were out on the harbour and knew we were on the Aquitania. I don't know how they got hold of it but it was there, it was known. Trying to find me along the rail of the Aquitania and here I was downstairs doing a job.
- 27:30 So we missed out. So there was not much really excitement in my part of leaving Sydney. The others were all up on deck, the ones who weren't on duty below, and enjoying the sights of - the Harbour was pretty full of boats, waving them goodbye. It was quite a convoy of us left at that time. Not just the Aquitania. That was the
- 28:00 biggest of the boats I think. But the [HMT] Mauritania and don't know I can't remember the names of them all but there'd be about probably 8 troops carriers plus a number of navy destroyers and people looking after us.

Can you

- 28:30 **describe the Aquitania for us?**

It was a long thin boat with four funnels and if you stood at one end of the corridor you could look right down the curve of the corridor. There was quite a curve in it because of the length of the boat. It wasn't a straight deck. We had a cabin with I think there were 8 of us in the cabin, which normally would have

- 29:00 two berths in it and we had a toilet that would normally belong to a cabin. Our cutlery and crockery was all the original from the ship. Hadn't been replaced. We were at dining tables and not benches. It was a comfortable boat. Very comfortable to travel in. Fair way from the
- 29:30 decks down below up to the deck up top. But not nearly as bad as it was later in the Queen Mary when I came home.

How many men were aboard the Aquitania?

No idea. The whole of our battalion was on board. But that'd be about 1000 men. I must explain at this stage that the battalion was formed between

- 30:00 New South Wales and Queensland. We had two companies up in Queensland and two companies in New South Wales. When we joined the Aquitania, the Queensland companies joined us there. So that's the first time we got together. We did our training in the Middle East together then. But
- 30:30 I don't know what other units were on board. It was fairly packed. How many, I don't know.

When did you first come up on deck after doing your duty while leaving Sydney Harbour?

Probably the following day because it was late in the day that we sailed and I'd have gone straight to the cabin afterwards for the night. Would have been the following morning we

- 31:00 came up and Sydney was well out of sight then. We didn't know where we were. We went round the south of Tasmania and we pulled into Fremantle I don't know how many days later. It'd be a couple of days later. And more troops came on board there. Mainly infantry troops.

What was the social life like?

On board?

- 31:30 You could hardly call it a social life. There were nurses on board. They were travelling in the first class area with the officers. The officers and the nurses kept together. We weren't allowed to mix with them. As far as we were concerned, there were boxing matches, there were impromptu concerts. There was a lot of two-up played.
- 32:00 A lot of cards. I think a sing song at some stage. Not much else. We did a lot of physical education really. Was about the only thing we could do on board. We got around in shorts and nothing else most of the

time.

32:30 Every now and then we had to put our boots back on to make sure our feet didn't get too swollen, too big for them. We didn't like wearing boots on board, because they were too hard on the deck. That's about all. A lot of spare time.

What did you know about where you were going?

We knew we were heading for the Middle East. What we

33:00 were doing when we got there we had no idea. At that stage the 6th Division was in the Middle East. I don't know just where it was but they'd advanced and I think they'd got up to Benghazi and right across the top of north Africa before they got pushed back. So we expected we'd be joining them.

33:30 Things changed between here and there.

Where did you go after you left Fremantle?

We went straight to Colombo. We left the Aquitainia there. We joined a smaller boat called the Christian Huygens which was a most uncomfortable boat. We were packed in pretty tightly. We had a days leave in Colombo.

34:00 Then we transferred from the Aquitainia to the Huygens. It was only the next day we sailed from there straight through from Colombo to Aden and up the canal and the Gulf of Suez to the canal and into Qantara, not Qantara, Port Suez I think it is, the bottom of the canal where we disembarked there.

34:30 The night we got to that area there was an air raid on. Our first taste of war.

Can you describe that for us?

It wasn't very much really. There were a few bombs dropped. Didn't hit anything. There were a few guns fired. Didn't hit anything. And the planes flew away. That was it. But we knew we were in the war zone when German aircraft could come down

35:00 that far and reach us.

What did you see of the plane?

Nothing. There were search lights from the navy base looking for them. Whether they found them I don't know. But we didn't see anything of them.

What were the sounds like?

Not very much. Just a big cracker going off in the distance somewhere and a

35:30 few guns firing. That was about it. Was a very tame affair.

Back to Colombo. What were your first impressions?

Lovely city. A couple of us met a lady there who was one of the local European residents, but sort of a local volunteer tourist guide. Drove us around. She had a

36:00 car. Drove us around Colombo and drove us up to Mount Lavinia which was a very lovely seaside resort not far from Colombo. We had some lunch up there. It was an interesting city. We didn't see much more of it. We went to the markets and had a look through there and bought a few things to send home. But that was about all.

Do you remember what you bought at the markets?

No.

36:30 I've forgotten now. Went home to my girlfriends.

So after the air raid as you were approaching your destination, when did you first touch dry land?

The next day it would have been. We went ashore at Port Said. I think it was Said that end of the canal. And

37:00 joined our train up to along the canal to another place where we crossed over the canal on boats, barges, and joined the train on the other side. That was our first taste of what we call 'Spinny' sausages. Sawdust sausages. Spinnys was an English caterer

37:30 who had contracts for all sorts of food in the Middle East. These sausages we reckoned they were always full of sawdust. We got a lot of them. Pretty rough ones. We had our breakfast there. I think it was a night trip up in a train. From Portside. I can't think of the name of the place. I mentioned it earlier where we crossed over the Canal. We joined the train in the morning.

38:00 It was a full day trip from there to Palestine. We landed at where - Gaza was our first camp in Palestine.

- We unloaded from the train and we marched to a camp about three or four miles away. We only had
- 38:30 packs on at that stage. Our kitbags were being transported by truck from the train. We had to set up a tent camp there.
- Did you bring anything personal with you from Australia?**
- Yes. A lot of personal things.
- What did you bring?**
- It's hard to say what is
- 39:00 personal. I didn't shave until – I did shave at that stage. I had to shave soon after I joined the army. I didn't need to, but I still had to shave just the same. Shaving gear, hair brush, mainly toiletries.
- What toiletries did you bring?**
- Those things and of course your toothbrush and everything. Mirror.
- 39:30 A writing pack. My girlfriend, Marj, brought me a little folded pack of writing pads and envelopes and pen, things to take with me, with a rising sun stamp on the side of it. I've still got that in there somewhere. That was the most personal thing probably.
- 40:00 A little book of matches, wet matches. Don't know what else was personal. Everything else was army issue.
- Can you describe for us the logic of having to shave when you didn't need to?**
- Maybe I did need to. I didn't feel I wanted to because it was just very light hair, but
- 40:30 the army says you've got to shave and that's it. I expect when you get to that age you need to shave and that's it, you've got to shave.

Tape 3

- 00:30 **Geoff, I thought I might just take the time to talk about the hardware a little bit more. What did you think of the Vickers?**
- Very good gun. We got during the war a mark 8 ammunition which is an advance on the mark 7 we used before. .303 ammunition. That gave a lot longer range. I forget just what the range was but it was a pretty good
- 01:00 long range firing. The Vickers fires in a cone of four shots. It's not that accurate. You can't pinpoint a particular bloke or that sort of thing, but you cover an area and because of the numbers of rounds that are going into that area it has a pretty devastating effect. It's mounted on a tripod and because of the mounting there's a certain amount of
- 01:30 movement in it. That gives the cone effect, where the gun's moving up and down. But we frequently use it on a travis. It's mounted fairly tightly on the tripod and the number one operator then hits the gun with his hand and moves it just a little bit across and then another burst and a bit further across and so on like that. Covers an area and can go backwards and forwards
- 02:00 covering a fairly wide area. It's a very devastating gun. Six or seven hundred rounds a minute which is a pretty fair output. Weight is a big problem. Not only weight, but also water that you have to carry for them. Because they have a water jacket on them that keeps the barrel cool. The barrel fires a lot of rounds before it wears out but that water has to be kept up to it
- 02:30 and it will start to boil after a while. You have a condenser can in the front of the gun that you have a lead coming out of the water jacket into the can, and as the jacket starts to boil so the steam goes down into the can and condenses in the water that's in the can. You hear it bubbling around in there. Then after a stage you've got to refill the gun.
- 03:00 As I said before, they're not light. The tripod folds up into a fairly compact unit. The three legs fold together and are carried in one unit like that. That's the heaviest part of the outfit. The person who's carrying the tripod, the number one of the gun, he carries it up and he flips the levers
- 03:30 on the legs and flops it out, opens it up, then tightens them up and sets it so that it's level. And the number two brings the gun in and slips it on the top. There's a pin that goes through to hold it in position and another one at the back of the gun on an elevator screw that lifts the elevation of the gun up and down.
- 04:00 That holds it in position there where it's ready to fire. There's a number three on the gun who feeds the

ammunition through it. Ammunition comes in a belt and it's fed in from the right hand side through the lock of the gun in the centre and comes out empty on the other side. The rounds are plucked out of the belt, fed into the chamber and the lock that goes

04:30 backwards and forwards inside the gun is ready for firing as soon as you press the trigger. It fires it and it goes backwards and forwards at a very rapid rate. As I say, six or seven hundred rounds a minute. Plucking bullets out of the belt. The belt carries about 100 rounds I think it is. So you've got to keep feeding belts into it. That's why you have three or four blokes behind the gun who are ammunition numbers bringing the belts up

05:00 to it all the time.

You've just answered about ten of my questions without me even having to ask them. The ammunition belts, what were they made of?

Cloth in first instance. Woven cloth. Specially woven of course. I think always the ones we had were the same material.

Did you have to load the cartridges into those belts?

Yes.

05:30 That was a big job. We had a detachment back in the company headquarters or somewhere who were continually loading belts and feeding them up. They came in a steel canister so they were protected on the way until you get to the gun and you just open a canister and pull the belt out and shove it in. As it goes into the feed the number one of the gun pulls a

06:00 lever back and that then pulls the first round out and shoves it into the chamber.

So did you reuse those belts?

Yes. They could be reused. I think in the main they were returned and got reused.

Did you only use ball ammunition or did you use tracers as well?

Yes, tracers on occasions.

In what mix?

06:30 If you were night firing you want to know where your rounds are going and so you put about one in every ten tracers. But to do that it means you have to pull the whole belt out of the case and go through and put the tracers in and put it back in again, which is a tedious job.

Just a bit more on the cooling, in the desert the gun might have already just been hot from the sun. What cooling problems did you have

07:00 **then?**

Running out of water was a big thing. Had to keep the water up to it. Although because the can condensed the steam as it went through the biggest part of the water is recycled, but it still runs out eventually. One problem that had to be looked after all the time was the packing. Because the barrel is loose inside the

07:30 water jacket. There's packing around the end of the barrel where it goes through the jacket and at the other end packing to keep the water in. That packing wears out after a while and that can be a loss of water there.

Why was range taking important with this machine gun?

Because you've got to know how far to fire. A

08:00 rifle you have sights on it that can be adjusted, an army rifle. You stand the sight up on it and you run the actual V up and down on that depending on the range you want. That allows the bullet to have a trajectory that lands on the distance that you're firing. The same goes for the machine gun. It has a trajectory.

08:30 You've got to know just how far your target away is to get to that target. It has a sight that lifts up just the same as a rifle sight does. The range taker is the bloke who tells you how far to put your sight on, gets you to the target.

I guess what I was getting at was a rifleman would just estimate the range himself.

09:00 **Why did you guys need to be more accurate?**

Because we feel we're a more accurate gun. The cone of fire that I mentioned before, we need to have a centre of that cone on the target we're aiming at.

The Vickers is also capable of indirect fire as well.

Yes. That's right. You set it up by compass bearings on a

09:30 certain point. You can be behind a ridge and you have something laid out on that ridge, markers laid out on it that you aim on. That's done by compass or by line of sight perhaps someone looking over the ridge and lining it up with the target on the other end. And you set your gun on those markers.

10:00 It is a very good way to fire out of sight.

What, given that it's mounted on a tripod, what level of recoil is there?

Not a great deal. The lock inside the gun is the thing that recoils. It goes back every time you fire it goes backwards and forwards. The lock is a thing that was probably about that square and about this thick.

10:30 That pulls the round out of the belt, drops it down and shoves it into the chamber and when the trigger's pressed it fires its shell. That's where the recoil is taken up on what we call a Fuji spring which is mounted on the side of the gun and this takes the backwards movement all the time

11:00 and brings it forward again.

There must have been quite some amount of ejected cartridges around as well.

That's right. They're flying around and they're pretty hot. You've just got to be careful they don't get down your trouser leg or something like that.

How did the weapon break down for carrying? Who was carrying what including ammunition?

The number one carries the tripod as I said. He's the first one into position, puts his tripod down.

11:30 He's the bloke who fires the gun eventually. The number two carries the gun. They're not broken down any further in actual action - well they're not at any time except in stripping a gun to clean it and replace parts, anything like that. Then number three is the fellow who carries the tin of water. He's the bloke who feeds the ammunition through to the gun.

12:00 There's four five and six who are ammunition numbers who keep bringing the ammunition up or water if it's necessary. I think that's about as far as it goes.

Who was taking the range then?

The range taker is separate. The range taker is a separate bloke all together from the gun crew. He operates between two guns. There are two guns in a section and they work together.

12:30 And the range taker operates between the two of them. Then there's another section in the platoon and they have the same set up there.

If you were say deploying by foot, how many belts of ammunition would be carried in one gun team?

They'd be flat out carrying four

13:00 belts to a man so you might have 20 belts.

And then hopefully some more.

Your platoon sergeant is the bloke who usually supplies all the material behind you. Hopefully he's got a jeep or something that's got a lot more and keep a supply up to you.

Did you ever carry the guns around with the water jacket filled already?

Yes.

13:30 That's an extra weight in them.

So assuming the water jacket was already filled up, how long would it take to get the gun into action from the first command?

Depending on how far you've got to run to take up your position. Only a few minutes. It's very quick. Number one races out with his gun and drops it on the ground, bangs his levers on the side

14:00 that loosen up the legs, goes flop with the legs out in front, tightens up the levers on it again Number two comes in and slaps the gun on top. A couple of pins that have got to go through it to hold it into place. And number one flops behind the gun. Number three comes up and shoves the ammunition in and you're ready to go. Virtually a few minutes.

How reliable

14:30 **was the weapon in the desert?**

Very good. As I say, it had a cone of fire which might be a couple of hundred yards long, but in a couple

of hundred yards in the desert you've got every chance of a man standing up in it. You could get half a dozen rounds through him at least. Or someone lying down anywhere in that cone of fire

15:00 would be in danger.

What about the conditions in the desert of sand and dust? How did they affect it?

Just meant you've got to protect your gun as well as you can. We did have canvas covers that went over the working parts of the gun. But even so they still had to be cleaned pretty frequently. They were very acceptable of dust.

15:30 They worked pretty well with a bit of dust, but it could get too much for it.

Being a relatively complex weapon what sort of maintenance was required on a routine basis?

Every day the gunners'd pull the gun down, clean it over, very lightly oil it, put it back together again, make sure it was working all right was the regular routine.

Must have

16:00 **been hard to do that cleanly in the desert with the wind blowing.**

Yes. If there was any dust or wind around it was very difficult, but had to be done to keep the thing working.

Did it ever strike you as ironic that these same guns would have been seen by your father in the same place?

That'd be right. They were used a lot in the First World War in Palestine.

16:30 And they proved their worth there. I think they were a good gun. Nowadays of course they've gone and much lighter things are being used.

Okay. I think that's all my questions about the Vickers. Describe to us those first three months or so in Palestine?

17:00 It was a new country to us. Most of us hadn't been overseas in our lives. It was interesting. We got out amongst the villagers on route marches and bivouacs in different places. Met a lot of the Arabs, the locals. We got leave in Tel Aviv. And met all the Jews there. We did our training out in the

17:30 rolling hills. Much the same training as we had in Cowra except it wasn't green country like in Cowra, it was brown and harsh.

What conditions were the local people living in?

What we thought was squalor. Very poor conditions. But they were happy. They lived like that for thousands of years. More or less.

18:00 Mud huts. Lots of prickly pear fences around the place. First World War they had a lot of trouble with the prickly pear, the forces particularly. They had it hard. But they seemed to enjoy their life.

How did you get on with them?

Very well.

18:30 Not that we mixed that much with them. We did have problems at times. Our camp at Gaza particularly was next to an orange orchard and we used to sneak into the orchard and pinch all the oranges. Of course it left an awful smell around the house. If the orange skin was good it used to go in the boiler, we'd dry it in the sun and boil it in the boiler with the hot water in the camp.

19:00 Our CO [commanding officer] was a very imaginative bloke. He got all sorts of things going for us. He got this boiler. I don't know where they got it from, but they got a boiler and set up the hot water system which other camps didn't have. We did fairly well with him, old 'Torpy' Whitehead. A Whitehead invented the torpedo apparently and Torpy got his name from that.

19:30 **What conditions were you living in?**

In tents. I suppose you'd call them down to earth conditions. We had cane beds. These are intricate sort of things. They were made of cut bamboo all laced together and formed a rectangular

20:00 frame with partitions in it so the bed didn't collapse in the middle and a straw palliase on the top of that. Got you off the ground anyway. It was quite comfortable. We had central mess tents. Not bad.

What did you know of what was happening in the

20:30 **rest of the war while you were in Palestine?**

We got our news sheets. We had a local AIF paper used to come around regularly. Forget the name of it

now. We used to get news from that and knew what was going on. We got mail from home and of course they told us a few things too.

21:00 **Can you describe Tel Aviv to us?**

A white city. Jews built most of it. White stucco and a lot of it was falling down. This was fairly new in its life. Not a bad place to go for leave. I had a girlfriend there. A very –

21:30 she was a nice girl, married with a child. It was a very – what's the word? – non sexual relationship. Just friendly. She worked as a waitress in a nightclub. We used to go in there quite often, have a couple of whiskies and I used to walk her home. That's about all. It was just a friendly relationship.

Was she Arab or Jewish?

Jewish.

22:00 Most of Tel Aviv is Jewish, although the Arabs are pretty freely moving in and out of it. It was not a bad city to have leave in.

What was there for a young man to do on leave in Tel Aviv?

There were nightclubs. Bardia restaurant or café I think it was a nightclub with floorshows on every night.

22:30 Plenty of girls around to entice you away from your dollars or shekels, whatever they called them. They were Israeli dollars I think. There were places to go. We went rowing on the river there at one time, three or four of us. Went horse riding another time.

23:00 Out of Tel Aviv we did have leave. The battalion organised leave for us to some of the rest camps – not rest camps, they were Jewish settlements really around the area. I went to two of them at different times. Where you just go and join in the local activities –

23:30 a dairy farm or whatever it might be, get some good food outside the camp. Just an enjoyable interlude.

So they were like a kibbutz?

Yeah. Kibbutzes.

What warnings were all of you troops given about venereal diseases?

We had our pictures shows of dreadful things can happen to you. Always told about it. If you did go to a

24:00 brothel at all you had to go to a blue light depot first and get a dose of something before you went and go back there and get cleaned out afterwards. Quite an effort really for a few minutes fun.

So what were you told about what precautions to take in a brothel?

24:30 That's about all. That you had to do your prophylaxis.

Were condoms available for men who wanted them?

No. Not that I know of. I don't think they were used very often.

At this stage you'd been training for quite a long time between training in Australia, then training in Palestine.

25:00 **How was morale after all this training and no real action?**

I'm getting a bit fed up with doing nothing. We were itching to get into it. After all, we were trained for it and we just wanted to get into it. But it wasn't to be for a while until eventually – although we were only there, end of April we left, we got there in January.

25:30 So it was only three months really, our first training in Palestine before we got shipped up to Mersa Matruh. Going to a battle area although there was no battle going on there, only the night attacks, the aerial bombing.

Up to this point in the war there hadn't been much joy for the British Commonwealth side. It tended to be one defeat after

26:00 **another. Greece was falling around this time I imagine. What did that do to morale?**

Didn't help it very much. But we felt, things are going to change when we go into it. As a matter of fact, when we left Palestine in April 41 it must have been we were due to go to Greece as far as we knew. The scuttle buck round the camp

26:30 says, righto we're off the Greece. We left camp on 25 April and got on the train and we eventually ended up at Mersa Matruh. They were coming out of Greece at that time so we didn't get there. We were quite happy about that of course, we'd missed out on all the troubles they had over there. So we went to

Mersa and established a fortress around Mersa

27:00 waiting for the Germans to come down. At that time they were in Tobruk or round Tobruk. Our blokes were in Tobruk. That's when we got attached to the 9th Division which was in Tobruk. We had previously been with the - we started off with the 7th and the 7th had gone to - no the 6th went to Greece I think. The 7th went to Syria later. We got on to the 9th

27:30 who were up in Tobruk. Mersa was just an interlude. We worked hard at Mersa Matruh. We dug slit trenches, gun positions, whole trench systems. The battalion was running the whole of the machine gun defences around Mersa Matruh. Instead of the 48 guns that we normally have in a battalion, we had about

28:00 76. I think we had to run all these and sight them and get them into position, dig holes for them.

Can you describe the way that the fortress was constructed and what materials were used?

It had been built by the British earlier in concrete, 'pill boxes'. Pill boxes were very nice, except that they were prominent. They were good targets for artillery.

28:30 We built hidden trenches all the way around. There's a fairly big circumference around Mersa Matruh and we had to cover that. There were infantry there too. I forget what infantry were there when we went there, but they were in positions out in front of the gun sights and we had to get our guns around fields of fire covering the whole area which was very well laid out.

29:00 We had our living accommodation in most cases under the ground. In some cases we just had slit trenches behind the gun positions. In fact there's a photo of me there somewhere that showed me sitting in a slit trench in one position. Then behind the guns there were holes for ammunition and some of the

29:30 layouts were complete cave systems with trenches all underground. And the living accommodation was underground too. One was quite a big room with about ten bunks in it. So we were generally fairly well off. We moved from one place to another while we were there. Weren't stuck in the one place all the time.

Why did you move?

Just to change the scenery and to learn the different parts of the

30:00 defence. We got a lot of time to ourselves at Mersa. There were no locals in the town. They'd all been moved out. The town was still there, pretty well entire. A lot of quite nice houses round and a couple of hotels. All empty - as I say empty of civilians. Full of army personnel.

30:30 The first place we went to when we landed there straight off the train we went to what they call Gypo [Egyptian] Barracks. Was quite a big barracks that used to be filled with Egyptian soldiers but they all buzzed off. The Egyptians didn't do any good there at all. Didn't help us. We stayed there for a little while before we got sent out to our own areas.

31:00 Australian soldiers have always had a bit of an ambiguous relationship with Egyptians. How did you guys feel about them?

We didn't have much to do with them. They were all out of there before we'd moved into the place. After all the Germans were coming in our direction. The Gypo didn't want to wait there. They might get caught. But the Egyptians generally, well

31:30 they accept whoever comes along as long as they got a piastre in their pocket they'll do.

The underground accommodation at Mersa, was that a good cool place to sleep?

It was a bit better than on the surface. None of it was cool. We weren't far enough underground to do that.

32:00 It was just a hole in the ground with a sandbag roof over the top in most cases and camouflaged. All the trenches were like that. They were covered with sandbags and iron and anything to cover the top of a trench

What were the hygiene facilities like there?

We had a hole in the ground somewhere. There was no night man to come round and collect the buckets.

32:30 Just went down the hole and stayed there. Don't know what happened to it eventually. Soaked into the ground and dried up I guess.

What about washing?

We got a little bit of water for washing. Most of the washing was done in salt water. Things are not the best in salt water. That was most of it.

33:00 We didn't wash that much.

What about, was drinking water a problem?

Not at Mersa. I don't know what the supply was though. I think it was pipeline. Still pipeline supply from Cairo. Or from Alexandria, it'd be. But we never seemed to be short of it. We didn't waste water, but we had enough.

What about flies

33:30 **and lice and so on?**

Terrible - flies. Lice weren't bad. Every now and then we took our blankets into a central depot and they fumigated and steamed them. Our clothes I think went through that. We got a change of clothes every now and then. They'd go through the same procedure just to get rid of the nasties in them.

34:00 But they weren't that much of a worry. Fleas of course were a bit of a problem in the sand. There are always fleas around. Flies weren't too bad at Mersa. It was only afterwards during the battle that flies become worse when you got plenty of dead bodies lying around. They were terrible then.

What about illness? In Mersa?

There was a certain amount of that. I didn't suffer

34:30 from anything. A lot of it came from - what's it - food left out or something like that and going off. Although we didn't have fresh food much. I don't think we ever had fresh food. But if you leave a tin too long it can go very quickly.

35:00 Diarrhoea and dysentery. Dysentery from the flies. But basically it wasn't too bad at Mersa. It was fairly well looked after.

What about desert sores and things like that?

Not a worry. We got a swim pretty frequently and that kept us clean.

And so at Mersa you were basically just waiting for something to happen?

Well the Germans were on their way

35:30 back. They were all round Tobruk at that stage and if Tobruk had fallen they'd have been well on the way to Mersa. That was the next place on the line of defence. So we never knew when they might come. They bombed us pretty frequently. Always the bombers' moon would come up and the bombers would arrive. Not that they did that much damage. I think

36:00 sometimes the ack-ack [anti-aircraft fire] guns did more damage. The nose of an ack-ack shell is a pretty heavy item. A 3.7 shell landing - if they land on top of you that's too bad. But you hear them whack down the grounds around when you're firing at the gunner at the planes up above. They got a few planes every now and then.

Were they Italian or German planes?

German.

36:30 I don't know where they were coming from, but they were fairly regular appearers.

Were there any light anti aircraft defences - machine guns and so on?

Yes. They didn't have a great deal to do. These nights, the bombing nights it was all fairly high level bombing. The light stuff wouldn't have a look in. The Beaufort, 40 mm Beaufort were used quite frequently, but

37:00 mainly the 3.7s, the long range ack-acks.

Were there anti tank defences as Mersa as well?

Oh yes.

What were they?

The old two pounder and can't say that I can recall how they were dug in but they'd have been probably in front of us and dug in around more or less the same as we were.

What about physical

37:30 **obstacles for tanks?**

There was a ditch and a wire fencing all the way around the area. So the anti tanks'd be out looking over those. Don't know how far ahead of us that'd be. Fair way I think.

What about minefields?

Far as I know, there were plenty of those

38:00 around, but I don't remember where they were.

From a tactical point of view, what was the role of your machine guns and how would you work with the infantry in that sort of position?

It'd depend on where the attack came from. We would be firing over the head of the infantry as we were in many places. The infantry just had to trust that we stayed over their heads.

38:30 The same as any artillery do. We were a short range artillery. If we were asked, if there was an assembly of troops out in front of the enemy in front we'd get called to fire on them because our range was much longer than the infantry's range. Although not as far as the artillery of course. But we had a pretty good range of 7000 yards I think.

39:00 With our mark 8. So we could call down fire on top of the infantry if they were sending for an attack at any time. If we suspected any particular massing of them, we'd be there.

Did you have predetermined fire points marked out?

Yes. The range taker would get different sights and different places, different points.

39:30 So you knew the exact range and you could call on the gunners to get them.

So you had these marked down somewhere?

Had a mark chart. I've still got charts in there of different ranges that I took.

So you would pick out likely points?

Yes. You'd go round the area and your limit and pick out certain items of different ranges around that area.

40:00 Give them a name. That name was known to the gunners. Soon as you call out such and such a point, such and such a range, they'd get there. Hopefully.

But of course it never eventuated at Mersa for you?

No. We were lucky. We fought out of Mersa and went back to Palestine. The South Africans took over from us there

40:30 and unfortunately later on in the war the South Africans had also taken over at Tobruk when our fellows came out. They lost Tobruk and they lost Mersa. They didn't even try and hold Mersa at all. I don't know that it would have done them any good, but they didn't try and hold it. It had a good port. Probably not as good as Tobruk, but quite a good port. But it wasn't a big enough place to hold against the

41:00 German attack.

Tape 4

00:32 **What were your impressions of the Middle East?**

Good place to stay away from. No. I've been back there since. It's a very interesting country and of course a very old country - one of the oldest parts of the civilised world. I enjoyed it and saw a lot of it. Since the war,

01:00 back in 88 we went over there on this trip which took us to a service at El Alamein. During that we had a trip up the Nile and, apart from all the pyramids, got to see further up to the dam and a lot of the old relics up there, the statues and everything and Luxor and places like that which was most interesting.

01:30 It's just surprising that there's so much remaining there in a country that blows gales of sand and it's a wonder it's not all sandblasted away long ago. I know most of it has been dug out of the sand over the last century or so.

How did you cope without women in your life? You seem to have been one who liked to have girlfriends, and all of a sudden you were in a very male world.

02:00 **What was that like?**

There were no alternatives. Not for me anyway. I daresay some people find alternatives. But I don't think there was much of it in the AIF. As appeared to go on, well in the navy there's a lot of talk about those sort of things. But I don't know. You get along without them. They are not indispensable.

02:30 **So you'd encounter a lot of talk about men visiting brothels?**

Yeah. There's always that sort of talk goes on. The - I don't know - there's army talk is based a lot about women and various aspects of it.

03:00 It's just normal.

The girlfriend that you told us about who was in Tel Aviv, how did the war affect her life?

Her husband was away in the Israeli forces. I don't know where he was from Tel Aviv. But he certainly wasn't at home. She didn't seem to worry about him

03:30 too much. Heard from him now and then. She was working in the café, the Ben Yehuda Café. Seemed to enjoy it all right. Not terribly worried. There were a lot of Israeli women in the forces. There still are. They took it.

04:00 **When you were on leave in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, what sort of sights did you go to see there?**

Not that many sights around Tel Aviv itself. We travelled around Palestine quite a bit. And other places. Got out to

04:30 Haifa. Haifa was one place I can remember going to. I don't think we had that much time to go to other places. Haifa was a nice city. They'd had bombing up there. About the only part of the Middle East, of Palestine, that got any bombing. The night we were there once there was an

05:00 air raid on and everybody raced out of the building downstairs. We stayed up top and watched the search lights and heard the guns go off and that was about all there was. Just a lone plane coming around.

What were your thoughts while that was going on?

All those silly goats running down there to the air raid shelters.

What about religion? What role did that play in your life?

Not very much in mine. I was

05:30 Church of England born and bred sort of thing. We had our services in the army of church services every now and then. You went if you wanted to. Had

06:00 trips to Jerusalem and the sights around there which was very interesting. The hill called Golgotha and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Bethlehem. All those places that we knew from the Bible. And that was about religion.

I understand that it was around this time you

06:30 **made contact with your future wife.**

That was later. When we were in Palestine - at what stage? It must have been before we went up to El Alamein. Before we went to Syria, I think. That if first

07:00 wrote to them. The boys in the camp in the tent decided they wanted to write to a certain girl who had her photo in the Womens' Weekly. Womens' Weeklys were very popular there. Anyway, they elected me to be the scribe. I wrote to this girl. She was a lovely looking girl. I've got a photo around here somewhere I think. Eventually her sister

07:30 needed out of her my address and wrote to me and it was her sister I eventually ended up marrying after a lot of letters to and from both the Middle East and after we came back and went to New Guinea and eventually I got married and that was that.

How often did you write to her while you were in the Middle East?

I do have a number of the army letter I wrote.

08:00 It was a good few. Probably every couple of weeks I should think.

What sort of exchanges were they? What did you both talk about in your letters?

Not much about the war. You can't say very much overseas, otherwise you get great holes cut in your letters. Mainly about what life was like at home and what life could be. We eventually talked

08:30 each other into wanting to get married. Then after we got to that stage what we were going to call our children, what we going to do as far as a house was concerned, all sorts of things.

Was this before you'd ever met?

Yeah.

When did you first meet face to face?

After we came back from New Guinea.

09:00 It was a lot longer in the piece. We came back from New Guinea and met face to face. We decided we were going to get married. We got married. All in the same leave.

Can you describe for us your first meeting? Where were you?

We were at Mount Cravat at her family's home where she lived. She was a nurse at the Brisbane General Hospital. I went out to meet her at Mount Cravat.

09:30 Actually one of the officers from our unit had been there before. I don't know how it came about, but he picked it up from the letters that I wrote to her and decided got to see, make sure, if this person is genuine. He went out to see her and checked up on her. Which I didn't appreciate very much, but I suppose it was a good move. Anyway that's where I met her. At her

10:00 family's place. I was on leave. Stayed with them for quite a while. Had to go home to my family who at that stage were in Moama down on the Victorian border. So I went down to there by train. It's a pretty fair trip from Brisbane. Had time with them. Went back to Brisbane, got married.

10:30 Went back to camp. We had a honeymoon down at Bilinga on the south coast. At that stage there was no Gold Coast. There was just the south coast. Bilinga was a little offshoot of Surfers Paradise. We had a cottage down there for a week and that was our honeymoon.

What was it like,

11:00 **changing your relationship from one of letters to one face to face? Was it uncomfortable? I imagine it'd be quite strange to have never met somebody and then ...**

Yeah. We seemed to know each other so well. It might have been. Bit hard to remember now just what the feeling was like. There were no worries about it.

11:30 **Back to just before you left for Syria in Palestine, what news did you have about going to Syria while you were back in Palestine?**

At that stage there was concern that the Turks were going to go in on the German side and come down through Syria an attack the canal from that direction.

12:00 There was a British Army established out in Mesopotamia or Iraq, Iran area. As it is now. They were moving across to Syria, but they were more an army in name only. There weren't that many troops in it. But they established this army up in Syria and this was after the French had been defeated. The 7th Division had defeated

12:30 the French up there. We moved up there after that and took over. Went into the British Army, 10th Army I think it was called. Virtually became the whole of the 10th Army. First of all we were just defence troops around Beirut

13:00 out from Beirut in a lovely resort in the mountains called Brahmana, up in the snow country. We were virtually doing nothing there. Just barracking. That's where the headquarters of the 10th Army were. We were providing guard duties around it. We had sections down in

13:30 around Beirut and various places there on guard duties and camps mainly maintaining a camp in case they wanted to bring troops in there later. Generally it was a fairly relaxed attitude at that stage. Then later we moved from Brahmana. We moved north to Tripoli which is the second city in Syria

14:00 above Beirut. Out from Tripoli is a range of hills called Jebel Liban and we were put in there and had to build fences across Jebel Liban and that was a rocky ridge of hills and we were building machine gun posts in the solid rock. That was hard work. No jack hammers - mechanical jack hammers - just a spike

14:30 and a sledge hammer held in your hands. One bloke on the sledge hammer, another bloke holding the spike. I forget what they call it. But that was the way we dug holes in the rock.

How long did that take you?

We were there for maybe six months. I doubt it'd be that long, but we got a lot done in that time.

15:00 In the anticipation that maybe the Turks'd come, maybe they wouldn't. We had other troops out in front. The 20th Brigade I think was further up at Aleppo which was nearer to Turkey. We were the main line of defence across the centre at Jebel Liban. But luckily we weren't to stay there for too much longer. We did a lot of hard work digging these holes. I did

15:30 a course while I was there of unarmed combat, and this was very interesting. Although I'd been working hard in the trenches and using the hammer and everything like that I was pretty good condition. Once I got into this unarmed combat, I found muscles I never knew I had.

Could you describe for us the training?

We were doing things like tossing logs around.

- 16:00 A dozen of us'd get a great long log between us and we'd lift it up and throw it around. A lot of combat – how to de-arm a person if someone comes at you with a bayonet, how to get rid of it. De-arm them without any weapons. Same as somebody attacking you with a knife. All this sort of things. We became quite good at it.
- 16:30 Also jumping off the back of trucks. That was an interesting one. Driving at 30 miles an hour along a dirt road and you've got to jump off the back of a truck. You jump with you back to the – facing the way you're going – you jump down and you roll as you land. You just roll over till you stop virtually.

Did you injure yourself along the way?

No.

- 17:00 It was good fun. That was one of the deviations from the hard work while we were there. But then we got the call eventually of course where things were going wrong in Egypt. We got called out of there. The 9th Division were sent from Syria back to Egypt. That's when we really got into the battle at Alamein. We just had to pack up. We left our tents, everything
- 17:30 standing. We left someone in there to guard it all. Which was worse than useless. Matter of fact that bloke was probably at risk the whole time he was there because no sooner had we disappeared over the hill than the Arabs swarmed in and pinched everything we'd left – piles of cement and tools and things like that. Everything disappeared. The poor bloke who was in charge of the lot couldn't do a thing.
- 18:00 He couldn't shoot 50 or 60 Arabs. They'd have killed him. So he just stood by and let them go. He eventually caught up with us somewhere or other. But we headed north from there up around Aleppo, north of Syria then back around – there's a road that runs down the back of Syria through Damascus and all the way down the back country through Israel,
- 18:30 till eventually we got down to Egypt. We were supposed to be travelling incognito. We had all our insignia covered, anything on our vehicles were covered. And we travelled at night. But then the first village we went through all the kids were out yelling out, "Hi Aussie!" They knew very well who it was. We had tan boots whereas
- 19:00 everyone else around the army wore black boots. The British all had black boots. We had felt hats which no-one else wore. Things like that. We were well known.

What contact did you have with the British?

Not a great deal. What we did contact wasn't always very pleasant.

How's that?

Because a lot of it was with

- 19:30 the military police who didn't like what we were doing, with officers who didn't like us not saluting them. Things like that. Our blokes were generally fairly wild. There are a lot of places they got into real battles. In Alexandria for instance in Sister Street, which is a street full of brothels in Alexandria, they didn't like the way they were treated there one time
- 20:00 and threw all the furniture out the window. Things like that the fellas'd get into. So the MPs [military police] didn't like them very much, and hence we didn't like the MPs. I wasn't involved in these things mind you. That was the other part of the army. Anyway we travelled down the back of Syria and Israel and eventually got to Egypt across
- 20:30 the canal. At that time they had a bridge of barges across the canal so we could drive straight across. Bypass Cairo and got to Alexandria. Went into camp there for a while. All this took days to get there.

Can you talk us through the timing from leaving Syria to reaching Alexandria?

It was just a matter of pulling up somewhere at night.

- 21:00 They weren't always camps. Sometimes there was a camp, a British camp would be established. We got fed there and dossed down for the night somewhere or other and then moved on the next day. Other times we just stopped a night on the road and made our own camp. We had food with us. Certain amount of food. Things like bully beef and things like that.
- 21:30 Nothing like bully beef and hard tack biscuits. There wasn't very much else to say for the road down except that we travelled as fast as we could in convoy, the whole division, and got to Amiriya.

You mentioned that you mostly drove at night. How much sleep did you get?

We slept in the trucks during the day. Or we slept in the trucks at night rather while we were travelling.

- 22:00 **Was there a specified distance that the trucks had to be apart driving in convoy?**

Yes. I don't know what it was on that convoy. It was fairly close most of the time. But then as you get down to nearer the battle areas your convoys have to open up. Aircraft are likely to be around and

attack them.

Can you describe for us the mood of the troops at

22:30 **this stage.**

We're a bit elated to some extent because we looked like going into something, getting into it at last. But we were also a bit depressed by the fact that the British had retreated or come back so far. It looked as if it was going to be a battle for Egypt for Alexandria and Cairo. After all they were only 60 miles

23:00 from Alexandria. That didn't make us very happy. But we were the last resort so ... We were elated at eventually getting into a battle that we had been trained to do.

Tell us about Alexandria. What was there when you arrived?

We didn't see much of Alexandria. We were camped outside at Amiriya which was a camp

23:30 ten kilometres, say, out of Alexandria. A lot of our drivers saw it. When we got there we were very short on transport as far as the unit was concerned. Because we were a mechanised unit we needed transport to carry our guns into action. At least to get them so far and then to service them afterwards. We'd come down in army service corps trucks.

24:00 They wouldn't be available to carry us any further. So the word went around very quietly, get your own transport. And we did. We got it all round Alexandria. Soon as a Tommy sergeant or a driver'd get out of his truck to go into a shop or anything a truck'd disappear. We really looked after ourselves. Some of them had guns, machine guns mounted on them and everything

24:30 like that. Anyway they all came back to camp. They were painted over. Got our own logo on them. We were mechanised.

Who did you steal from? Borrow from?

The Tommys mainly. They were the only people around there. Some of the Polish troops and others like that, some of them might have suffered. But they were mainly Tommys and it wasn't until after the Battle of El Alamein that the call came out to return all

25:00 vehicles. They all had to go back to a depot, the ones that were left at that stage. So many had been blown up in the meantime. And we were back to using the army service corps trucks to transport us back to Egypt after the big battle.

Facing going into battle, what were your fears?

A bit terrified about it.

25:30 Again, elation at getting where you've been trained to go. Scared wondering what's going to happen, can I take it. That's the biggest thing. Can I take it. Because so many people break down when the time comes. You get under heavy bombardment, you got

26:00 not necessarily face to face. We didn't get face to face with the enemy but we got pretty close to them. Under shell fire you can break very easily. So we were just - well I was concerned that I could take it all. I never worried about the bombing in Mersa Matruh, hadn't worried about that. But that was a different matter from going into battle for the first time.

26:30 When we went up at Tel el Eisa was the first battle we went into from Alexandria. We moved up there which as I say is only about 60 miles out of Alexandria and the Tommys were all streaming back saying, you'll be sorry, Aussie, you'll be sorry. We wondered what we were in for. So we got our

27:00 directions of where we had to go and the area that we took and we moved up there and it wasn't very long before we heard zip zip zip going past and that was bullets passing us. They were shooting at us. Down in the sand or behind a bush, somewhere like that. Get out guns set up, you were just thinking about what you were shooting at.

What did you think of the enemy?

27:30 They're the people at the other end to be defeated.

And what did you think about killing somebody?

I didn't know much about it. Anything we did was well out of sight. That didn't come up really until the jungle much later. It's an impersonal

28:00 thing. You're directing a gun onto a position. You might be able to see people moving there. You might not. You fire on them you might see someone drop, you might not. They might be out of range or out of sight all together. So it's very impersonal. It's a bit different for infantry where they're hand to hand, where they might have to stick a bayonet into someone.

28:30 Would be a different feeling all together I'd say. But it didn't come to that as far as we were concerned.

You mentioned before going into battle that you wondered whether you could do it or not, whether you'd be able to take it, that's right. What examples had you seen of men who couldn't take it?

Some of them'd start crying,

29:00 slobbering. Do all sorts of funny things. We didn't know very many in our crowd I'm glad to say, but just the occasional one he'd break down and some of the blokes jumped up and run around and stripped their clothes off, all sorts of stupid things that you couldn't account for. Why would they do that?

29:30 **How was it dealt with in the unit when somebody did react like that?**

Just drag him down. Maybe whack him a couple of blows on the chin to shut him up. If he came around well and good. If he didn't come round you'd have to ship him back and he was sent out of the road. Cause they were a danger. But it didn't happen very

30:00 often. I don't know how the infantry got on. I think they were fairly well hyped up, most of them. But there's only the occasional one that breaks.

How much contact did you have with the infantry?

They were always around us. When we were in the battle area the infantry were always in front of us. We hoped they were. They're supposed to be.

30:30 To protect us from hand to hand combat. We were behind giving them support over the top. We had our friends in the infantry. We were with the same unit all the time. We knew a lot of them. We were sorry for them really for being infantry and being up there in front. Things they had to do.

31:00 **Did they talk about with you the things they had to do?**

Not a great deal. No.

When you were at Tel el Eisa what could you see of the infantry in front of you?

Not much. Mainly they'd be dug down in their slit trench keeping their heads down. When it came to firing anything we'd be firing over their heads. Though in the main we tried to keep them

31:30 away from in front of us or get a position where we're firing between different areas of the infantry. That's much safer. There's always a possibility that something might happen. A gun tripod can collapse from the vibration of the gun. The handles that hold the tripod tight together can loosen and the tripod can relax and the gun can fall down when you're firing it. So if there's someone in front, there's a fair chance that someone's going

32:00 to get hurt. I don't think it ever happened with our guns, but it's a possibility. So we just kept them away from them if we could.

Tell us some more about Tel el Eisa.

The first day we went into Tel el Eisa it was on the flat along the coast. We were only there a very short time and we got pulled out of there and sent up over the ridge, the

32:30 Hill of Jesus. Tel el Eisa is the Hill of Jesus. Sent up over that ridge to move down the other side and out across the railway line which was probably a mile from the ridge near Tel el Eisa station. For some unknown reason they took us across the railway line into positions on the other side of the line which wasn't a very good site for us actually. There wasn't much sand or soil

33:00 on top of the rock and we could only get very shallow trenches to dig down into. We had the railway behind us which was a very exposed area to move over if we had to get out in a hurry. When we moved into there, there was a lot of German movement in front of us and a lot of dust rising. Eventually I moved out to a cairn in front of us. To put

33:30 my range finder up on the cairn. So that I could get above the ground and see better out in front and I could see that the infantry and artillery were forming up out there. As I was taking ranges out there I heard a crump behind me. I mentioned this before. There was one bang behind me and shortly another one in front of me. That's when I packed up and left

34:00 back to the slit trench. It wasn't very safe. The next one was probably going to be in the middle. I don't know whether it hit the cairn or not, but I wasn't there at that time thank heavens. The Germans had formed up and they came through on our left. The tanks came right through and along a telegraph line that was flying along the left. There was apparently a track there. They were following that. When they got to the railway line the spread out and moved

34:30 along the railway line. That came right over the top of our positions. The tanks came right through us at that stage and one tank ran over one of our sergeants in a slit trench. It wasn't very deep and he had a mess tin in his pack on his back and it pushed the mess tin into his back - not terribly heavy, it didn't kill him or anything like that. But enough to make a

- 35:00 fairly nasty bruise there and he suffered from that problem the rest of his life. He's only recently died a couple of years ago. I can remember a German officer waving a pistol around in the air and shouting out, "Hunds up!" We were down the slit trench with our hands going like this, what's going to happen to us next. We're prisoners. One of our fellas had a boy's rifle. A boy's rifle is a
- 35:30 point five weapon which fires a pretty heavy armour piercing bullet and it's a fairly long rifle. Takes up about five feet I suppose and a very difficult thing to control, to handle, to hide. He had this. Supposed to shoot tanks with it. He had it down the bottom of his trench well out of sight with him. He did after the tanks went through us.
- 36:00 They kept on going after taking our surrender in effect. Our platoon sergeant got up after them with a sticky bomb because they're fairly vulnerable from the rear, tanks are. Mostly they're watching the front. A sticky bomb is a round thing about as big as a grapefruit with a handle on it. You pull the pin out of it and you race up to the tank and you slap it on the tank. It's a glass bottle with exposure inside it and
- 36:30 the detonators on the handle. You slap it on the tank and after a few seconds it goes off and the impact kills the crew of the tank. At least this is what it's supposed to do. The first one, Gus Longhurst, our sergeant, slapped on a tank, the handle broke off. It didn't go off. He got another one on and it fell off further away and he didn't do any good with that at all. So Gus got back to his gun
- 37:00 and at this stage the tanks were getting a bit far out of - well we couldn't reach them - out of range. And the anti tank guns were shooting them. The anti tank guns were further back along the railway. They were firing across this way at the tanks. Then they knocked a couple out. They were Germans running around trying to do something with their tanks and get them out of the road or running for protection. So Gus took one of the
- 37:30 guns off a tripod and put it under his arm. With the number one behind firing the gun they fired at all the Germans who were running around the tanks and knocked quite a few of them out. That got Gus the MM doing that. The MM? Military Medal.
- 38:00 Anyway the tanks kept on going. We got left behind. We said, what are we going to do next? No infantry turned up. German infantry. They'd been dissuaded long ago by the artillery fire and a lot of the tanks got blown up or disabled by the anti tank fire. We pulled out very quickly and moved back over the line and got into positions on the other side of the line where it was a lot
- 38:30 safer. That night the Germans came through and collected a lot of their tanks. They had a very good recovery system. They'd bring down lay loaders and pull the tanks onto them, drag them away, or else they had someone who'd come and repair them on the spot. They got most of the tanks away although there was still a few left on fire there the next day. There were quite a lot of
- 39:00 their troops of their infantry had been left around their too when they went. We were in that position for quite a while then. There were various attacks came on. We supported them from there. The infantry eventually had to fight very hard to get to the two mountains that were behind us. The Tel el Eisa range. Two hills of Hill
- 39:30 33 and 29, two big hills. Those are the metres height of the hills. We stayed there for quite a while and eventually we'd pulled out when they'd taken that area and went back into rest camp. And onto more training. We were training in they called jock columns. The idea was
- 40:00 that we formed up a square box and that square box contained infantry around the outside, artillery and anti aircraft and machine guns and everything on the inside. But eventually they gave up the jock columns as a bad idea, thank heavens.

After the Germans rolled over in the tanks at Tel el Eisa did you think you were prisoners of war?

We did for a while yeah.

- 40:30 They were saying, "Hunds up" to us and they went past us and generally the infantry follow up very quickly. But the infantry didn't. They gave up for some reason and didn't follow up and we weren't prisoners any more.

That must have been quite confusing. What did you do?

Once the tanks went we just packed up and moved back over the railway and got out of it. We couldn't do anything else

- 41:00 but get away. They didn't have us then. They'd lost us.

Who was over the other side of the railway?

Our troops. Not very much at that stage. The infantry were mainly over there. I think we got out in front of the infantry. We shouldn't have been.

What were the casualties like on the Australian side?

Not very much. We lost one chap in that time the

41:30 tanks went through I think apart from Johnny Cochrane being damaged and bruised badly. I think there was one chap killed while they went through, but that was all for our platoon.

Tape 5

00:35 **You'd just got to the point where you'd been in the jock column boxes kind of arrangement.**

We gave that up. It was a pretty silly sort of business. It might have worked out in the desert but it didn't work with current warfare, so they gave it up and established a double defence line across

01:00 there. We had to dig in and build trenches and everything which was behind the area we attacked into. We still held. Anyway that's about all we did. We went back into the line again at another stage. A place called the cutting. We got a lot of artillery fire there.

01:30 No real attacks at all. Not for the area that I was in.

How much incoming shellfire?

You'd expect something every day somewhere along the line. They just sent it over as a nuisance really.

Was it mortars or artillery?

Artillery. Just to keep us alive, alert.

How did that

02:00 **play on people's nerves?**

Didn't worry us much. Some people it might have. But generally most of us took it pretty well.

I meant to ask you, the wound that you received in the shoulder early on, how was that treated?

It's after this stage. The actual Battle of Alamein.

Okay so we're out there, you're up there in the cutting.

Yeah. We were for a certain time.

02:30 This was about the time that [Field Marshal Harold] Alexander and [General Bernard] Montgomery took over the activities in Egypt. He had bright ideas and all sorts of things went on. Hiding trucks and vehicles and making false vehicles and pipelines and things like that

03:00 to deceive the enemy.

Did you see any of that?

Not in our area. Anyway we were eventually pulled out of the line and whether we went back for a while first, but the time came when we were taken into confidence on what was going to happen on the 23rd of October. We were told basically that the story of it all.

03:30 Then the night before we went into areas just before the line where we had to dig down and camouflage ourselves. We stayed there all day long in our slit trenches sweating and cooking up.

What was your briefing? What objectives were you given?

We were told where we would go in on the line towards the only place I can say really

04:00 is Hill 29. Was one point we did eventually end up at. But we were given the lines of advance and they had different channels through the minefields marked out with lamps on each side of them. The engineers did all of this and did a hell of a good job on it. They had to go ahead at first, make sure it was clear of mines. It was all lined out with lamps along the side

04:30 with an emblem pointing back marking the track. The tracks had different names. I couldn't tell you what they are now. But they had different names. The emblems showed the tracks that we were to follow. When the battle did start, they had ack-ack guns firing along the sides of these tracks. So you had to keep between the tracer lines. All extremely well worked out. Even so there was still some vehicle that got caught on mines. There was

05:00 one just before us as we were going in. A Bren gun carrier got blown up. Few of the crew killed.

Given that you'd already had a taste of battle beforehand, what were your feelings going into this big one?

Very mixed. It was a lot of interest in it really just what was going to happen, how we were going to get on, where we had to go. We were concentrating on the

05:30 details of what we had to do. Then as we got up nearer - we went into a certain stage by truck and then we had to get off the truck. They went back. It was getting towards daylight. We had to move forward and get into positions and you just don't think about anything but what you have to do at the time. We passed a lot of dead infantry along the track.

06:00 Places they'd gone in first and cleared that, made sure it was clear. Then we got to the point where we were supposed to get to. We dug in there. There was still enough soil there to get down below the surface. We were on the corner of a salient. The area we were in went out to one point where there was a corner coming down.

06:30 The enemy were running out across this way and up there and we just got into the middle of them. We had troops on the other side of us, but we were right on the point. During the first night we were in there we heard German voices just across on our right. We heard quite a few of them talking there. So one of the guns opened up on them. They dropped to the ground. He shot a few. There were others yelling out, "Kamerad!"

07:00 They came in. We sent a patrol out and brought them in. Captured quite a few German generals there. They were doing a survey of the area to find out where we were. They found out all right. Not that they liked it.

Did you see these POWs?

Yeah.

What did you think of them, seeing them?

Poor buggers. They've had it now. They were just sent back and grilled for information and they gave up quite a lot of information.

07:30 Germans and some Italians. There'd have been about a dozen of them all together. Fairly high up. They had maps with them. They were very useful. That was the first incident there. The next incident in that corner was when I got shot. I've told you before about the bloke I saw shoot at me and ducked and just as well I did. It was I think the following

08:00 night after that at that stage when I got this wound on the shoulder. I was in a slit trench with my section commander, Derrick Plank. I was pulled out and the field dressing - we always had a field dressing with two little pad dressings in it. Pulled mine out and got one of them out and slapped it on the shoulder and strapped it down. That was that. It wasn't terribly bad. It was a gouge.

08:30 The scar's still there. But it didn't inconvenience me that much except my shoulder was stiff the next day. The following night we had to move up to this point called Trig 29 and that was to the north of where we were over that point that we were stuck out. We had to move up there and further round following the infantry and carriers. There were a lot of carriers there and some of our blokes, the gun members

09:00 got lifts on the carriers to get them up. Trig 29 was a fairly heavily defended point. The infantry went through and took the point all right. And when we got it we found that they'd taken a couple of buried German tanks. They used to bury tanks in a hole with just the turret showing and fire from there. They managed to get these without them causing too much havoc. We just got round to the far side

09:30 of Trig 29 and dug in there before the light came up, before dawn. We stayed there for a few days. We were at that point fairly good. We were halfway up the slope of Trig 29 and we were looking right out over a long flat which ran to what we called the mosque, the Sidi el-Barrani which was about three or four

10:00 miles away at the end of this long flat. Over the next few days the Germans massed their infantry and advanced up along that flat making counter attacks. We mowed them down. The artillery got onto them. There were probably three or four of these counter attacks that they formed up and got knocked back every time. We did a lot of shooting there and it was all to good effect.

10:30 There was one bunch of Germans around on our right. Again, we were out on a point with nothing on our right except this batch of Germans down there in an area called the Clover Leaf. Fairly low area going down towards the railway line. They annoyed us from there. They dropped a couple of mortars on us and one mortar killed our platoon commander, landed in the pit with him and killed him outright.

11:00 When that happened at that stage I was in a dug out in a slit trench next to the platoon commander when the mortar landed. An RAP [regimental aid post], regimental aid bloke was just putting a new dressing on my shoulder, taking the old field dressing off it and had a new dressing up like this ready to drop on my shoulder when the mortar went off and black soil went up everywhere, black sand,

11:30 straight underneath the dressing and the dressing went down like that and I had a nice thick coating of black burnt sand on my shoulder underneath it. It stayed there for the next week. Nothing came of it. It just a black mass that eventually fell off and the wound was repaired by that stage all right. We lost our

platoon commander. The following morning we made sure that we were going to

- 12:00 get these fellas down in the flat. So we lined up during the day matches on the parapet of our slit trenches in the direction of where we could see this fire was coming from. When we got up in the morning it was before daylight. We lined our rifles up on these positions and as soon as a head appeared over the trench down there we shot it. We got about four or five out of that. They clear out that
- 12:30 day, got out of the position all together. Then we had another big attack that came around almost behind us. Up on the slope of the hill. We weren't involved in that. Our guns were facing north and this attack came from our left. We could see the Germans attacking up the hill there. The infantry were looking after them and eventually knocked them back and
- 13:00 what was left of them retreated away from us all together. The next thing was another counter attack from the Germans. This time we had moved our position to make sure we were protected and weren't - they hadn't seen us. We moved further down the slope of Trig 29 near the bottom and dug in again down there. But it was a bad move.
- 13:30 That day when they started to attack us, the German 88 millimetre guns got onto us and they really got amongst us. One shell landed in our gun pit. The gun pit of the crew that I was looking after was with and killed the two main gunners and blew the gun up. The number three got out of the pit and came over and joined me in mine.
- 14:00 He was shivering like mad. He didn't have any wounds, thank heavens. It's amazing how a shell can do that, can hit in one place and not in another. Anyway we sat in the bottom of this trench. The shells were still landing around us. He was at one end and I was at the other. The trench was built in sandy soil and we were pressed against the end of the trench to stop it falling in because you could feel the sand drifting down every time a shell landed. He had a packet of boiled lollies he'd
- 14:30 bought from the truck the night before and we shared these boiled lollies between us while the shelling went on. That was a scary day, that one. But anyway apart from our gun crew I don't think they got anyone else that was around the area of the section then. But they certainly frightened us. Anyway the Germans gave up after that. They didn't
- 15:00 counter attack any more. Our people started to move through the rest of the attack went on and the Australians had to move right up the flat and around it onto the coast. They had a hell of a battle there. We stayed where we were. We gave supporting fire. One night we had to pull back and we went further
- 15:30 back and got our guns into position for firing at night when the Maoris went through us. They wouldn't leave us up on the front line when the Maoris came, because they'd kill the first person they saw in front of them. They were really hepped up. So we gave supporting fire there and I think that was just about the end of our war in the Middle East. Things moved on from there. The tanks
- 16:00 went through the line, the Germans retreated. The prisoners came flocking back in their thousands. We just stayed where we were until they said, righto you pack up and we move out. We moved up to positions on the coast and just up past the mosque. Got quite nice positions right on the coast there.
- 16:30 My driver and myself, Bert Wind, you'll see a photo of it there, built a place built out of sandbags and rocks and that, a nice bed and everything there. A good home for the next month or so, until they decided what to do with us.

Okay. I'll just go back and ask you a few more

- 17:00 **questions about this action. What did you see of the opening barrage of the battle?**

A great mass of flame and smoke and dust. Terrific noise. Some battle, some gunfire. The whole skyline was flickering and

- 17:30 flickering in one direction and you could see the shells bursting in the other direction. I wouldn't have liked to have been under it. A barrage like that doesn't do what you hope it might do of course. Everyone's below ground. The direct damage it does is comparatively small. But it has a certain amount of morale to the people attacking behind it and knocks down the people in front of it.

- 18:00 **Moving up through the minefield, although you were in cleared lanes, you did see a vehicle get ...?**

Yes.

It must have been a nervous time.

It was. You were concentrating on where you've got to go. Keeps your mind off the things that you see around you. I don't know. I might be hard hearted or something. I wasn't terribly moved by the

- 18:30 sight of dead bodies and even when it's your own mates getting knocked back. I didn't break down and cry for them, anything like that. I felt sorry for them, yes, it's all part of war. You miss them after a while.

And when you were up on Hill 29 and you were really coming to grips with the enemy

19:00 **then and you had them over open sights, it sounds like.**

Pretty well. You've just got a job to do. I was still watching through the range finder and giving ranges to the boys as they came up the flat. I could see the front lines of the Germans and I could get a certain amount of range on them. Then the artillery

19:30 coming over got amongst them and the dust and everything, you can't see much then. You just hope that by that stage you've got ranges for them.

In what sort of strength were they counterattacking?

I think it was divisional strength really, which was pretty solid. Although at that stage a division is not really what a division should normally be. It had been

20:00 probably a couple of thousand of them. It's hard to say. But they were pretty thick. Spread across a fairly wide frontage.

And how much damage do you think your sections did?

Plenty. We would hope so. That night or later on after they'd retired and during the night there was a lot of vehicle activity down there. But we didn't fire on them

20:30 because we expected it'd be Red Cross or something like that getting their wounded out of the area. So you leave them alone. Night were fairly civilised over there, except the times when you actually attacked. The Germans didn't like attacking much at night. They liked a daytime attack. Our blokes liked to attack at night so they're onto the potions at dawn and ready to withstand any counter attacks.

21:00 **Were things like Red Crosses fairly well respected?**

Yes. In the desert it was.

The morning when you'd lined up the match sticks onto the enemy salient or whatever it was, what range were you firing at there?

About 400 yards I'd say.

You'd need to be a fairly decent shot?

Yeah.

21:30 400 was a reasonable range for us with a rifle, the old .303.

It didn't worry you shooting on that individual basis against other men?

No. It was a tin hat.

What happened when - you said you were under fire from 88s?

Mm.

Describe

22:00 **to me what that's like when you hear those coming in.**

The thing is you don't hear the ones that get to you. But they scream a bit, particularly when they're going past. It's slightly terrifying. You're happy that it's gone past and you heard the noise.

22:30 But they're a fairly large bang.

The one that landed in the gun position, what sort of damage did that do?

Apart from killing the two members I don't know where it hit, it might have just landed on the gun perhaps and exploded there - they explode on impact - and got those two,

23:00 and Ted just happened to be around the other side of the pit and so all the material went forward which they tend to do. They keep in a fairly close area when they go forward. So he missed out that way but it got the other two boys.

And killed them instantly.

Mm.

How does the sound of being under fire from 88s compare to being under

23:30 **mortar fire?**

Mortars are quiet. You don't hear them coming most of the time. All they give at the other end is a bit of a pop and then they're on top of you. More frightening perhaps than the artillery. But they do a fair bit of damage,

24:00 a three inch mortar. They do a lot of damage or similar ones the Germans used. They tend to come straight down rather than artillery comes in at an angle and bursts forward. The mortar tends to come down and burst all round.

Did you have artillery support yourselves?

Yes.

24:30 The attacks were broken up mainly by artillery I think. We added to it, but the artillery would be the main thing. 25 pounders and some of the bigger ones, they had a tremendous amount of artillery at Alamein and they could call on them - it'd be 105 hours and seemed to be able to get them down into

25:00 a certain position pretty quickly.

Did you have artillery forward observers with you?

No. There would have been some around somewhere.

During this time of the battle of El Alamein you had some successes, you had some casualties in the platoon. How did the morale go up and down during the engagement?

25:30 I think it was pretty low at the time that my two boys got killed, because we were in a position, we'd moved forward from where we'd been before. Any shellfire in the first position we went to at 29 had fallen on the hill behind us. When we moved down I think they got our range a lot better and got onto us unless it was just that they dropped their range automatically. But we were happier

26:00 in the first place which we moved back to as soon as this had happened on the other one. So we were a bit depressed at that point. But I think then as soon as things started to move further forward, we were quite happy about it.

How did the loss of the platoon commander affect the platoon?

The platoon sergeant took over and he was doing a really good job. Doesn't really

26:30 affect the platoon that much, because we act as sections more than as a platoon.

What air activity did you see?

Plenty of fighting, dog fights. The British were really in command of the air. They came in occasionally to bomb, drop bombs on attacks and that sort of thing. Not very often.

27:00 But I think most of the bombing was further back on the German supply lines. Most of the fighting was also further back. The fighters, the bases were very close up to the front line really. In between us and Alexandria is only 60 miles and that's very close for air force and they were probably halfway between.

27:30 They could be in the air in no time and attacking anything we saw coming and generally took their attacks further back before they even got off the 'dromes.

You obviously went through a lot of ammunition in these positions. What was the supply like?

It was kept up pretty well. No worry at any time about lack of supply. We

28:00 luckily were in a position where the supply truck could get up every night. They brought us a hot tea. Stew and a cup of tea in hot boxes. We were doing fairly well there. Some of the infantry who moved forward from there they were days on the track and they were spending nights just dug in behind a clump of bushes or something like that. And they weren't getting their hot

28:30 meals. They just had to rely on their water and their tin of bully or whatever they had in their packs. We were well up on them.

How well do you think all your training served you in this battle?

I did things I needed to do without messing them up. The platoon as such

29:00 carried itself well and did all it was required to do. I think that's all the training brings out. As long as you do the job as you are told and wanted to do, your training's been all right.

Describe to us the Maori soldiers that you made reference to.

They were just

29:30 soldiers as far as their dress goes. Most of them are pretty fierce looking blokes and they'd formed up in front of us luckily. As I said, we might have been front of them once they started off. I don't know whether they'd been on any drugs of any kind or what it was, or just boosted up themselves. But I wouldn't have liked to be there on the track when they were coming through.

30:00 Bit hard otherwise to describe them.

What examples of courage or heroism did you see either from you Australians or from the other side?

Nothing really.

30:30 **Nothing that stands out in your mind.**

Nothing that stands out.

What about the opposite? Did you encounter any examples of panic?

No. I don't think so. Withdrawal as far as the Germans were concerned. They might have been Italians. There were a lot of Italians on our front there too. In fact the Germans were pushing them in as cannon fodder.

31:00 But they're so far away you can't tell. As they get up close, okay, you know who they are but at a distance you don't know whether they're German or Italian, but no particular – didn't see any acts of bravery or otherwise.

Do you know the nationality of the person who gave you your wound?

I'd say it was German.

When all those

31:30 **prisoners started streaming back towards the end of the battle, how did the men react to the sight of all these prisoners?**

We didn't see much of them where we were. We did see the columns going past, but we weren't close to them. Further back

32:00 in Egypt before the battle we did see some of the prisoners' cages and were more or less talking to and listening to. Some spoke English. They were all behind wire back near Alexandria. In the main the Italians were glad to be out of it and the Germans were all a bit arrogant. But they'd been brought down a bit

32:30 by being behind a cage.

Did you Australians have different opinions of the Germans and the Italians?

Yes. The Italians they were just harder to be taken notice of. The Germans were good fighters. In fact the Germans in some ways could outdo us. We had the weight, that was all, at the end.

Do you think in the desert they were a fairly honourable

33:00 **enemy?**

Yes. I think so. They respected the Red Cross in the main. They took prisoners where they could without – no indiscriminate killing of prisoners. A lot of our chaps eventually ended up back in Italy or Germany during the war. Got taken prisoner.

33:30 They were generally well treated, at least until they got back to the main camps in Europe.

But you probably have a different opinion of the Japanese?

Entirely. It's just a different background really. The Germans is a European background. No matter what language they might be or what breed they are the Germans

34:00 are certainly different to the French or the Italians but basically they've got a European approach to things whereas the Japanese have an entirely different approach. That was bred into them through their officers, their samurais and everything they do.

Since

34:30 **the war and in more recent years have you had any contact with Germans?**

Yes. I've run into a few here and there. In travels of course. I've been through Germany and struck some there that are very nice. Always seem to be decent people.

You ever encountered any German veterans from the North Africa Campaign?

I did one.

35:00 But he didn't want to talk. Didn't like to talk about it at all.

So you got shipped back to the coast after this.

Yeah. We set up our camp at the coast. We went fishing there generally with hand grenades.

What sort of a catch would you get from a hand grenade?

Quite good fish. Bit better than bully beef.

What was the official view on hand

35:30 **grenade fishing?**

No. Certainly not. Dangerous to the men let alone the fish and the wasted hand grenades. We had a battalion parade there. First time we'd been together since I don't know when, since before we left Palestine anyway. I've got photos of it in there somewhere I think. Quite a big parade.

36:00 The CO said some nice things about us. Said we were on our way back to Australia. Which we were at that stage. All the other Australians had left the middle east and come home. We were the last ones over there. The Australians didn't think much of us not coming home for their defence, but we'd done our duty there and we were ready to go.

What did you feel once you heard about Japan

36:30 **entering the war? Were you worried about Australia?**

We all were. We wanted to get home and get it, do something about it. But we realised that there was a job to be done over there. We reckoned, let's finish this and go. That's about what happened.

One thing we did miss out in your Middle East travels was I believe you had some leave in

37:00 **Damascus?**

That's right.

Can you describe Damascus of that era to us?

Damascus of that era would be the same as it was a hundred years before I'd say. I don't know whether it'd be much different today. It was a middle eastern city with bazaars and castles around it. 'Street called Straight' [the "Via Recta"], which you've heard about before, I don't doubt. A street of bazaars

37:30 and all sorts of other things. Very interesting city. We had no problems there, people attacking you or robbing you or anything like that. I think the few days that I had there I found was very good.

What about what sort of sights was there to see - besides bazaars

38:00 **and horizontal entertainment?**

Castles. The Turkish Baths. Had a Turkish bath there which was probably a few hundred years old at least. Very interesting.

What was the standard of cleanliness and tidiness like?

38:30 I wouldn't say there was a standard. Tidiness, yes, there wasn't much around. The cleanliness, there's plenty of slime and moss around. They kept the main working areas fairly clean. You could say it was clean seeing it had been going for so long and everything had been all right in it.

39:00 The workers were in the main old women that rubbed you down and shoved you from one place to another. You go into hot water then into cold water and you get a bit of a massage or something on the way. You're all in the nude doing this. Then they pass you to someone else and you get rubbed down again and dried off and set up in a hot room to cool down.

39:30 **Where did you embark back for Australia?**

From the same place as we landed. At Port Said.

On what ship?

The Queen Mary.

What was that like?

It was a bit overcrowded. I forget how many - 17,000 or something - troops we had on it. We were on it for four weeks.

40:00 I was on I think it was F deck down below. We had a hammock each. You couldn't sleep in a hammock or if you did sleep in a hammock anyone turned over everyone else had to turn over. I had to take mine up on the boat deck. Right up top. It was a quarter of an hour hike to get there. String it between the davits swinging out over the edge of the boat which is a half a mile down below. But at least

40:30 it was cool up there. We didn't have much to do on board. Wasn't that much room to do anything. It was not a bad trip home just the same. Coming home was the big thing.

Tape 6

00:32 **Just going back a little bit, what's it like to sleep in a trench in the desert?**

Not very comfortable. When you're in the front line or what I did was sleep with a tin hat over the private parts and hope that they're going to be protected. The idea is if you lose that you lose everything. But if it hits you somewhere else that's too bad, you're killed.

01:00 You wake up in the morning with a white layer all over your body of salt from sweating during the night. Not necessarily from heat. Just from the terror that's in you all the time makes you sweat.

Can you describe for us that terror?

It's, you don't think of it as

01:30 such. You don't really think that you're afraid. But it's there behind you all the time. You worry that, (a) there's a shell going to come over and its got your name on it, or (b) that the enemy are going to come over and you don't hear them until it's too late. Things like this are always on your mind. While you don't think that you're frightened of it at all, it obviously shows up in your body by sweating during the night and leaving a salt deposit on your body every day.

02:00 **Do you think that having to live with that fear day in and day out had long term emotional impact on you and your fellow troops?**

I don't think so. It might on some people, but I don't think it did with me.

What was Christmas like in the Middle East after El Alamein?

We had

02:30 a couple of Christmases over there. We celebrated fairly well in the unit in our camps. Christmas Day it was tradition for the officers to serve the men their Christmas dinner. Which was always a good thing. Generally we had a reasonably good Christmas dinner. They'd rake up - not turkey necessarily, but poultry or something like that as well as ham.

03:00 We did very well. We'd get a lot of parcels from home with Christmas cakes and puddings in them which we'd usually spread around the tent. Plenty of beer. It was all right. Even though it was sometimes wet. I know one Christmas in particular was very wet and the camp was like a

03:30 quagmire. We had slit trenches around the camp for air raid precautions. They were all full of water. Every now and then someone'd fall into a slit trench and have to drag him out. I seem to remember that someone got drowned in one once. But it was always a danger. Otherwise Christmas was a good time. We'd done our buying beforehand.

04:00 A padre ran a shop on a truck that used to go round. Particularly after the Battle of Alamein it came up there. With all sorts of goodies in it, the local stuff that they'd bought and available for sale at reasonable prices. We'd wrap these things up and post them home to our friends at home. That was

04:30 Christmas 42. We were still up the desert. We came back to Palestine? No, I don't think we got to Palestine at that stage. We came back to Cairo before we went on the boat. We were on the boat after Christmas 42. So we had Christmas in camp there somewhere. Not quite sure of that.

05:00 I know we had two Christmases. Must have only had two. Only over there two years. They were both in Palestine. One was swamped out, the other was a dry Christmas. The first one we got there. I'm mixing these up a bit, the actual time frame.

Preparing to leave to return to Australia, what did you know of

05:30 **what was in store for you once you'd left the Middle East?**

They'd given us a certain amount of instruction on what to expect from the Japanese. We didn't know where we were going at that stage. A lot of troops coming back had landed in Ceylon or in Sumatra or Java, and had been captured. But

06:00 that was before we left over there so we came straight back. We couldn't do a great deal about jungle training on the way, because we didn't have any jungles on the boat. But we were given lectures on different aspects.

I understand you had a close call with an attack on the boat on your return?

There was a warning out when we were halfway across the Indian Ocean.

06:30 I think this was the time when Sydney was shelled, fired from a submarine. Remember, Bondi was shelled at one stage and everyone packed up and moved out? But during the night the convoy split up and the Queen Mary I know went off top speed. Was heeling all over the place. It was even going like this on the curves and the Queen Mary

07:00 can do a pretty fair speed at top speed at 34 knots or something. But in the morning when we got up there wasn't a ship in sight. We were right out on our own somewhere. We were that way for the rest of the day until we caught up with the convoy, or the convoy caught up with us before we came into Fremantle. I think there was a scare over there because of the submarine in Sydney. I think they thought knew we were coming

07:30 and they were getting ready for us.

I understand you had a brother who was serving as well in the Second World War?

No. He wasn't in the war. He was in the CMF after the war. He was in Melbourne. I think he got called up - National Service at that stage. Only there for a short time really.

What was it like arriving in Australia again after two years abroad?

08:00 It was great. Great to be home. Got a good reception. Even though they'd been sending us white feathers and things, saying nasty things about us not coming home at the same time as the others.

Can you tell us a bit about that?

Some people got white feathers sent to them.

From whom?

From girlfriends, other people who knew them. It's amazing you know. Even in Australia,

08:30 soldiers who'd been wounded and discharged because of their wounds would often be given a white feather walking along the street because they're not in uniform. Because they reckoned that they should be serving. And yet they'd done their bit and they'd been discharged. People don't know that of course. So they hand them out a white feather. Otherwise getting home was just a great

09:00 affair. Good to get back amongst our people again. We had a big parade through Sydney. As they did through the other cities too. Which was a good thing. Given the freedom of the city. What good that did us, I don't know. That was after we'd had our leave and we'd all assembled back at Wallgrove camp. We went into the parade from there.

09:30 Leave otherwise. Don't know what else I can say about it. I went back to Campbelltown, where I'd been when we started. Saw all the people there.

What sort of shape was Sydney in after the Japanese subs had attacked? What was the mood there?

Didn't know much about it. We were not in Sydney that much.

10:00 You'd get leave and you'd go in there for a night or something like that. But our camp was out at Wallgrove and we weren't there that long. We were shipped north to Queensland pretty well straight after the parade while they had the division all together, or the Sydney part of it.

After your time in Sydney, how were notified about where you were going next?

We weren't.

10:30 We were given a time we had to report back to camp. Our post embarkation leave was up at a certain date. You were to report back to camp. We went on the parade and back to camp and we were just shipped off on the train. We knew we were going up to Queensland at that stage, to the Tablelands camp. Didn't know what else was to come for us.

11:00 **Having survived North Africa, what were your thoughts about going into battle again against a different enemy?**

We were anxious to see what the Japs were like. Didn't really relish the thought of facing up to gunfire again. But it's what you were there for.

What rumours and stories had you heard about the Japanese?

They were unstoppable. No-one had stopped them up to that stage.

11:30 Thought, to hell with that. If we can stop the Germans we can stop the Japanese.

How do you think your service in North Africa contributed to your preparedness for fighting the Japanese?

Not a great deal, except we knew the work we had to do. But we didn't know anything about the country that we were going to strike. It was totally different. The sand and the heat of the

12:00 desert. And the mud and slush of the jungle. Whilst we were told what it was like, we weren't really prepared for it until we got into it.

So tell us about jungle training?

We did that up on the [Atherton] Tablelands. There was a fair bit of country up there at that time that had heavy jungle over it. Round the -

- 12:30 can't think of the name of the big mountain up on the tablelands. But there was a lot of scrub country around there and we did our route marches and jungle training through that. I don't know how good the jungle training we did there was for us when we got to New Guinea. But it must have given us a pretty fair backing I think.

What sort of exercises did you do preparing for jungle

- 13:00 **warfare?**

A lot of it was open country stuff. Some of it worked into the jungle. We started working up from platoon efforts, battalion efforts, then brigade, and I think at the end there was a divisional exercise although divisions weren't used a great deal as a complete unit in the islands. It was more brigade

- 13:30 size units.

In terms of your platoon that operated the Vickers machine gun, did you know how to do the other jobs that other men did as well as range taking?

Within the platoon, yes. We all did our share of training on each position so if one gets knocked off someone else can take his place.

- 14:00 Far as the range taking went there was another chap in my platoon who had done range taking and would be able to take over. So we were all fairly well organised that way.

What specific skills did you have that made you appropriate as range taker?

I don't know really except being a cleric. For a bank officer I was good with figures.

- 14:30 I don't know what other skill I had, but that might have been enough.

What was the camp like on the Tablelands that you trained from?

First camp we went into up there was at Kairi. There were tents. All the camps up there were tents. We had a hut for the headquarters of the unit. We built huts ourselves for the messes,

- 15:00 our eating areas were just a grass roof on poles really. A fairly big area to cover enough for the battalion to sit down at. We had to put our tents up and the tents were put up with rails along the side so they could be tied back without pegs on the ground. We had to put paths between them..

- 15:30 We had to dig latrines. Latrines were built around a deep hole. And wash houses. That was about all. Very few privileges around there at Kairi. Then after we came back from New Guinea we went into Ravenshoe camp further out further south of the Tablelands area. And

- 16:00 we had more or less the same there except it was a flat area. Kairi was on a slope and the camp was on a slope and we had a parade ground on the slope down the bottom beside the Barron river. But at Ravenshoe it was all flat country. We had the same accommodation there. Tents, and the headquarters were in a hut. But we also built a big hut there as a cafeteria. Our cook

- 16:30 was in charge of the cafeteria and he used to get meat in from the local farms and dairy produce and everything and put on meals there at night. Everyone around the division would come in there for tea. The place was packed. A couple of hundred blokes in there every night.

What were the living conditions in the tents like at Kairi?

Not bad. Same as they were in tents anywhere.

- 17:00 You didn't have much room. But theoretically they didn't let any water through. We got a fair bit of rain up there of course.

The Atherton Tablelands are known for fairly aggressive wildlife. Did you have visits in the tents from snakes or spiders?

No. I think they all kept to the bush. While our tents were on the edge of the bush,

- 17:30 it was cleared all round them so they didn't come near us. We did catch a couple of pythons in an area down below between our overall parade ground and the river there was a patch of scrub country through there. Jungle country. Not very much of it. But we had a commando

- 18:00 course built through there with all sorts of things popping up to frighten you and you had to dodge them and do all sorts of things like swimming across the creek on ropes and climbing poles and that sort of thing. We caught a couple of pythons in there at one stage about 8 or 10 feet long. They didn't catch any of our blokes.

What different

18:30 **uniforms and equipment were you issued with for the jungle?**

Nothing really. We started off with khakis we brought home from the Middle East. We had our – I don't think that they gave us the serge uniforms up there. We still had those of course. We had to wear those when we went on leave. Our

19:00 field service uniform. It wasn't until we got to – where? We got to Morotai on the last leg of our war that we really dyed our uniforms green. They gave us green dye and we had to boil everything up and stick it through buckets of green dye. Before that, I think it was all khaki

19:30 still.

What about the gun? How did it handle the different conditions?

Not much difference. More water around. We didn't have to worry so much about carrying water. Otherwise the conditions were much the same. Once we got up into New Guinea, we struck

20:00 difficult conditions there because of the water, the wet tracks. Trying to carry a heavy gun along a wet track is not very comfortable. At one stage we were up on a rise – in most cases we had to leave the track, we were following a track that ran along the coast or fairly close to the coast. We had to leave the track to get a field of view, somewhere you could see anything, by climbing up a range –

20:30 edge of the range beside the track. You might get a hundred feet up or something like that. One particularly case we were on a big open hill covered with kunai grass, a big tall grass about five or six feet tall. We got a position there. We had to cut passageways through the kunai so we could get a field of fire, we could see where we were supposed to be firing. And the Japs were over the creek about three or four hundred yards ahead of us.

21:00 We could see them moving along a track down there. We hadn't been there very long when the Japs got back at us with a mortar fire and set the kunai on fire. We had to pack up and move out in a hurry. We didn't want to get burnt up. Kunai burns pretty fiercely. It all burnt out and we went back that night after things had cooled down and set up our guns again and we were ready to fire again in the morning. We'd dug in by that time.

21:30 We had no kunai to worry about having to cut down. We just dug in and we were to some extent camouflaged by the black ash of everything around us. So we did a bit of firing from there.

Can you tell us about leaving Australia again for New Guinea?

The first time we left Australia after we came back from the Middle East it was in

22:00 a liberty ship. At that stage there'd been a story come out of America that liberty ships had been breaking in half. Some of them had split in half crossing the Atlantic and they didn't have a very good name. We were a bit scared about it. We got a bit of heavy weather going up to New Guinea outside the reef and the boat'd be going up like this and it'd come – crash! – down onto another

22:30 wave and every time it came crash onto another wave the blokes'd be out of their hammocks and up the steps. We had a big cabin just below the main deck. A lot of people in it. 100 odd blokes I suppose. With a fairly wide staircase going up onto deck. We'd all be up onto deck ready to dive overboard if it started to sink. That was a bit scary that trip. The next trip was a much more stable boat. I think it was a – whatever came after

23:00 the – there's a liberty and a victory ship came out of America in scores. I'm not quite sure which order they came in, but the second boat was a much more stable one than the first one.

Did you have New Guinea vets teaching you jungle training back in Australia before you left?

Yes we did. We had a lot of them

23:30 came back there and give us a pretty fair run through.

What did they tell you about what to expect?

Can't tell you very much about that, I'm afraid. Sniping was one of the big things. The order of patrolling so that you've got a man well out in front and the others behind spread well. Not like the American

24:00 shows, where you see them all coming in a cluster one after the other. We had to spread out so if one gets shot it's only one and not four or five. That sort of drill. The sort of things to expect up there were mud and banzai [Japanese for 'hooray!'] charges which we didn't get any.

24:30 Types of booby traps to use when you camp at night.

Such as what?

Empty tins along on a wire so that they rattle, a stone in them so they rattle if someone touches a twig

or something. We did have special booby traps with detonators on them that'd go off in anybody tripped a wire. We used to have to put these out around a certain

25:00 distance in front of the camp at night when we were camped out. We'd dig down always. Get down under the surface at night even though your hole might be full of water or half full of water. What else did they teach us? Don't know.

What were your first impressions of New Guinea?

Not very good. We landed at Milne

25:30 Bay first time up and were taken out there to a coconut plantation. We were warned not to camp under the coconut trees. Although the natives said the coconuts won't hit you, they've got eyes in the bottom of their head. You know where the eyes in the bottom of the coconut are? They'll see you, they won't eat you. But there were cases of a couple of blokes up there I heard were killed by coconut landing on their head.

26:00 We were used for unloading ships there quite a bit. They didn't have a real idea of using machine guns early in the piece so we were given quite a few medium rough tasks like unload ships. And we did fairly well at unloading ships. We unloaded them a lot quicker than the

26:30 wharf labourers did. That was all our training in Milne Bay. Then we moved from Milne Bay to Finschhafen. That's when we got into the war up there. On the way up to Finschhafen we were attacked by torpedo bombers. We were in a convoy of -

27:00 I don't know how many ships there'd be. Quite a few ships. A lot of them were LSTs which are troop carriers. Not only troop carriers, but landing ship tanks they called them. They carried tanks and motor vehicles as well. They were the biggest ones of the landing force type ships.

27:30 This torpedo attack came in somewhere near Buna. We saw a torpedo go straight underneath our ship. One hit the tail. The tails sit down a little bit further than the bow in these LSTs and one hit the tail of the ship and blew the tail off it. It got ashore safely. There were a few chaps damaged on that. A couple of the torpedo

28:00 bombers were shot down. That's about all the damage they did. They disappeared and we got on safely to Finschhafen which is just out of Lae. At that stage the 7th Division I think it was was landing at Lae by air or up the Markham Valley from Lae.

28:30 I think they were landing as paratroopers most of them although they'd never had a parachute on before in their lives. We had to land at Red Beach which was around on the coast from Lae at Finschhafen. That was all right. the landing was virtually unopposed while we were on the fighting area of New Guinea.

29:00 We had a little bit of fighting then. Not very much. I didn't think there was any really. We were mainly unloading ships again and carrying supplies up to forward troops to the infantry. Which wasn't fun over those tracks as they were - all mud and slush and roots. If you slip over and trip over. You'd have to carry a pack load of bully beef or a pack full of ammunition or something

29:30 or other. Fairly heavy loads. Then we moved a bit further towards Lae, and we were at a stage where we had to build jeep roads so vehicles could get through, jeeps could get through. Corduroy - chopping trees down and laying them across to put a corduroy surface across the road. A log surface so they wouldn't sink in the mud. Mud was a big problem in New Guinea

30:00 anywhere. That was about our exercise there. Then we came back to the coast. We knew we were going further up the coast this time. I think I mentioned Finschhafen. It wasn't Finschhafen. It was at Red Beach just outside Lae. We had to come back and camp on the beach for the night so the landing barges could come in and

30:30 collect us. It was a miserable wet night and the only area behind the beach we could camp on was swamp land. So I spent the night squatting on a log with a ground sheet or a gas cape - gas capes we used to carry were fairly good ground water capes - over me and shivering like mad all night long. If I went to sleep I'd have fallen off the log into the water I'm sure. Anyway that got the night over.

31:00 We then went to Finschhafen. We landed at Finschhafen without any opposition. We were used as machine gunners there. We were also unloading boats and barges on the beach, but we moved higher up behind the hills at Finschhafen and had to set up posts there for aerial attack for one thing and guarding the tracks that the Japanese might come down on

31:30 for another. Then from there we joined the 4th Brigade CMF, the chocko soldiers ['chocolate soldiers' - militia], who were set to advance up the coast from Finschhafen around the coast and on the way towards Buna further up. At that time the 9th Division was attacking the

32:00 Mount Sattel? Names are not coming clearly, are they? Sattelberg. Sattelberg was a very important Japanese post up in the mountains or not far back from the coast. Our company wasn't wanted. The other companies were used in that. Our company was with the 4th Brigade and we went up the coast

- 32:30 looking after that area whereas the rest of them attacked through Sattelberg and came round the back and cut off a lot of Japanese further up the coast. We fired on a lot of areas. It wasn't easy going. It was still much the same as we had before where you move up from the coast onto a ridge and try to find a field of fire and
- 33:00 something to shoot up. At least we were used there. Was one point we went into I know we were on a point out on the edge of the coast, it was fairly high above the sea, a rocky point, and firing on the Japanese further up along the coast. We had our gun pits dug just down on the slope of this rise. Suddenly one of the boys yelled out, "Look out! The Japanese are here!"
- 33:30 There were Japs crawling up the rocks behind us. They had no weapons other than grenades which they were all ready to throw into us. We got onto them with Owen guns and rifles and got the lot of them. About a dozen of them I think. They'd come off a boat that had been sunk. Our Beaufighters had sunk a boat just off the coast
- 34:00 there during the night and they'd swum ashore. They'd climbed up the rocks behind us and were just about to attack us. So it was a very close go.

How close were they to you?

I wouldn't say as close as me to you, but not as far as the wall back there.

So three or four metres maybe.

Yes. That'd be all. Some of them. The others were coming up behind them. And they all

- 34:30 kept coming even though we knocked the first ones back. I had an Owen gun in my hands at that time and I remember watching the holes go down the front of this bloke's shirt when I fired at him.

What was that like for you?

Exhilarating you could say perhaps. I'd shot my first and only Japanese.

- 35:00 That's all I could say for it. He's an enemy. Got him.

Do you remember what went through your head when you turned around and realised how close they were to you?

"Good God! What are they doing here? Let's get them!"

After that event did you feel that you and your platoon

- 35:30 **were more on edge, more attuned to the type of warfare that you were going into?**

More attuned to it, yes. I don't know about on edge. We were more aware of what could happen and probably more alert because of it. But I don't know whether we were scared about it at all.

What did you do with the dead bodies?

- 36:00 We moved on from there. We left a lot of them in slit trenches. Buried some of them. Some of them had gone down the cliff as we shot them. They were just left.

Did you strip their bodies of weapons or grenades or anything that they had?

No. They wouldn't have had anything - they didn't have much clothing on, most of them. There would have been anything worth looking at even if we had felt so

- 36:30 inclined. There had been cases of people pulling gold teeth out of them and things like that. They might have had rings on them, which is most unlikely. But we just left them.

Where did you go next?

Further up the coast. We did some more firing. Other places further. We didn't get that much

- 37:00 further up the coast really. We got to a place called Massoin Point. We stopped there. We handed over to another unit that went on from there. I think it was another one of our companies. They went on with the 4th Brigade further up. But we stayed there. This was just before Christmas, 44 would have been.

- 37:30 We had Christmas dinner there. Wasn't much of a dinner but we had it there. We got a few fish. We managed to catch a WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK or something like a WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK in the bush and cooked it up and then added the bully beef. I think we even got some stuff, some parcels came up from behind us. Maybe some Christmas goodies in there.

- 38:00 We weren't really isolated then. There were people behind us.

From your description up until this point in New Guinea, it sounded like your platoon was acting very independently. Where was your direction coming from?

A platoon normally acts with a brigade of infantry. One platoon. The other platoons would be with the other brigades.

38:30 The company - the unit's with the division, the whole battalion. But there's normally only one company in action at any one time in the front. So we just had that one platoon with the brigade.

How did the style of operation differ from what you were doing in North Africa?

Entirely different.

39:00 We couldn't see what we were looking at, what we were aiming for really, the way we could in the desert. The difficulty of carrying equipment for one thing. We had no vehicles there. Except one jeep which our platoon sergeant had to carry ammunition forward for us. Otherwise everything was backpacked.

39:30 It wasn't easy. Wet and sloppy. The sickness rate was fairly high in New Guinea.

What kind of illnesses?

Malaria was a big one even though we had our malaria tablets. You still used to get it. All sorts of skin diseases. You'd have a sick parade and blokes'd be getting painted with

40:00 purple and yellow and blue and green dyes in different places for different things. We were a picture.

The treatment of skin diseases - because I understand that was very widespread - how decent was the treatment you received?

How effective? Seemed to do fairly well. The big thing was trying to get dry. If you could get a spell of dry weather with a treatment, it'd

40:30 do very well. But if you were continually wet all the time any amount of treatment wouldn't do much good. It might hold it steady, but it wouldn't get rid of it.

What degree of discomfort did the skin infections give you?

Itches. That's the big thing. Sores. It would rub and get worse.

41:00 You're carrying gear around all the time.

Did you lose sleep?

I suppose so. I don't know. We used to get enough sleep I guess to keep us going.

Tape 7

00:34 **January after that Christmas where you caught the wild duck or whatever it was you were pulled back to Finschhafen again.**

Yes. We went back there and we were amazed at the changes since we'd gone up. We'd got back and crossed a certain creek and came into civilisation in effect. There'd been nothing

01:00 of that in that area when we went up, just the track we went along. But when we came back it was all camps. From thereon right down to Finschhafen. An American troops had moved in. They had their ice-cream machines going and lights everywhere and it was a real metropolis. Good sealed road. Not sealed, gravel. Could have been sealed. So we were amazed at what had happened at that stage.

01:30 So we went back there and virtually got on a boat straight away and came back to Australia.

What were your feelings about seeing how well equipped the Americans were?

God. Why can't we get some of this? They seemed to have everything. That's probably the only time we really ran into them, going through there. We didn't really strike many Americans. Just saw their camps.

02:00 There were other times. Before we went to New Guinea in the first place there were a lot of Americans up in North Queensland and we were at one stage down on the coast learning to get on ships and go up the ropes on the side of ships. The Americans were there. They had their cinemas. Picture shows. We had a choice of two or three along the coast there.

02:30 Used to go there at night. Looked after themselves well. Morotai later on was - we'll come to Morotai anyhow.

Did you kind of think they were soft for needing all this stuff?

Yeah. How can they put up with all the mud and slush and everything and live like this.

Made you feel tough, did it?

Yeah.

03:00 We were on our flat feet.

You mentioned when you first went to New Guinea that first time, 43, 44, there was some uncertainty about how your heavy machine guns would be effective and that's why you were loading ships. Can you explain what you meant by that?

They didn't feel that we'd be able to give the supporting fire they wanted through the jungle. That trees'd get in the

03:30 road, the field of fire wouldn't be clear, we couldn't get into positions we could use them adequately. But we proved to them later that we could. We did. They were fired to good effect on the way up the coast.

Obviously a weapon that's got a 7,000 yard range must be a lot different using that in the desert to the jungle though?

Yes.

04:00 We were firing at much shorter ranges in the jungle and you had to pick your targets to make sure you had some effect at the other end.

What run-ins with illness did you have in the jungle?

I had dengue fever at one stage. They took me back to a - not a hospital

04:30 but a CCS, casualty clearing station, for probably a week or so. That was the worst I had up there I think.

How long did that put you out of action for?

Only a couple of weeks.

What was the standard of treatment like?

Very good. I forget what the treatment was. But whatever it was, it got rid of it

05:00 and I was okay again.

Did you have any contact with the New Guinea natives?

When we were at Milne Bay we did. We struck some there. There's a village not far up the river from Milne Bay. Some of us out walking one of the tracks one day came into the village and struck up a bit of conversation with them. Generally they were hard to understand, but some of them could speak English. Most of them couldn't.

05:30 It was just interesting to watch them. They were using blow pipes for chasing birds up in the trees. That's the time when we started to judge the women by the length of their breasts. I forget the names we used to give to them, but we had different names for them. This size or that size and so on.

06:00 They were there a very backward people. They weren't civilised at all really. They're the only ones we struck there until we got to Borneo. They all cleared out otherwise.

How do you rate the Germans against the Japs as soldiers?

The Germans are different class

06:30 of soldiers all together. They were direct fighters. The Japs were a very furtive type. The Germans, while they did attack in a certain amount of amass as we found out at Alamein it wasn't the type of banzai attacks the Japs went for.

07:00 I don't know. I feel that the Germans were a far better soldier than the Japs. The Japs relied a lot on mass and just weight of numbers.

What about in terms of courage?

It's a bit hard to say, because the Japs'd virtually throw themselves away at times. Once they started banzai charge, they'd go ahead with it no matter how often they got mowed down. So maybe that's courage.

07:30 Maybe it's just insanity.

I have been meaning to ask you for the benefit of the tape, tell us about your nickname while you were in the forces?

General. That started very early in the piece. I think I was probably cut out to be an officer at that stage but I never got there and never bothered about it. I used to, I don't know,

08:00 act a bit like one. But maybe it didn't come from that. The name Boucher is a bit like 'boo-cher'. There's

a General 'Boo-cher'. Sometimes nicknames come from that sort of connection. That might be what it was for.

So when people called you General why do you think? Were you bossy?

Could have been, yeah. Quite likely.

08:30 **When did you return to Australia from the main New Guinea island?**

Can't tell you the exact time or when we were back in Australia.

March 44, my notes say. That sound right to you?

That'd be about right. March 44. I went back to the Tablelands.

Any leave?

Yes.

09:00 We always got leave after an overseas turn. That must have been the time my wife got pregnant. I had leave in Queensland. That's right. She had preceded me. She knew I was coming and she had gone down to Moama where my parents were at the time - or my father.

09:30 She was staying with them for a time so I went straight down there from Brisbane. We landed in Brisbane. Spent some time down there. Went to Melbourne for a while and then back to Sydney. When I was in Sydney, I went into the transit camp at Addison Road, Marrickville I think it was.

10:00 One of our blokes was there, our regimental carpenter was there, building a hut for them. Putting up a building. Every now and then they'd call for anyone that had experience with tools to help him on the building. Gordon Bendor was the bloke's name. Gordon said, "Geoff, you can throw a hammer can't you?" "Oh yes." So I got up and offered to help with this building. As soon as they pulled me out

10:30 of the ranks, I just disappeared down the other way and went back to my aunt's place we were staying at up in Roseville at that time. Lucy was there. So I'd have a day there and I'd get back to camp at night and everything'd be sweet. Did that for about a week or so I think. Then eventually I got hauled in and sent up to Tablelands again and she got back to Brisbane by sea.

11:00 A friend of hers got her a berth in a boat going to Brisbane.

Sounds like you were quite adept at finding cracks in the system.

That's one of the traits of Australian soldiers I think. Finding cracks in the system. You get around them when you can at times when it doesn't matter that much.

11:30 When I got back to Brisbane, I don't know whether this was the time or not, I overstayed my leave and got hauled up before the CO at the transit deport and this time it was at the showground - what do they call the showground in Brisbane? The 'Ekka' [Royal Brisbane Showgrounds]. I was given I think two weeks or something -

12:00 what do they call it? Confined to barracks. Starting when I got back to camp and the tablelands which didn't worry me much. There's nowhere to go there anyway. So that was my penalty for overstaying my leave.

How long had you overstayed your leave?

Probably a week or so. I think that's the time

12:30 my wife got pregnant.

After coming back from North Africa and New Guinea - both quite adverse climates and situations - how did you find the way that people were living back in Sydney and Brisbane?

High on the hog. They were living pretty well. Despite all the rationing and everything they seemed to manage all right. I know I brought home - we were given

13:00 cigarette rations, tickets for cigarettes, when we came home from New Guinea. When we came home from the Middle East I carried two or three cartons of cigarettes home on the boat in my kitbag because Dad smoked. I didn't. So he got those. Then we came home from New Guinea and I got this cigarette ration and I gave that to Dad. Whilst the shopkeepers not

13:30 supposed to trade it from anybody but the owner he took these from Dad all right. So he got a few extra cigarettes for that. Things were a bit tight. They had to be careful about what they were using. But basically I felt that they were doing fairly well.

What level of patriotism did you observe back in the big cities?

14:00 What a question. Not much flag waving. I think at one stage when we first got back there they were all a bit scared about what was going to happen. After all, at that stage the Japs hadn't been pushed back

across the Kokoda Trail. They were still coming south. The Battle of Midway hadn't happened I don't think then. That virtually saved Australia.

14:30 So they were all getting pretty scared.

What about after that threat had passed?

That's a difficult one. I can't really answer that question.

I have talked to other men who said they didn't find that there was a particular level of concern once that threat had gone past. They almost felt on their return that nobody gave a damn really.

I think

15:00 that might cover it fairly well too.

There's more of a myth that at that time everybody pulled together and everybody was waving the flag, but I've spoken to other men ...

Don't think so. One of the problems that we were against too was that there was a waterside strike. Quite a lot of trouble when we were trying to get goods in New Guinea.

15:30 They had to put the navy in I think to load ships for us which didn't show a great deal of concern in Australia. I don't think they seemed to be terribly worried about what was likely to happen.

Hearing about wharfies going on strike, that could have made a big difference to you in New Guinea. How did you feel about those people?

Cut their throats.

16:00 **You were back in Australia for quite some months during this period, weren't you? Were you up at the Tablelands the whole time?**

Yeah. Down at Ravenshoe. We were doing more training still. Never stopped training something.

What did you have to learn at this point?

16:30 One thing we had to do was to teach the other units that machine guns were useful. We had a demonstration on one occasion of field firing where we had machine guns firing over the top of advancing troops. It was across fairly rough ground that had been ploughed at one stage and you know what ploughed ground that's been grown over's like. It's not very

17:00 even. A big sloping area. With a lot of the big wigs up along the top watching us. A company of our battalion, we had to do it for ourselves, was advancing across the field and we were firing over their heads, a little bit raised above them, not very much. The strict orders were, if anyone stumbles or falls down, stop the firing immediately.

17:30 The idea that maybe a bullet dropped short as they sometimes will. But anyway we got through that without anyone stumbling. Everything went well. That demonstrated to the gathered big wigs what the machine guns could do in an infantry advance.

Why were the big wigs doubtful at this stage?

I don't know. They shouldn't have been. But they just wanted to know that we could do it.

18:00 **Sounds quite late in the war to ...**

Late in the war to be concerned about that.

You've got to wonder.

Not long after that we had a route march out to Mount Garnet. I forget how far that is from Ravenshoe from the camp. Our camp was the last one - battalion was the last camp in the Ravenshoe area towards Mount Garnet. The whole division moved out in

18:30 battle formation more or less to Mount Garnet. I think there were some manoeuvres on the way down there. Then we all gathered at Mount Garnet. Camped there overnight. They had a parade the next day and also horse races, quite a big racing carnival - which we all enjoyed. Then we just turn around and march back home again.

19:00 **You were a combat veteran by this stage. How did all this training make you feel?**

You get a bit browned off. It's so unnecessary. We had a lot of new members come in all the time. They've got to be brought up with the rest so there was some value in it. But you get a bit browned off about doing the same old thing

19:30 over again.

In what ways would this manifest amongst the men, this boredom and frustration?

Grumbling. Lot of people were trying to transfer out to go to other units just for difference. Anyone that had a brother or a cousin in some other unit tried to get along with them which wasn't very - it was frowned upon by the army generally. They'd much rather have

20:00 brothers separate. Not very happy. That happens quite often.

I think you only worry when your soldiers stop grumbling, don't you?

Yeah. Something along that.

What about incidents of AWL [absent without leave] and so forth?

Not much from up there because it was fairly remote and it was hard to get anywhere.

20:30 There wasn't that much absent without leave.

The next point we've got to talk about then is moving out of Australia again.

Yes. Moving to Borneo. We sailed on - don't know the name of the ship now. Anyway

21:00 we sailed for Morotai without any problems. We were in a troop transport, fairly big ship. The whole division went to Morotai. We landed there and hung around there without any training or anything. That's where we had to dye all our clothes. I don't know what

21:30 happened there because we had jungle greens beforehand. Don't know what the problem was, why we had to dye things at that point, but I know we were dying clothes there. I had a tent fly, a small fly just big enough to cover my bed really. I'd bought from Paddy Pallin in Sydney. He'd posted up to me in New Guinea. This was very useful. I used to string it between a couple of trees over the top of the bed.

22:00 That had to be dyed green to so that went through the pot. We lost our old CO up there - I say the old one, the second one, Teddy Macarthur Onslow or Pissy Ted as we knew him. He went to somewhere from there and the 2IC [second in command] took over. We had regular pictures on the island.

22:30 The story about the island having been cleared of Japs and then it came out that there were about 8000 Japs on the island still anyway. Some people said they saw them sneaking in towards the edge of the scrub to watch the pictures at night. I didn't see that myself, so I don't know whether it's true.

Any entertainment shows besides the movies?

Yes. I think we might have had concerts there. We weren't there that

23:00 long. I forget how long it would have been. Only a couple of weeks I think really. One of the companies went off to land at Tarakan. Soon after that the rest of us went on to land at Labuan round the other side. We had a good free trip that time. We were in landing craft.

23:30 I think it was LCIs, Landing Craft Infantry, at this stage which are like little destroyer type things really with a ladder that goes down each side of the bow. We had no incidents all the way around. At one point we could see the lights of what we reckoned was Ambalanga I think on the bottom of the Philippine Islands. They were off our

24:00 starboard bow it'd be as we rounded the top of Borneo. Then we went into Labuan. The bulk of the division landed at Victoria which is on Labuan Island. We went ashore there. There was no force opposing us at all. There were Japs still on the island but they didn't make

24:30 any appearance at that stage. There's another, the other brigade landed on the southern side of Labuan Bay and they moved down towards the oil fields down in the south. They had a fair bit of fighting over that side. But the only excitement we got on Labuan was when the Japs broke out of what we called a pocket where

25:00 most of them had congregated on the island. They broke out of there and virtually came marching down the road straight into the main camp where there were a lot of American troops around. We got the small boat people who used to ferry us about and the headquarters around there. They started firing at the Japs so the Japs started firing at them and they fired back and they killed a lot more of their own people than the Japs did. They got all the Japs anyway.

25:30 Then there were still some left in the pocket and it was quite a while to get that cleared out. One of our platoons had to go in at one stage and do a bit of hand to hand work through there. But that was all at Labuan.

You were going really in an amphibious assault. You must have been quite keyed up heading into the beach on those ships.

Yes. We weren't on the first wave. We

26:00 always come in later after the infantry had gone ashore and the first wave had taken all the brunt of it.

But even so, you're still keyed up as you say because you're going onto a strange shore and you never know what may be there. While we didn't hear any fire on the infantry and we thought everything was safe, you never know what might happen. We did have air attacks. No sooner had we got ashore than they set up a picture theatre for us there, and we had

26:30 pictures at night and no sooner you'd get the picture rolling and there'd be a bit of a hum from somewhere and a siren'd go and you'd have to turn the pictures off and wait for the plane to go away. Happened a few times. We didn't have long there when we got moved across to Brunei on the other side of the bay.

Was there a sense at this point that it was all going to be over before you saw another Jap?

I think there could have been.

27:00 We knew there were plenty of Japs around in that area. But I think the feeling was that we were just being put in to give us something to do. The Americans were well on the way at that stage towards the Philippines. I don't know just what stage it was really but they were well on their way up there. There'd been no attack on Japan itself.

Was there a sense that you were in a sideshow then?

Yeah.

27:30 Somewhat. Although there was still a bit of fighting there and a lot of Japs on the island. Borneo. There was a fair bit of fighting on Tarakan. It was quite severe. One of our companies went there and they had quite a bit of fighting before they could take Tarakan over and make it a landing strip for our fighters and bombers. Balikpapan further down also had a lot of fighting. We weren't in that one.

28:00 That was 6th division I think went to Balikpapan. Yes. There'd been a feeling that maybe we shouldn't be here, maybe it was time we started going home. But we were there for a few months.

I wanted to ask, you mentioned in the first time in New Guinea especially you were not carrying the Lee Enfield [rifle] any more at this stage as a personal weapon?

28:30 Yes. I mentioned at one stage I had an Owen gun. I think that was probably just because I grabbed it at the time, not because I was equipped with it. I was never really armed with an Owen gun. Which is a pity. I could have used one. But then again you've got to carry a lot of ammunition with those things. They'd shoot a fair bit off.

Okay. Sorry about that diversion, I just wanted to clear that up. Yes. Brunei.

29:00 We moved across from Labuan down to Brunei and we took up a position just out of Brunei City itself. Brunei City was pretty well flattened. It had been bombed flat.

How did you get to Brunei?

By barge. There was a barge service runs across there. We established a camp up on the road not far out of Brunei -

29:30 a couple of miles out probably. To watch that particular road in case any Japs came through it. Although I don't think there were any Japs known to be in the area. That was our platoon. Other platoons were moved further down the coast with the advancing troops down there to Moray and places like that. We stopped there until the end of the war actually.

30:00 Had no more fighting. We had a fairly good time in Brunei. Had pictures there. I picked up a local girlfriend. Wouldn't call her a girlfriend really. A lady whose husband was still with her living around there. But I used to ride her out to the pictures and took her there quite a few times and then went back and had a meal of rice or something with her.

30:30 Or the family.

Was she a native?

Eurasian. Mixture. Her father was a British bloke from Singapore I think, her mother an Asian woman - local girl, probably.

What conditions were those native people living under in Brunei?

She wasn't too bad. She was out of the town. But a lot of them in the town itself were - there's a

31:00 fairly big water village just across from the main township and that was fairly poor. Their toilets were straight into the water of course. Every now and then the high tides, the water would come up and wash the floor off for them which was a good thing. They travelled by canoe, dugouts mainly. On one occasion we borrowed a dugout and went paddling up around the rivers. Had a lot of fun

31:30 in that. Couple of us. They were fairly easy things to paddle once you got the know how.

You were involved in doing some survey work at one point.

Yes. We moved back from Brunei – no that must have come in before we went to Brunei. Or was it? I get my time periods mixed up a bit I'm afraid. Anyhow

32:00 we did go from Labuan across to the mainland, the place called Mempakul which is on the mainland of Borneo and we surveyed this area with the anticipation of a lot of American forces coming in there. So we were mapping all the roads and streets around, the paths around and marking the villages. We thought

32:30 we could have run into Japanese at any time so we were always on guard when we were out on the tracks, but nothing happened. We just struck a lot of the locals and we went to a wedding on one occasion. The whole camp went down to this wedding down on the water front. It was very interesting.

Can you describe the wedding?

The bride was completely hidden. The groom didn't see her. I don't think he'd ever seen her actually.

33:00 Until after they were married. Couldn't go through the exact procedure of the marriage. But they sat side by side for a while and certain things were said over them. I guess they were married then. They all repaired to a feast which we were invited to join which was quite good. But that was interesting. We were short of meat there, so

33:30 the boys killed a bullock, a local water buffalo. One of the fellows who'd been a butcher he dressed it down and we got plenty of fresh meat off that except the fresh meat was as tough as old Harry. It could have been an elephant or something and we'd killed it instead of a water buffalo. Anyway we got some stew out of it and gave the rest of the meat to the locals.

34:00 I was the mapmaker. Being the range taker I was nominated to draw maps of where we went for all the patrols. Chaps went off in different directions of course and as they came back they gave me reports. I had aerial maps of the area and they told me what was here and there and I drew in the tracks on the maps. I was making

34:30 the maps up. These were on tracings. Wax paper. To overlay the aerial maps that we had of the area. I did this at night in the tent when everything was reasonably cool and it was all very good. The next day I'd take it down to headquarters which was down on the coast in the heat of the day and show it to them and they'd say, "Hey this doesn't add up. Look, you're a quarter of an inch out on this map." Eventually we worked out the difference

35:00 between the night and day the wax sheets would expand during the day. So eventually they accepted the fact that they had to read their maps at night in the cool. But we didn't last there long. We got taken by duck – it was a duck transport to the island there. You know, the ducks? Not very comfortable things, but they waddle across the rocks and the sand pretty easily and swim in the water.

35:30 We went back to Labuan and that was when I went up to Brunei after that. It was at Brunei in the camp there that we heard the war was over. There was great celebration in the town. A big parade.

How did you celebrate, Geoff?

It was a fairly blank period actually. I don't know. I don't think there was that much celebration.

36:00 Except that we were all very joyous about it. We didn't have much to celebrate with otherwise.

What was there to drink?

Not much. We got our quota of beer in every now and then. Wasn't much of that. We probably got some rice wine or something from the locals. I didn't drink that much.

What about celebrations with gunfire and so forth?

36:30 Fire crackers. Chinese were predominant down there too, and they always have fire crackers around. There wasn't much gunpowder available so the fire crackers couldn't have been too good. Quite a good parade through the town. Everyone had dressed up. Things that they'd probably used before for their Hari Raya [New Year] celebrations. They'd dragged them out and used them for the victory celebration.

37:00 We weren't long to stay on there. When they shipped us back to the mainland we joined the rest of the battalion on Labuan Island. We were there running a POW [prisoner of war] reception camp. All the POWs from around Brunei – there were quite a few of them up in the north, the ones who went to Sandakan, there weren't many of those left. I think a lot came across from Malaysia. Came into the camp there to be

37:30 outfitted and fattened up and eventually shipped back to Australia.

Can you describe what condition they were in?

Pretty emaciated. Very poor. A lot of them were very sickly. We had to look after them and fatten them up well and entertain them. They had a couple of concert parties come in there. Some of the VIP [very important person] people came in.

38:00 **Seeing the allied prisoners of war, what feelings did that give you about the Japanese that you might not have had before?**

Nothing I didn't already have I don't think. It just strengthened it. The way they'd been treated. They'd really been starved, knocked about. They brought all sorts of

38:30 interesting things out of the camps with them. One chap had a radio that was built into a bottom of a little box he'd made up himself with all sorts of parts. He was listening to news from Radio Australia. They'd all sorts of gadgets they brought with them.

39:00 Anyway eventually we got our call up to come home.

You had a pregnancy ticking away back.

Yeah. I was counting the days to get away. Luckily I had a pretty high number for repatriation. The number was based on – apart from your years of service, your

39:30 marital status, particularly. So I was in the first batch to leave the camp. We spent the night before we left the unit – there were four of us, I think, going out at the same time, got out on the beach, we had two bottles of gin and four bottles of water and spent the night there and woke up pretty sorry and sick for ourselves the next day.

What were your feelings about leaving your mates

40:00 **after all this time it was over?**

Thank God, I'm going home. No. It was hard to leave them. But we'd been broken up at that stage and things were not the same as they had been. Besides some of them were coming with me anyhow.

Was that last few months of the war a bit of an anticlimax for you?

It was really. Because there was nothing happening. We were all trained up for

40:30 something that didn't happen and all we were doing was filling in time. So that was the end of it. We arrived back in Brisbane and I was out of the army in time for my daughter to be born.

Tape 8

00:32 **Just going back slightly, how much did you have to do with the POWs in the collection camp?**

We received them into the camp and fed them and equipped them. There were doctors on hand to look after them. A lot of people had been flown in from other places at that stage to look after them. We just ran the camp

01:00 really.

Did they talk to you about their experiences?

Not a great deal. They kept fairly well to themselves. I think some of our chaps might have talked to them quite a bit. I didn't speak to any of them at all.

What did you feed them?

Good food. I think it was food being flown in to upgrade the normal army tucker.

01:30 So they were well fed and they put on weight fairly quickly. Weren't too bad by the time they left the camp. Looked as if they might have lived well in the prison camp when they got home. Give the wrong impression.

From your experience serving in the army, what did you learn about mateship?

It's a great thing.

02:00 In the army you depend on the other people to keep you alive. As long as you can rely on them you're quite happy with them. They're your mates. They'll do anything to save you. And the same with you for anyone else.

02:30 Not many of us left now, but we've been together – some of the chaps were in my platoon in Ingleburn when I first joined the army and they're still coming to reunions with me on Anzac Day. Still around. Only two or three of them. But they're there. We don't see each other much except maybe on Anzac Day. I'm on the committee of the association and I go to

03:00 meetings now and then. Not always. They have a meeting every month. Some of the chaps come to that. We see each other then. But we know we're always mates even though we don't go fishing together or spend every weekend together. That sort of thing. If you ever have need of anyone, he's there.

How did you adjust to civilian

03:30 life when you returned?

Fairly well. I came back to the bank. I had a certain amount of leave after we were discharged. My baby was born in Brisbane, Brisbane General Hospital – or my wife’s baby. I spent a bit of time up there. Then I went down to Moama where my parents were.

04:00 Had some time there. I came back to Campbelltown, saw people there. Then back to Brisbane. We had Christmas in Brisbane. I remember my daughter was asleep in her cot in the end of the lounge room where we were having a very wild noisy Christmas party. And she never stirred

04:30 the whole time. Then I think it was soon after that we moved out of Sydney. While I was in Sydney, that’s right, I found a place we could stay in. Share a house with an old bloke. So we moved down to Strathfield and lived there for a while. I went back to work. I was in Sydney office for a while. No, I didn’t go to Sydney

05:00 office. I went to Summer Hill. The manager of Summer Hill was an old First World War digger, fellow with one leg. He was a very nice old bloke. He understood the problems of a returning soldier. He said, “If you ever feel like it, get up and walk out and go for a walk up the street,” this sort of thing. I never felt like it really. Having been five years away in the army, five and half years and two years in the

05:30 bank before that, I was 7 years service and the two girls running the office had been in the bank for about 3 years or something. I had to learn the whole rigmarole again from scratch up. So I was busy. I was quite happy to stay in the office and learn what I had to do. From Summer Hill I was moved to

06:00 Coogee, which was quite a pleasant move. Mainly because I managed to find a flat at Coogee. We were a bit tired or the old bloke in the house was a bit tired of the baby crying every night and keeping him awake. He was only too pleased to see us go I think. So we got a flat at Coogee and moved out there and I was moved to Coogee branch for a while. There were three or four other returned fellows there. Couple of

06:30 non-returned who’d been in the branch for ages. Running the place. Those days the bank used to close at two o’clock. Everything was written up by hand of course. Passbooks were written up by hand, or the passbooks for current accounts. Not only savings accounts. Didn’t have savings accounts then. The teller was one of the old hands and the accountant

07:00 was the other one. The teller used to knock off as soon as the doors were closed and they’d go and sit down and have a cup of tea. The rest of us’d be working around clearing all the books and doing all the work that’s required. But we couldn’t do anything until the teller had handed over the rest of his work. It wasn’t until that was done and we could balance the books that we could go. So one afternoon we said, “Right we’re going home. If the books are not finished that’s

07:30 too bad. We’re going pretty soon. So if the teller doesn’t get his work through straight away we’ll walk out.” He got it through straight away and he kept it coming after that. So we got out of the place pretty early in the afternoon. Go down to the beach for the swim or home or somewhere. That was Coogee. Then I moved from Coogee to Randwick up the hill. I was on teller’s

08:00 duty at Randwick and I was on travelling teller. We had an agency at – I forget the name of the place, it’s south Randwick anyhow – and used to go down there every day and open up an office there and collect all the cash from the local traders. I’d have a bag full of cash. I’d have to ring up for a taxi to take me back to the branch.

08:30 That was my day’s work then. Carrying a pistol in my hip pocket all the time in case I was attacked. I don’t know what I would have done with it if I had been. But after all a bag full of cash is worth a lot of money. Was in those days. Bit of time at Randwick. Moved into the city then into ledger department in the Sydney office. How much of this do you

09:00 want? Keep going? The ledgers were having trouble. They were having all sorts of problems. They didn’t have enough experienced staff there. Too many young staff. So a lot of old chaps had been brought in to straighten them up. We straightened them up. Got things going in general all right in Sydney. At that time everything was worked

09:30 by machine ledgers. Two ledgers to a set. One for the account sheet and another one for the pass sheet, the statement that was issued out to customers. Got past the old passbooks in there and it was modernised. Not very long in that job, and I was shifted to information department which was upstairs. That was where if people wanted to know anything about

10:00 a certain business or a customer or something like that they’d ask for an opinion of them. A bank opinion. Which was a fairly common thing to do. You’d write what you thought about the business or person in response to your customers’ enquiries. No personal stuff in this at all. Just purely business transaction. I had a bit of time there and went from there to

10:30 overseas department. That’s right, overseas. We had a manager, overseas, called Saffer. Old Saffy used

to smoke a pipe and he used to dribble and he wore a waistcoat and he'd dribble down his waistcoat when he was smoking his pipe. You can imagine old Saf. He had a great girth on him like this. Worse than mine. That's bad enough.

11:00 I was in the bill department there for a while and handling overseas transactions. At this time after the war there were a lot of big people coming in from overseas or people who were destined to become big in Australia. A lot of them came through Sydney office, bringing their money in. People like Sebel chairman.

11:30 The big builder fellow. Dusseldorf. Some of those fellows came through the branch at that time. I was helping them look after those. I got put onto what they call foreign exchange bookkeeping. That's a complicated business that handles all the - takes figures for all the foreign exchange

12:00 that the branch is doing and collates it and decides just what sort of a price ought to be charged for Sterling or American dollars and that sort of thing. And the Fijian currency. Then I got called to go to Fiji. Yep. Fiji was the first one. How would you like to go to Fiji?

12:30 I don't know. I'd better ask my wife. So I had to ring home and she promptly said, "Yes. We'll go to Fiji." At this stage she had two children.

What year is this now?

54. Time's getting on. Second child was born in 49 I think it was. In Sydney. So we decided to go to Fiji

13:00 At the end of that year we went off to Fiji. We had to rent our house. We had by then bought a house out at Epping. We had to rent the house. That was fixed up. We had to ship our goods to Fiji, the ones that we wanted to go and the rest of the stuff we had to put into store.

13:30 We got that all sorted out and the stores and everything had to leave the house before we did so we had certain things, saucepans and things like that kept back so we could live for a couple of days before we left and caught the plane to Fiji. Consequently when we left we had saucepans and frying pans and things like that hanging all over us. Got on the Pan Am clipper to

14:00 Nandi. That was a six hour flight in those days. You know the old Pan Am clipper? Remember seeing pictures of that? It's a bit like a flying boat really only it's not quite a flying boat. It's a land boat. Two decker type thing. I forget how many passengers it carried. Probably wouldn't be more than 100. Anyway we got to Nandi.

14:30 No. La Toka's the first one. Got there. We were met by the local manager. Stayed in a hotel for the night, the hotel at the airport. Flown out the next morning to Nandi out from Suva. The accountant at Suva office met us there. Took us to our new home in Suva and settled us in there. Said, "This is where you'll be for the next couple of

15:00 Years." Left my wife and kids behind and I went into the office and met everyone there and I was in business in Suva.

How did you enjoy living abroad?

Very interesting. It's different. We found the Fijians were very nice. The Indians were all right, but at that stage they weren't independent. They were still a British colony. All sorts of things happened there.

15:30 I joined the junior chamber of commerce in Suva and we formed a chapter there. I was one of the inaugural members. I think the second year I was there or before the end of the first year we started a festival going which I was one of the prime movers. The Hibiscus Festival.

16:00 Which ran for a weekend to start with - running all sorts of shows round the city and you had a parade which was quite good considering the things that were available in Suva at that time. We had a musical show, a sports day, a regatta. And a

16:30 beauty parade. I think we had about a dozen locals lined up in the beauty parade. These were all part of the festival parade. The parade you had right through the city. I was one of the judges for the beauty parade.

Course you were.

They had about a dozen judges I think. It was a complicated thing. But there was one girl that I thought was very lovely.

17:00 She was not a Fijian, but came from one of the islands just north of Fiji. So every time I got a chance I marked her up to a nine and she won the parade and she won the Miss Hibiscus. She got a trip from there to Sydney. JCs [?] in Sydney looked after her, took her round and gave her a great time. Qantas had donated the trip for us.

17:30 So that went over well.

How did your daughters do their schooling in Fiji?

They went to school there. Both went to primary school. They started school there. Lyndal, the youngest one, she wasn't very happy at school. She was always in trouble and mainly we found out because she couldn't see. They put her up the back - she'd put her in the front of the class, she was all right. Put her up the back of the class and she couldn't see a

- 18:00 thing, and so they'd bring her down to the front again. Eventually we decided she couldn't see very well and we had to get glasses for her. Consequently she didn't like school at all. I used to have to cart her off to school every morning howling and virtually screaming.

How long were you in Fiji for?

I ended up three years. My wife came home and brought the two children back to school in Sydney at the end

- 18:30 of the two years. I got permission to stay on a third year, because at that stage I didn't have anywhere to come back to in Sydney. Going home then was a bit complicated. So we decided we'd take a third year and they let us stay there. I stayed on and Lucy came home with the kids, just for the break of a few weeks. We
- 19:00 ran the Hibiscus Festival again. This time, I was a prime mover. I was the organiser this year and it ran for a week instead of a weekend and had all sorts of functions on. I was trying to do my own job as well and the switchboard operator was complaining that there were so many telephone calls coming through. I was getting something like 20, 30 calls a day coming through
- 19:30 on the telephone and no time for anybody else in the office. But we ran a good festival. It was very well done. The same happened the following year except that we appointed an outside person to be a fulltime organiser. So I was let off the hook at that one. But they were very good, those festivals.

Going back to your reflections on your

- 20:00 **World War II experience, did you ever return to North Africa?**

Yes. I went back there in 88. Val and I went over there and went to the memorial service at El Alamein on the 23rd of October. We did a boat trip down the Nile, or up the Nile really. We flew down to

- 20:30 Aswan on the dam and took the boat trip back from there up to Luxor. Visited all the temples up there along that route including Abu Simbal which is a side trip from the dam. It's a bit away. You might remember Abu Simbal is a big statue, set of statues that were cut out of the solid rock.
- 21:00 Because when the dam wall was built the dam was going to cover them. The cut them out of solid rock. Tremendous statues they are. Carted them all up and built a special hill for them above the high water mark. It was very interesting to see those.

What was it like for you returning to a place that had been fairly traumatic when you were younger?

Interesting. That's about all. I did

- 21:30 get a strong feeling at the time that we went out to El Alamein for the service. I was walking down the pathway from the bus down to the cemetery where the service was to take place and there were a lot of reporters along there. I had my medals on. A lot of reporters were grabbing us along the way and wanting to speak to us. I just couldn't speak to them. I was too filled up. I still get
- 22:00 that sort of feeling now. That was the main thing that I felt there. Just memories coming back and gets you over full.

What role has Anzac Day played in your life since the Second World War?

I've been to every Anzac

- 22:30 Day service and parade that I can get to. We've missed a few. But generally I like to go to it because we gather as a unit. We've always been doing that, getting together as a unit. The same happens in Queensland because as I pointed out the unit was formed up in there - half up there and half here. They have a good gathering every year too.
- 23:00 It means you can get together with all your old mates. Probably don't do it any other time of the year. Although we do have an Alamein day dinner on the 23rd of October or thereabouts every year. There's a number of us go to that. I try and make it usually. It's just good to meet them again. Say hello and talk about old times,
- 23:30 the funny things that happened in those days. Not so much about the nasty things, the good things.

What involvement did you have in the CMF after you returned from service?

Yes. In 47, I think it was, I joined the Sydney University Regiment. I'd gone back to university on a scholarship. I forget the name of the scholarship they call it. Where you can get

- 24:00 not a degree, but you get into a university on two subjects – English and one other subject. I took English and Maths. I got through on that and so I started going to university. I was doing economics there. Joined the Sydney University Regiment when I was in the university. I got there up to a staff sergeant.
- 24:30 in the SUR and then because I was too old to get a commission in the SUR [Sydney University Regiment] they got me transferred to the RAASC [Royal Australian Army Service Corps], the army service corps, 4 Company, 2nd Div [division] column which is the name they gave that part of the service corps, which is a transport unit. I was with them then until we
- 25:00 moved to Fiji in 54. I got my commission. At the time the Queen was here. The Queen came out in 1954, wasn't it, she came out? We moved to Canberra, the whole company went to Canberra running the transport down there for the troops that were in Canberra at that occasion. She landed in Sydney and saw a few other places and ended up
- 25:30 down at Canberra for a special meeting of parliament and all sorts of other things down there. We had the responsibility of moving the troops around from one place to another. I was the transport officer in charge of the whole job. Got my commission down there. It was quite a job because we had no walkie talkies in those days. Not mobile phones, whatever we've got
- 26:00 now. Trucks'd get lost so easily around Canberra. People were supposed to be in some place and they were somewhere else and we'd have to send to send a car or someone after them, a motor bike after them.

After your experience during the war, what were your thoughts about King and Country and Queen and Country? Had that changed from when you first enlisted?

No. It hadn't changed.

- 26:30 I've always been a Royalist. I think that's how the birth of Australia was from England. No matter what the birth might have been like. It might have been a pretty hard childbirth, but that's where we all came from initially and I still feel tied to the British Royalty.
- 27:00 I don't believe in this breakaway and republican or anything like that.

Are there other stories from the war that you haven't told us today that you'd like to tell us?

Bound to be lots of them. Just a matter of recalling them. what can I talk about?

- 27:30 When we were in Palestine we used to get leave to go to Egypt. This was when we first got over there. And I got a week's leave on one occasion. We had to take the train to Cairo and we were put up in certain quarters down there, army quarters, in Cairo.
- 28:00 Had a week around the place. During that week I had an air flight to Alexandria to see what Alex was like. We'd been to the pyramids and all the main things around Cairo and so a couple of us got onto a plane and flew down to Alex, a little dragon rapide. 'Air Mizzer', they call it. Misery was right. The main thing that we saw around Alex I think was Sister Street. And Sister
- 28:30 Street – you may not have heard of it, but it's the street of the brothels. We just had a little bit of a survey round there and had a look at a few places and a few of the shows that went on.

What were the brothels like?

Pretty dirty, dingy places. Some of the shows that you could see I can't go into just what they were but they were pretty

- 29:00 down to earth sort of things and you'd almost feel disgusted at them even though you were in the army and didn't bother about that sort of thing. For a couple of acres you see something different happening.

What was the train trip like from Palestine to Cairo?

Very dull. Dirty and just average.

- 29:30 **The places you visited during the war, did you ever notice or observe the physical beauty of where you were?**

Yes.

Which places spring to mind?

Physical beauty? I don't know that you'd call Cairo any beauty to Cairo or Tel Aviv. There might have been physical beauty about Damascus.

- 30:00 Or Brahmana up in the hills of Syria. Beirut had a lot of beauty about it. They had beautiful park through the centre of Beirut with palm trees on each side of it. The Mareka was off one end of it. Mareka was the local joy house, brothel.

30:30 **Even though you didn't use them, you all knew where they were.**

Oh yeah. Knew where they were all right. I won't say I didn't use them sometimes.

Really?

Yes. Whereas of physical beauty. I don't know that I could name anything very much was beautiful. I think Mersa Matruh had points about it.

31:00 In particular at Mersa I haven't mentioned when we moved around to different sites in Mersa, one area was on the northern part of the perimeter and it was very close to what we call Cleopatra's Baths. On the northern entrance to Mersa Harbour there was a fairly big rocky prominence and cut into the middle of that rock was a vase.

31:30 It went right through the rock with the sea coming in from the other side and a bit almost a swimming pool cut in the middle of it and then it came out on the land side and there was a pool behind it. It was a lovely spot and a beautiful spot for a swim. They say Antony brought Cleopatra there and I quite believe it could have happened because the way the rock had been cut out, it was the sort of thing people wouldn't do in more modern ages.

32:00 They might have done it at the time they built the pyramids perhaps. But it was very nice. That was about the only nice part about Mersa Matruh.

What about in New Guinea? Did you see natural beauty there?

No. Mud. Rain. Trees.

32:30 Stinging bushes. Lianas that hung onto you when you moved through the close stuff. All this of course was up in northern Queensland too. But I can't see anything beautiful about New Guinea. Maybe around the coast. Where we finished up at Port Evocation Point, finished our New Guinea advance. It was a nice little beach there.

33:00 In an enclosed area. I suppose you'd call that fairly beautiful. The area.

Your father served in the First World War and then you went on to serve in the Second. Did you feel that you were part of an Anzac tradition in your family?

I suppose so. I went back to a place in Cairo that he had visited. The entrance gates to the

33:30 gardens on the island near Cairo. I can't think of the name of the gardens now. But he talked about meeting a chap there who wanted to come to Australia and he used to write letters for this bloke to people. Met him on quite a few occasions apparently. I couldn't see him around when I went there.

34:00 But this was a very lovely garden. I've got a photo of the gateway the same as the gateway that he took how many years before - 20 odd years before. It's only 20 odd years difference. But it looks exactly the same.

Got one more question for you, Geoff. If someone was watching this is years to come, be it five years or a hundred years, what message would you have to Australians about serving ones country?

34:30 Only that it is your country. You live in it, you benefit from it, you enjoy it and you should support it and do whatever is necessary to keep the style of living which you admire so much about it. And we do have a great style of living in Australia. No doubt about it. Having travelled round the world a few times,

35:00 anyone would realise that there's no place like home in Australia.

INTERVIEW ENDS