

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Ronald Hatch (Ron) - Transcript of interview

**Date of interview: 17th March 2004**

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1628>

### Tape 1

00:35 **So Ron you grew up in New Zealand, what was it like in New Zealand?**

Well I was born in Wellington and from there as a baby.

01:00 **So Ron before we were interrupted then we were just talking about what it was like growing up in New Zealand?**

Well being a baby I didn't know that much about it obviously, but I wasn't permanently in New Zealand. My father happened to be mixed up with

01:30 racing thoroughbreds and at that stage he was a jockey, strangely enough a very successful one. And he was 20 years of age and I was naturally born. But he used to go to mostly live at Christchurch, I don't remember much about that. But then we settled in a place called Marton. Now I was about four, I remember those days, three or four. And he bought me a little Shetland

02:00 pony we used to keep in the powerhouses. So really I learnt to ride a horse from that day. We were there for some time in Marton but we finally settled in down in Palmerston North, inland city called Palmerston North. I was there until I came to Australia in 1935.

**Sorry what was the depression like in New Zealand?**

Well the Depression was terrible.

02:30 Matter of fact it was worse than the other depression I know of. New Zealand was dependant on England for everything. All our produce used to go to England, frozen lamb and butter fat that was the main things there, which was the same things that kept New Zealand going. For that New Zealand used to buy all things

03:00 from England all clothing and so on. In 1929 the depression hit New Zealand and the first thing England did was to look for a better bargain for the butter fat, instead of buying it from us bought it from Denmark. So we couldn't even get rid of our butter fat. It was selling for a penny a pound or something.

**Gee.**

And it was shocking. But during that depression we had my father by that time

03:30 was a horse trainer and had quite a good establishment. And I was about 12 and there was three boys in the family and I was the eldest and my mother was often sick and we had staff. And at 12 I had to do certain things that were more than for my age, I more or less kept the house going.

04:00 I had fowls that I used to get the eggs and barter them with the grocers. We had a house cow, which I had to milk. I had to turn the cream into butter every Saturday. We had vegetables and we lived, and we had lagoons near us we had wild duck eggs, but we lived.

04:30 We lived and existed but the things that we were eating were nature things but which now they don't eat so we more or less got through that, it was very seldom that we sat down to a meal like you get now, but we got through it.

**Sounds like your days were pretty long then?**

They were and cold in the winter, it is a very cold place. And we had the rains where we were living, snow was on top of those but it was never much

05:00 near us, but when you get hail the water troughs would be frozen over in the morning.

**Gee.**

So the animals couldn't even drink the water. So it was very bad and we used to get round bare feet and you existed and we had the normal things like colds. We got different things that children get but we got through.

**You had two brothers am I right?**

Two brothers, one was two years

05:30 less age than me and the other was eight years younger, they were both of them are alive now.

**Got good genes in your family then.**

And three of them, the three of us went overseas in the army.

**All three of you?**

Yep, my second brother Keith he was with the New Zealand artillery and he got captured in Bardia

06:00 and got relieved as a private and he went through the officer training over there and he was in the El Alamein war as a one pip officer, went right through to Italy and was discharged a captain. My other brother joined the 2/7th Regiment and

06:30 he went to New Guinea.

**So you were just talking about your brothers in the service.**

Yes that was just by the way they both did service.

**Did you all move over to Australia?**

No, my mother died when I was 16 and that broke the head family up a lot, and then

07:00 my father came to Melbourne, brought some horses over. And then I came over in 1935 by his third brother; my second brother stayed in Wellington and is now living there. He enlisted in the New Zealand army to go to the Second World War from there.

**It was must have been pretty traumatic having your mum die when you were 16?**

It was.

07:30 Because she was a wonderful woman and she all the young, my father being a horse trainer apprentices, successful apprentices, and my mother, they all went to a church on a Sunday, and she was an Anglican, and she used to take about six or seven of these young jockeys every Sunday into church. We had one Catholic; she made him go to mass,

08:00 that is how she was brought up. She was not only a mother to us she was a mother to them too.

**Sounds like a delightful woman.**

She was.

**So your dad did something, well I should think pretty unusual for the time, bringing horses over from New Zealand to Melbourne?**

No it wasn't really because that was his business, he was training horses. They bring them over now and they win Melbourne Cups.

**Yeah I know, but I mean in those days.**

Well it's the same now; he rode a horse called Goby

08:30 Goby was the best horse that ever lived with Phar Lap thrown in, he did, he rode, he won 83 winners out of 86 races.

**Gee.**

And he raced a three year old in Sydney as a young horse that had never won a race and entered in the Derby and won the Australian

09:00 Derby, the Sydney Derby and won the Melbourne Derby when he was a three year old

**Gee.**

and came over till he was nine and won the same races on the ninth day that he won as a three year old.

**Gee.**

And he was only beaten three times and even with the horses now, if you got the other stakes that they pay for the same races now he would have made millions,

09:30 but he won 83, he only lost three races in 83 my father used to ride them.

**He must have been a bit of a celebrity your father then if he was.**

He was a celebrity, he became the leading jockey in New Zealand when he was 15, he was small and he rode 87 winners in a year and it was a record until 1930 when I taught the boys to ride sitting next to me in school, I became his apprentice

- 10:00 and broke his record, a boy called Keith Pointer who rode 125 winners. Came over to Melbourne and won the Melbourne Cup and he came over to Melbourne to stay and was the champion jockey in Melbourne and fell at Moonee Valley and got killed at 26.

**Gee that's a.**

I was brought up continually in the horse industry so I left to come to Melbourne.

**So you would have been around horses then for**

- 10:30 **most of your life.**

Always from the day that my father bought me that Shetland pony when I was three or four I was never off a horse's back. I rode in shows and everything and I even used to ride the horses track work with him before I went to school when I was 12 or 13. But I was getting too involved in horses; my mother didn't like it. I was mixing with the wrong fraternity in the stables and things and they put me into

- 11:00 Scots College as a boarder in Wellington and got me away from the atmosphere and from then onwards my interest in horses or going to the races was never the number one thing but I still enjoyed you know watching it occasionally and have a bet.

**Sure. So what took over your interest when you moved to Australia as far as sports were concerned?**

Well the first thing that took over my interest was to get a job.

- 11:30 Because I didn't have a job when I left, I was working in New Zealand but not a job that was satisfactory for me. And I came over to Melbourne with this jockey Keith Pointer for a holiday when the Melbourne Centenary was on. He shouted me over; I went over with him. He stayed; I went back to New Zealand. Twelve months later I'm back in Australia. I made up my mind, I collected what little money I had, sold my golf clubs, got on a boat and got over, and I had practically

- 12:00 nothing in my pockets when I landed in Melbourne. But my father met me; he and I got accommodation out at Caulfield. I told the woman that I didn't know how I was going to pay her but I was going to get a job and I'd pay her back, and she believed me and that's what I did. And I finally got a job with Woolworths [supermarkets]. Woolworths had just started in Melbourne; they had a big chain in

- 12:30 Sydney. But they only had one shop in Melbourne that was in Bourke Street, and it was quite a big shop next to Coles [supermarkets], which had a lot of shops in Victoria. And I interviewed the manager and asked for a job. I never forget what he said to me, "Why should I give you a job?" I said "Because I've had to come over here to get a job" and so he took me on and I said "What job I was"

- 13:00 and he said, "We are a big company and we are looking for different people, managers and things like that", he said, "We'll see how you go, we might make you a trainee manager". A trainee manager, so the next thing I know he tells me I can start in a week's time or something. Well I tell you I got home to where I was staying, I didn't have any money to even get back to get me job to get in,

- 13:30 no when I went to see him first I didn't have a job to get into town, money for the meeting and I hitch-hiked on a tram into Melbourne to see him, that's how...anyway I got the job, I started a couple of weeks later. And when I went into this big shop, I met a country boy as you might say and they had quite a big staff and he gave me a grey coat to wear

- 14:00 and I thought this was great you didn't see too many managers getting around in grey coats, so they put me up into the top floor. And the top floor is where all the stock came in or some of it, and they put me on opening cases. And all the store came in and my first store at Woolworths was opening cases from Japan sorting out crockery, which was surrounded by straw, and it was over 100 degrees in temperature and the roof was

- 14:30 about 6 feet above me head and I came from a cold climate and that was my introduction to my job.

**Hard sweat.**

Yeah well from there I developed. They put me through and they put me through every department over the years six months, anyway I finished up a manager.

**How long did it take you to finish up a manager?**

I was a floor man for about 12 months and then they

- 15:00 opened up they bought a chain out of shops overnight. Where they had one shop they had about 23 and those had to be already done. Where I, what happened pretty quickly to me, I wasn't manager for very

long there. Their head manager of the Rundle Street Woolworths died

- 15:30 and overnight they transferred me to Adelaide but not as the manager because another manager was there but I was a head, 2IC [Second in Command] to him there. And I stayed with them for a few months or more and then I was offered a position with Holeproof Hosiery, which I took.

**And where was that in Adelaide?**

No that was in Melbourne.

**Oh right so you've gone from Melbourne to Adelaide**

- 16:00 **back to Melbourne?**

Yeah that was at Brunswick, out at Brunswick they've got a big factory, everyone knows Holeproof and I was in charge of the production of men's socks. But I stayed in a hotel in Melbourne called the Stork Hotel, because when I came from New Zealand I went to many boarding houses, or guest houses as they call them, but they were just not very well run but the owner slept out

- 16:30 on the veranda because they crowded all the other rooms with people. And I was going from one to the other until I told my friend that I met there that he knew the hotel, the Stork Hotel in Melbourne. He leased it to this family but he had another one he owned around the corner called the Central, which is opposite the main markets in Melbourne. And they took me on as a boarder, but

- 17:00 I was the only one boarding in the whole hotel the rest, he didn't take any other boarders on and I became very friendly with that family. And I was living with them until the time I enlisted in the army about four years later.

**So what was going on as far as the war was concerned when you were working in the hosiery in Melbourne, is that when it started to build up in Europe?**

Yeah yeah yeah, the strange thing about the hosiery, well the man in charge of the design of the hosiery

- 17:30 and ran the men's hosiery was a German. And those Germans still by the way were very, had membership in the German club in Melbourne which is very strong. And the war hadn't started then; there was lots of things about it, the Japanese and things. And I know that a lot of the Germans were put on the early days, on the, you know when they captured the Italians and that,

- 18:00 put them in camps. But I used to go back to the hotel where I lived, and I used to go for a drink occasionally when I went back. And there was a little room there I met a bloke called George Bramble. And he always went in there every time because he had a factory just handy to that. And the Goodyear people used to go in there was a group of men just there and I joined them and George got to know me, and he had this factory that I knew nothing about.

- 18:30 And he had a factory on manufacturing waterproof clothes, the ones where they put the rubber on the material. Well he was the only factory in Australia that put rubber on materials. So he could make all those fashionable women's raincoats, the black raincoats that kids wore the coats, all the police uniforms, everything, it was big. He had one factory in Melbourne, which was fairly big, and one in Sydney and another one in New Zealand. And it was a one owned business; there was no company.

- 19:00 And then he sort of took a liking to me and I got to know him and he wanted to know if I would come and be his factory manager. And I'd never heard of him and then I saw the factory, he took me out there and anyway I joined up with him. And that's where I was when war broke out.

**What were you doing as part of this factory?**

Well I was the manager of the staff and everything. I wasn't doing anything about putting rubber on; that was another side of it. But when

- 19:30 the things came and they cut out what they had to make they had the staff, we had about in one room there about 150 workers.

**That's a lot.**

Oh it was big. And I was, well having well got used to Woolworths with the staff I used to control I could handle it. And but then there was the smell of war, there was nothing about it, there was no war declared or anything like that.

- 20:00 And then with the Prentices - they had the hotel - they had two daughters and a son. And they had this house in East Melbourne a nice home and I used to go out and stay with them on the weekends. And I was out this particular September I think August when the war broke out. And we were listening to the [radio] and suddenly the news came over the air from Menzies [Robert Menzies, the then Australian Prime Minister],

- 20:30 and he said he had this announcement to make that Poland had been bombed by Germany and now Australia was at war from today. Now I had briefly had experience in New Zealand because New Zealand had a lot of compulsory cadets and territorials. And the,

21:00 sort of territorials.

**Hi Mrs Hatch, how are you Mrs Hatch, you can come through if you like.**

21:30 **We were just talking about the announcement of war?**

Yes Menzies gave us because it was shocking. Well I think although things you know rumours were going around and that sort of thing but there was nothing definite. Well when he said it, well before I left

22:00 New Zealand and for sometime when I was a teenager there at school, we were cadets, compulsory cadets and as we left high school it was compulsory to do a term in the territorials either infantry or artillery, New Zealand specialised a lot in artillery.

**OK.**

I learnt artillery in the school. We had our own artillery company and we used to go to camp with the territorials when they went in. I was a lead driver of the 14-pound guns.

22:30 That means they had there were two horses at the back of me with the driver and me in the front with the driver and we used to haul the middle of the gun. And there'd be another one or something else and we used to go into actual service with them a lot when they went into camps, firing the gun and everything into a mock war. Guarding them in and guarding out, went through all those experiences.

**Sounds like a bit of fun.**

23:00 It was fun and dangerous too I might add. If you had to pull up suddenly, and the bloke at the back he has a pole, a pole comes through his horse and himself and if he pulls up he can't pull up the same time as me that pole shoots forward with him and takes him in the back. But that's by the way. It was very interesting for me and the lads. Then when I came to Australia I didn't go back, but when I heard this over the war yeah I thought, "We're at

23:30 war". And I must have had the background in the army and I thought, "Well if you are going to be in it, be in it straightaway. So this Prentice the son who is doing his first year medicine at the Monash university, a brilliant scholar, well he signed the next day to enlist. And we went to St Kilda Barracks to enlist and I wanted to know where the artillery barracks were I wanted to enlist.

24:00 And someone at the barracks told us to go to the artillery barracks near the Melbourne Cricket Ground and see there. So we walked from St Kilda Barracks to there, which was a fair hike and get there; the doors were shut and there was no movement on the ground. I knock on the door and a bloke comes to the door and he's got army pants on, winter dress, one of the grey singlets we were issued with,

24:30 lather over his face, he said, "What do you want?" We said, "We want to enlist." He says, "We're full up". So that was that. We walked back from there and we get back to town, and Des was still only about 16 and I was 25 and we went to the Young & Jacksons [Hotel] and stayed there and had a few beers. We were going to get back to the hotel, so we finally walked down King and Elizabeth Street where the hotel was down the corner

25:00 near the markets. And I can still remember this people outside the hotel, his mother sees us walking along and I can still hear her voice now screaming, and she'd heard us going to enlist and here's this eldest boy that is just doing university for medicine going to enlist. And of course when I got up she abused me, reckoned I should have my brains bashed and then got stuck into him and then she started to cry and

25:30 I told her he wasn't enlisted. So that's how I didn't get in the army.

**It must have been a bit of a rude shock to realise that they weren't taking on people?**

The first day after the war, they hadn't even prepared, it only came over the air the night before, this bloke most probably didn't even hear it, he was a caretaker at the barracks.

**So it seems like it was a bit disorganised?**

It wasn't disorganised

26:00 but they weren't there that time of the morning, there was no one there.

**Goodness.**

Well I'll tell you how unprepared they were.

**Well what happened after you?**

Well after that, back I go to work.

**Yeah.**

Well then shortly after that, the first contracts of the army came into the factory and the first one was for I think it was a million groundsheets. And the groundsheets we got the

26:30 contract for, the groundsheets had rubber on them.

**Right.**

You've seen a groundsheet.

**I have.**

And the groundsheets we had to make were those with the cape around them and where they got a thing at the back and they button up, the groundsheet becomes a cape groundsheet.

**Oh yeah.**

Now on the groundsheet there were five.

**Pause for a moment.**

Now where was I?

**Oh we were talking about the groundsheets.**

27:00 Oh yes the groundsheets. Now those groundsheets have got five buttons on them, just like men's coats, like that, around the ground sheet is 17 brass eyelets, and they used to join them together to make a big thing to put over something. You know that. Well it is a sheet and it's got round eyelets and if you want to make it bigger you get rope and these brass...you tie them altogether.

**I got ya righto.**

27:30 And you can put and cover this whole building with it if you wanted to, just to make it bigger. But this coat has to be covered with these. It's got certain cotton in it that has to be special coats cotton that came from England; big 10,000 yard cones. The cloth was alright, we had the cloth and we had the rubber to put on it. But we didn't have the buttons and we didn't have the eyelets. So as factory manager, I had to order

28:00 everything that was to manufacture those groundsheets. So I had to get 5 million buttons. Well just before that there was an embargo put on Japan and all those buttons were made in vegetable material that came from Japan, and you couldn't get a button in Australia. The eyelets were made in Adelaide and the bloke rang me through from there thinking I had made a mistake in

28:30 the order, 17 million eyelets, I said, "No that's right we are doing it for so and so". He said, "There is not that much brass in Adelaide". Then it came to the cotton we had to unpick that thing it had been all sewn up and all those stitches had to be so far apart to make them strong, we had to unpick that cotton until we had yards and yards of cotton from that one sheet.

29:00 And then we multiplied that by a million and it told us how many cones or hundreds of cones of cotton we had to get, they came from England and the war is on. I put the order straight in for cotton and we got it over to England to be sent. The eyelets eventually came but the buttons they didn't have, I couldn't get the buttons. So I went to the plastic, the Australian glass, big company in

29:30 Melbourne that just started plastics. They made teacups and eggcups and little things, not what you see now they make, just simple things. So I took the button along to them and I said, "Can you make one of them?" "Oh yes we could." I said, "It's got to be the same colour." "Oh yes we can make that. But you'll have to get a mould made." I said. "What's a mould?" "Well it's a steel thing about this big or whatever it is you've got to get it made" I said, "Well make it, make it and we'll pay for it". So he makes it and the buttons were

30:00 exactly the same as we had and better but they weren't made from plastic or vegetable stuff but water and stuff that might sit soft, these were better than that and that was the beginning of getting plastic buttons made in Australia from that day.

**Wow.**

So we got our buttons, but the cotton, that had to come over from ship, there were no aeroplanes then flying over. And all this was over the

30:30 money had to be paid at the wharf before they'd put it off, when it was delivered it was paid for at the wharf and the bond. My boss Mr Bramble sent the boy that does all the travel, send the ute [utility truck] down to pick up the cotton and then he came back and he said, "Look at this bill, look at this bill". He said, "They had to send a bigger truck to go and get the cotton". But what happened then, he said,

31:00 "You'll make me broke, you'll send me broke." I said, "Look if you don't want it I can get rid of that now". I could have because no one in Australia could get it, I just got the first order from England, he realised that and kept it. We got all this stuff and started making these groundsheets. And that is all the new system had to do. Now it got to the stage where Dunkirk came and I couldn't just stay there and watch and do this and the war is on like

- 31:30 that and there is Dunkirk and Britain is being pushed back to England. And I was brought up in a military background in New Zealand and that. And I said, "I've got to enlist" and I said, "There is only one way I can enlist is if you arrange for the government to release me because I'm in a particular occupation and being manager". He did that for me and that allowed me to enlist.
- 32:00 So one day I go to enlist again and I thought, I was in town and I had my best suit on. I'd just bought it as a matter of fact, I was going to enlist and go back and tell them where I was staying, I was doing all this. So I went into the town hall in Melbourne said I wanted to enlist and had the pass that I could get in on account of the reserved occupation being allowed to be done.
- 32:30 All he did was take a urine test off me, took me name, there was about 50 of us, took us out to Swanston Street and marched us to the Flinders Street Station. We didn't know where we were going, they were all in suits like me, and they just walk along, we get into this carriage. We finished up when we got out of the train in the Caulfield Racecourse. And there is about two or three thousand others rushing around
- 33:00 and World War diggers there rushing around as RSMs [Regimental Sergeant Majors] giving orders and telling everyone what to do. And we were finally sworn in in the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] and then told to go to the QM [Quartermaster] store to get our clothing. We go to the QM store they had a pair of boots they gave me, they didn't try them on. They said, "What size do you take" and they gave me, they gave me a hat and they gave me a greatcoat. I said, "What about the rest of the gear?" "We haven't got anything.
- 33:30 That's all we got". So I got this hat and coat and now I've got to get out, I haven't told them I've enlisted: I've got to go back to Brambles and tell them, I've got to arrange at where I'm staying at the hotel. They are not going to let me out, once I was in there I was in there. So I made found out who was the senior officer of the camp and I went and explained things to him I was in a position I couldn't, I had to go. He said, "Well I'll give you 24 hours
- 34:00 but you've got to wear your army uniform". I said, "I've only got a hat, boots and a greatcoat." He said, "Wear them". I said, "Why wear them?" He said, "If you get into trouble, the provos [provost, military police] will know you're in the AIF". So I had to wear them out the gates until I got out of sight and then I took them off and I went back afterwards. But they didn't have uniforms for us, no equipment, no
- 34:30 webbing, nothing.

#### **Sounds like it was quite disorganised then?**

It wasn't so much disorganised because they knew they had to have enlistments and they'd already got rid of the 6th Divvy [Division] remember that. The 6th Divvy had been done and some of the 6th Divvy were on the Williamstown Racecourse, now that's where I finished but in the morning, no once we were in there

- 35:00 permanently we had to go to the Q store and get what they call a palliasse. A palliasse is what you put straw in for a mattress, and a blanket. And then they gave us allocations to where we had to stay and we were in horse stalls, not the ones that close doors, the open ones that they have at the race meeting where the horses go before the meeting before they race. And there was two of us in each stall and another bloke that I'd never
- 35:30 met was with me a bloke called Warwick Carly. And I got to know him pretty well there and I didn't know where he came from, he came from Werribee, I didn't know about his history or anything, but we got on well together. But every morning the bugle would go to wake us up about five. We had to line up outside, every troop that wasn't already given where they had to go and we were allotted out where we had to go, we didn't know where we were going to go, what unit
- 36:00 where. I enlisted in the AIF: he did too. There was no saying we wanted to be in this, that or the other. So I did this for about four or five days. And one day we were called out and there was about a truckload of us ten or 20 of us, and we hopped in, all different blokes, and the only bloke I knew was this bloke that was sharing the horse place with me.

#### **36:30 We were just chatting about you getting loaded up on these trucks with these other blokes?**

Oh yes there were 20 of us there and we didn't know where we were going, and we finally got out to this empty Williamstown Racecourse, where the 6th Divvy had previously left to go overseas. And it turned out that we were the advance party to

- 37:00 prepare the camp for the other 3,000 people who were coming in. So our job was to fill dozens and hundreds of palliasses of straw, move forms, move tables, do everything to set it up. For these, there were about 2,000 altogether troops coming in, where they were to go, and messes to be made for the officers and sergeants and so on, and we were doing this for weeks.

#### **Weeks, gee.**

Oh it

- 37:30 was we were there for at least a month. Things were going along and it took to get everything prepared, you know all the kitchens were arranged for the cooks and so on. And the bloke that I was with that I

met what's his name, this Warwick Carly, he came from Werribee; he proved that he was smarter than I found out afterwards because our job was to clean every latrine

38:00 and thing in the place, I had the broom and he had the hose. So you know who had the easiest job, he finished up a colonel and I finished up a major.

**That is very funny.**

It is funny; I just put that in. He was a colonel, well anyway we finished that and troops started to come in. And I was allocated to a unit called the

38:30 write this down, the 1st Ordinance Field Park. This unit has never been in any other war before; there have been field engineers' field parks. But a field park is where all the equipment is stored on the ground and like the engineers they have bridges, parts and everything to make bridges across rivers and so on and so on and so on, that is a field park.

39:00 Ours was called an ordinance field park and I didn't find out what it was for until some time. The war now was mechanised and all the, where they had horses before in the First World War, they had all vehicles and all these tanks and cars, everything, and they had engines in them and they had our workshops to fix them and they had to have a place like you have a place like to get spare parts from everything from

39:30 mending cars or replacements and things like that. We were the ordinance field park and ordinance carries everything from guns, vehicles, everything, not clothing. And we went with every division and the field park would break up into the brigades and the brigades broke up into battalions and there'd be a field park in a battalion and it would even be like that in the field.

40:00 So wherever there was a workshop to fix up, there was always us to give them the parts and that but I was in another part of the ordinance field park, I was in the recovery. And the recovery is where anything breaks down in action, if you're not in action, like a gun breaking down, a 25 pounder [field artillery gun] going or some vehicle it had to be recovered and brought back to the workshops to be done and then we had to take a new one in its place. Those

40:30 were two different things and that is what our ordinance field park was. And it was called the 1st and it was never ever called the 2/1st, because it was the first one in the history of AIF. And that's how we went overseas.

**Well before we go into going overseas, was there any sort of training that you gained as part of being in the 1st Ordinance Field Park?**

As I explained to you, we didn't know what we were in.

41:00 We knew the 1st Ordinance Field Park but we didn't know what, they never told us what they did. We never saw a vehicle, only the vehicles that brought us in there, or the Q store had to go and get whatever it is. But we never had a series of vehicles attached to any company or section like that. We were AIF issued with the equipment, rifle, bayonet or equipment. And for six months,

41:30 I went in May until the time we went overseas say from May to November sorry, we did nothing else but train as infantry. We did all that part in Williamstown, we went to the butts where you fired the rifles or machine guns. We did everything; we did bayonet charges on

42:00 straw humans.

## Tape 2

01:54 **Ron can you tell me about the kind of training that you were given?**

Yes our training was first to make

02:00 us fit, and route marches was the beginning. I told you I got my boots issued to me when I was went into the camp at Caulfield and they weren't, they didn't fit me in effect they were too big. Until that time I could wear them they were quite reasonably comfortable. But when we started the route march I found how bad they were because after my first route march I finished up with huge blisters

02:30 on me feet. And I that give me a problem then because I had to change me boots. And I went to the RSM that issued them, but didn't issue them but was responsible for me onwards in that camp, with our uniform after we cleaned the camp up. The quartermaster sergeant there was a First World War Irishman and

03:00 he had to keep a tag of all his clothing there what he had and he wasn't going to change my boots. Anyway I went and got a certificate from the doctor that he had to and he had to do that and I think I was very unpopular with that bloke for some time. That's the first thing. Well we were on these route marches and then we got our equipment issued to us, our rifles, our bayonets, our webbing, all those



sort of things.

- 03:30 And then we start what they call the bullring and that's where you march and march and march and do this and do that from morning to night. And then they got, they brought the other things into training, we had a Lewis gun [machine gun, World War I vintage], which was obsolete in those days even then. And we had to learn how to take that to bits and put it together and all its stoppages, mostly gas stoppages, and what to do and then replace it, and even do
- 04:00 this in the dark. And it wasn't sometime before, about two or three months while we were in there before we even saw a Bren gun [Bren light machine gun]. And then with the Bren gun we went through the same batch again. Sergeant-major who was in the Q store used to give the instructions on how to use the Bren gun and that went on for days and days and then we'd have bayonet charges and everything that was
- 04:30 relevant to infantry training under the circumstances. We still didn't know what a field park was, we still didn't know what we had to do. There was some people in there that didn't know what to do because as I explained earlier a field park is the supply of the parts and pieces to a workshop which is mainly car parts, you know like one of these Repco stores you know where you go to get car parts, same thing. Well they had to come from the Ford works and the Holden works,
- 05:00 people who supplied these things because all the vehicles we got were either Holdens or Fords. And they worked for Ford and they were told to join our unit and if they did they would get promoted quickly and they knew what they were going to be before they came in and most of those two left sergeants, we were still privates. There was no, the officers came in that was a company, the regiment was formed as a pre war
- 05:30 thing, the field park, they had been working on this you know naturally. And the CO [Commanding Officer] was a colonel, there was a major 2IC and a captain and I think they had another lieutenant. And we were all privates and we trained with them. And I remember I got sent to a school, which still had guards by the way on the gates, and there was always a sergeant who was a guard, there was a corporal as a guard and there was a privates, they were running out of
- 06:00 corporals. So they sent me to a school with a couple of other blokes; we thought we were going to get two stripes because with two stripes you get an increase in pay from five shillings a day to about eight shillings a day which is much better than five. But I got one stripe, which you've got all the responsibility of a corporal but you don't get paid. And I found out myself why I was that, because when it came to corporals of the guard or anything like that when it was nighttime,
- 06:30 I'd be every now and again put on as corporal of the guard and that's when you're on for the dusk till dawn. And this went on, oh it was boring, we knew, you know, 6th had gone over, Division and we didn't know how long we were going to stay, each week or month went on boring, boring and boring. Until something happened there that,
- 07:00 oh that's right. We had to go to Adelaide to pick up some vehicles, oh before this picking up the vehicles we were still trained as though we were driving vehicles, to get all the instructions of what you did when you were driving a vehicle. And we had to have, as I explained earlier, we had to have living trucks [mock truck drill using men]. And there'd be two blokes put out the front being the front wheels of the truck, there'd be two
- 07:30 out the back being the back wheels of the truck and they were there and then there was a gap and there was two more of these, these are vehicles. And the sergeant in control of the vehicle is beside them so that's five of them. Now you are ordered to proceed give the signal what the procedure was for going and they'd start walking forward. That's the engine going and then they'd put up this sign for stopping, then that would be
- 08:00 the order. And then he'd say, "Mount".

**We'll just pause for Mrs Hatch to pass through. So you had this mock truck?**

Yes but when they gave the order to mount you'd jump in your truck. The bloke that was standing beside the truck would have to simulate that he's doing it and he'd give you a fictitious handle and pull the door open

- 08:30 and he'd get in and close the door behind him to make sure. And this is how we learnt the orders and what to do when we got into a vehicle to stop, to start, turn and do all those. We hadn't a truck. We didn't see a truck. So then we get the order that we are all going to get in trucks, quite a lot of us, to go to Adelaide from Williamstown Racecourse. And
- 09:00 we get out there after travelling there, there was two of us, in one part we had about 10 or 15 in each truck and then we get there and we go out to the Ford factory and there are all of our trucks, which we finally were going to take overseas. Marmon-Harringtons [Ford subsidiary company] the big ones and three ton trucks and all of them and there must have been about 200 or 150 trucks, 200. And then we had to come back,
- 09:30 drive them back to camp and that is how we saw our first trucks. And there was two of us to each truck and we'd take it in turns to drive back to Adelaide. Well after that things started to hum a bit.

**Can I just interrupt you there Ron, what did you think to yourselves when you were training in imaginary trucks?**

Well we didn't know what to make, we couldn't get equipment, it was obvious to me that we were short of something. You know

- 10:00 they serviced the 6th Divvy, they tried to do something with the 7th Divvy, they got the numbers but were doing nothing. But if you were in the infantry well they'd be the same, they'd be away where they trained, but they were going through the same thing as we were on the oval. But as soon as the trucks came they took our bayonets away. Because you can't drive vehicles with bayonets or get in; you can't do things. So any transport soldier
- 10:30 in the AIF like in the Army Service Corps that supply all the goods and the food stores and drive a truck, you don't see them with bayonets only infantry, you don't see artillery with bayonets. And so they took our bayonets; we didn't know what we were going to be then but we know we had a rifle. But while all this is going on as a unit we trained very hard, we were very good, we were quite capable and they weren't
- 11:00 trained hard you know the physical part of it. And then we were allotted where we were supposed to be and then we knew what's happening. And then a big truck came in with all the parts, parts that supply all the different types of cars or trucks or whatever it is and that's where the original men from the Ford companies and the spare parts places came in, they had the job already, they were all sergeants and then
- 11:30 we were and that's where we were. And then the rumours started to fly when we are going to go, when we are not going to go. And then I remember getting in December round about the 15th of December they gave us final leave and that's when we knew we were going, we went on final leave and took that and came back into camp. And then on Christmas
- 12:00 Eve we were taken by train to Sydney and then out on lighters on Sydney Harbour and then out onto the Queen Mary.

**That's an unusual way to spend your Christmas Eve?**

Christmas Day, she sailed from Sydney on the Christmas Day to where we didn't know.

**How many troops were onboard?**

Five thousand.

**And what troops were they?**

Oh they were everyone's you know they were infantry, there was

- 12:30 light horse, at least the armoured div [division], all types, it was a division you know like part of a division five thousand. That was only the one boat. We left Sydney and then we came here and anchored outside in the harbour in Fremantle.

**What was the voyage like to Fremantle?**

Oh beautiful in this huge big boat. And strangely

- 13:00 enough we were the first troops on it from civilian trip and the civilian staff were still on the boat, the shops were still open on the boat.

**What kind of shops did they have onboard?**

You could buy a fur coat, this is luxury, this is the first class area where you can get your haircut or you could have a massage or you could buy jewellery or perfume, it's straight

- 13:30 from the civilian luxury trips and our unit was in the A class cabins and each cabin had two beds, proper beds and an ensuite bathroom and they put a bunk over above the beds to make four of us and we were in the A, some were down deeper, some were up higher. And we had our life
- 14:00 jackets and we didn't have drill or any or anything on that boat, 5,000 troops and you are not allowed to drill, but we used to sit up in the sun, or lay up in the sun up top deck and use the thing as a pillow and when they said for the meals you'd go down again and everyone sat at tables, there were several sittings on them the Queen Mary that they made into dining rooms. And the 5,000 sat down and I was a sergeant then,
- 14:30 they made me a sergeant a couple weeks before we sailed and I was in the sergeants mess and when we ate, we ate in the first class dining room of the Queen Mary and there was a waiter with his gear on and his white jacket and his menu and he was coming around giving us our meals and I said to him, I said, "Are the officers having it better than us?" because we had to go first and the officers and the nurses came in the second time in the first
- 15:00 class dining room. He said, "No the menu is just the same actually they might put a couple of hors d'oeuvres in for them but it's the same". He came in like a what's the name and we sat there and all the

other troops sat down, now that was as bad as it turned out, when they were finished their meals they sat down and started talking for the next bloke to finish whatever like that. And it took us several long times for us to get the whole troops on that boat to get fed

15:30 but with us we did it. And the only thing, there was a lot of lovely big paintings on the Queen Mary, they stored those and they had good timber floorwork and they covered that with plywood but apart from that it was exactly as the civilians did on that boat trip. Well when we got here we found that the Aratea from New Zealand was in

16:00 Fremantle. They brought the New Zealanders over. There was the Dominion Monarch, about three other boats and a few warships and we left sailing from here on the convoy. Well once we got to sea the first thing they did was take our life jackets away from us and say that we had to leave them in the cabin. And every time there was a boat drill we had to go down to the cabin to

16:30 get our life jackets to go onto the position on the boat for the boat drill. And if I was up top of the Queen Mary I used to take about a mile before I got back to the, to get me jacket before I got back because the length of the boat was nearly 300 yards and the number of decks you've got to down to do it shows you the size of the boat.

17:00 **It sounds enormous.**

You are outside are you?

**Yeah. So what happened when you got to Fremantle Ron?**

Well we weren't allowed to get off the boat because we were out the gauges anchorage, but a lot of the launches from here were coming out to see the boat. And

17:30 everyone was passing things over to send messages down below. And we had a member in our unit a corporal and he put a note in a tobacco tin and he threw it over and they caught it and he said to take it, there was a letter inside to post it to his people. And when we were at sea, he was called up because of this thing over the ship, and when the boat, there was all these launches got to shore,

18:00 there were police and security guards, each bloke that came in checking to see if they'd dropped anything over the boat's sides and they got this one letter and they eventually got it and he got put before the CO on the boat and lost his stripes before he got to Suez, so they were on the ball. But the Queen Mary, we took off with the convoy and all these boats were

18:30 you know away from each other, and all the navy was just up and down and around just to see whether there were submarines and so on, all the way all the trip and with a convoy like that, the speed of the convoy is at the maximum of the slowest boat they can't go any faster than that because the Mary can do 32 knots or 33 knots just doing this all the time and you'd think you were in a room,

19:00 there was no murmur of the boat you could just hear, it was a bit like, no murmur at all. And one day the whole convoy stopped and when it stopped all the engines were shut off the engines of all the boats and there was a terrific silence that went across that ocean, and someone had died and they were burying him at sea. And the bugles went and all that sort of thing out and they put the thing out and you see the corpse being

19:30 dropped into the ocean at the burial, as soon as he was in the bugle went again. All the engines started up again and then we went on again in the most, it wasn't hair-raising, it was sort of fantastic.

**Sounds like an arresting experience.**

It was absolutely you'd never believe how quiet it was and you know how simply we were there and we really knew we were at war. And so then we went on and

20:00 out on about the third or fourth day the Queen Mary broke away from the convoy and it started to steam up and all the engines went then and then you could see her take off and she tore and she heeled over and she went and went and went until about 20 minutes time we were outside, you couldn't see a convoy. And we went on all that way then until we got to Trincomalee and Trincomalee was on the opposite side to the

20:30 old Colombo port of the, Colombo on the far side of the island, Ceylon. And from there we were transhipped into smaller boats for the 5,000 troops onto smaller lighter, they call lighter boats. And the one we were on was called the Lancashire and it was used as a baby liner boat and it was used in the First World War and was still being used

21:00 up the African coast to transfer natives and things still. But all these smaller boats and they took us through to the Suez Canal to Suez and then down the canal to a place called Ismailia I think it was, Ismailia, and that's where we disembarked and went across the Suez and into transport and they took us into Palestine our particular units. Most of the men there too they were all the infantry

21:30 never on that boat went to Palestine. I got to Palestine to the various camps and that's where we, ours was called Berbera. And there'd be another one down the road called, they were all numbered and had their names and that's where we were and we continued our training there.

**What kind of training did you continue with?**

Oh in a case like that, they keep you occupied and if they can't do anything they take you on a route march. But you got to get up and do all your

22:00 and bunk your beds, they keep you really tied down.

**Can you describe the camp?**

Oh the camps were all professionally prepared, they weren't just tents. You know proper wooden cookhouses and different things, just like they do at Karrakatta [barracks in Perth] they were all made up and if they needed tents, most of us slept in tents apart from eating, that type of thing, the officers mess had wooden buildings.

22:30 But most of the ORs [other ranks] and the sergeants would be in these EPI [EPIP: English pattern, Indian product] tents which were pretty big tents like take about, well you could take any number 4, 7, 8 whatever it was so they were pretty big tents, they were well equipped in those camps. No problems there. But then we got to get our vehicles and we was as a recovery we were

23:00 driving as specialised drivers, we were very good drivers, quite a lot of us we had big trucks, 20 of us at a time, go across the Sinai desert back to the Suez Canal and then we had to go to Port Said where our vehicles had gone through not the troops and then we picked up all those vehicles and brought them back to Palestine.

**What kind of vehicles?**

Oh Marmon-Harringtons big four wheel,

23:30 bigger than a 3 ton truck. They got hydraulics and levers on the back of them for pulling people out of bogs or very strong with big wheels, you know I think, but there were only about six wheels to a vehicle the front and two backs but they were very strong.

**Two rear axles were there?**

Oh they were very, four-wheel drive too you know, get through anything. And that is what I drove mainly.

**So you'd drive those in a convoy would you?**

24:00 Yes yes and you had to be certain distances apart, I think it was 200 yards.

**Why?**

In case you got bombed. That was the reason for it, or you had to disperse yourself; you went off the road for strafing and all that sort of jazz.

**What were some of the formations that you'd have to fall into if you were strafed?**

Well if you're strafed, you'd just pull off somewhere so they go straight along.

24:30 We were strafed but I'll tell you later on.

**Sure.**

But that's in my words safe land, there wasn't too much fear of being strafed or bombed in Palestine.

**So sorry whereabouts did you pick those vehicles up from?**

Port Said.

**And why had they been left there?**

Because they couldn't just put those where we got off, because that was the sort of line, sort of landing to push across the Suez to get to the other side. It had to be from a

25:00 bridge, they had to get across the Suez better on better equipment than we got through with ours. So we had to get to something easy to get across, that's how we did it.

**How did you go there to pick them up?**

By vehicle, but they had to make special preparation to get those vehicles back.

**So when you picked up these vehicles where were you taking them?**

25:30 To Palestine to do the rest of our training.

**So when you got back to Palestine did you commence training in the vehicles?**

Yes everything we did with we were equipped; we were a unit as we were supposed to be.

**So this is the first time you're fully equipped?**

As a unit that's right.

**So did that boost morale?**

Well we knew we were going, but we didn't know when. It's always the when in the army, you're always impatient to know, no one that's when the furphy [rumour] comes in, have you heard that

26:00 expression? Well it's always the furphy some bloke will come in a water cart for example, that's how it started in the First World War, the water cart used to take water round to the troops and the firm called Furphy [Joseph Furphy and Sons] in Melbourne used to make the water carts and they had 'Furphy' written across it and the driver worked for Furphy, the what's his name. And the driver knew everyone because he's going from one unit to the other getting the rumours, he go to the 2/11th, or the

26:30 2/28th and say, "We're moving, we're getting out we're going forward" and he said, "The 28th are moving we are on the move" and then they'd find the 28th didn't move, "Oh it's a bloody furphy". And strangely enough my wife's niece married a Furphy and he lived in Western Australian, he was one of the descendants of the original Furphies that made the water tank in the First World War.

**That sounds like a furphy to me.**

27:00 Yeah. But then that was we landed, we left on Christmas Day. Up til about April I was there, March, we were there from about the time we got to Berbera until about March. Then I was called before the CO and I had to take

27:30 about 12 others similar to what I put into when I enlisted in the army for Williamstown Racecourse for the people that went to get the camp prepared. I had to go to [El] Amariya; that's a place outside, a staging camp outside Alexandria. At this time the 6th divvy were in Greece. The Greece campaign was

28:00 on. And we went to Amariya to prepare the camp for our unit coming. When we got there, there was other camps being prepared by the English, and a lot of them, South Africans, they're all camps but adjacent to our camp, which means we had to put all those EPI tents up, we had all EPI tents with us for our whole unit our units. And worked on that.

28:30 And then our main body came and we were ready to embark to go to Greece for the campaign. And just then it appeared in the Alexandria Times were the 9th Divvy who had gone up into Libya to take over from the 6th Divvy that went to Greece, were there just as they finished their training. But Rommel [Field Marshal Erwin Rommel] came over with his Afrika Korps and landed in Tripoli and started high

29:00 tailing it into this 9th Divvy and put them into retreat. And I read in the Alexandria Times, wasn't much, the strategic withdrawal from Benghazi for the 9th divvy. And I had to get, I had instructions from our CO to take 10 Marmon-Harrington vehicles and 19 ORs [other ranks] and myself to Cairo and pick up 10 anti-tank guns,

29:30 which I had to deliver to the anti-tank regiment in Derna, which is past Tobruk, and then hightail it back to where I came from to go to Greece with the contingent that were leaving. I left there on the 6th of April with this contingent of 10 vehicles. We got to Cairo that day, we picked up the guns and we took off the next morning and I got to

30:00 Mersa Matruh on the 7th. We stayed there overnight and Mersa Matruh was all bombed out from previous campaigns. We then took our next was from Mersa Matruh to Sollum, we start going on there and I got on the tail of a big convoy, which slowed me up and I found out that they were the Royal Horse Artillery moving up the way we were

30:30 going. I couldn't get past them so we had to go to the side of them on the desert, and we passed the convoy and finally got past them. We hadn't gone very further and we got pulled up again from another big convoy. And this was the Scots Guards, the English Scots Guards, and that we did the same for that until we finally made it to the front, and we finally got into Sollum at about 6 o'clock or 7 o'clock at night.

31:00 It was just getting dusk. I dispersed the vehicles and got the cook to make some meals, we had cooks travelling with us and mechanics and all that sort of thing. And the rest of this crowd went to the beach and had a swim. Before they got back a Don R [Dispatch rider] driver, the motorbike cyclist, come from the town major of Sollum; he wanted to see me. And when I saw him, he told us we had to go on,

31:30 not stay the night, go on. I never been up that way before. So we had to go on. So we got going again, and there's a pass that you had to get up to Sollum up to the escarpment [Halfaya Pass], it was pretty steep and I never been up there and we're driving and it was dark by this time. And we could only drive with these very bad covered lights you drive in the dark, you only see about a couple of yards in front of you. So I found my way up there, and I was up there

32:00 waiting for the rest of my vehicles to come up and a vehicle came back from the way that we were going and there was an English truck with a flattop at the back of it, the back was an Indian with a turban. In the front was a driver and two officers, I presume they had to go around them. He pulled up and he wanted to know where we were going. I told him it was

32:30 confidential and they blurted out that he was a general. And he said, "Well if you're going up there" he

said, "They're all coming back" and I said, "Well if that is so correct sir, you tell the town major down the bottom if it is sure. I'm sure he'll send a Don R after me and turn me round again" and off he went. Naturally I thought he would do that.

- 33:00 So I go on and I'm waiting all this time for this Don R to come, he didn't come. So we went on and on and finally I realised we had to go on. And I get to the turn off, I hadn't been up there before and there was a turn off to Bardia, and I thought Bardia would continue on to Tobruk, so we turned into Bardia and by this time the moon started to come up a bit. And it was absolutely deserted, Bardia, the moon was up, it was only a little place too.
- 33:30 But they still had guards there from the 6th been pulling out and there was just these old soldiers, the guards. He wanted to know the hell and I said, "I'm going up there" and he said, "You're on the wrong road". So we had to turn around in there, which was pretty hard in the short space we had to turn around, and off we went again and got onto the main road that took us straight to Tobruk. But we've got to go to Derna not Tobruk. We know nothing about what's going on, I'm supposed to hand these over at Derna to the
- 34:00 company coming back to meet me. When I we got so far and the mist started to come on and I couldn't see much so I had to pull off and we stayed there and early in the dawn breaking I could hear gunfire. It sounded like ack-ack [anti-aircraft] gunfire. But there is not supposed to be anyone there, there is supposed to be no one no closer than Derna if they were there. And as we got on I came to the perimeter of Tobruk and there was a hive of
- 34:30 industry; all the infantry was there digging in. And there was everything was coming in and going and I go thought because I've got these guns, "Where do I take them?" And I pull up into the town and everywhere you could see, everything has been bombed and so on. And I find the army headquarters, which was in town then and the person in charge then
- 35:00 got hold of me. And he said, "Take the guns out of the vehicles". So we had to, we had a compound made up of concertina wire around to put all this gear in. So I took the guns out and put them there and amongst there was all these other things, there was clothing, there's machinery, there is everything there. I put them there on this retreat so you can't get them. And then he uses us and the trucks and he takes us out to the perimeter
- 35:30 where we've got to pick up ten truckloads of prisoners, one truckload of Germans, which I had, and nine trucks of Italians. We've got to take them back into town; there was a compound there where they were near the perimeter. We put them in the compound and went back to him and he said, "Well that's alright, take them up, pick them up in the morning, you'll be taking them back to Alexandria". So we dispersed the
- 36:00 vehicles round there. The hospital was just near there where we were, the 2/4th Field Hospital it was pretty close to the town, it had white flags flying, all the flags flying, we just parked in that area. So that night I went to the sergeants mess, the young blokes we fed them down first, went into the sergeants mess and I come out of it. I was talking to a bloke and above us was a
- 36:30 plane, not a dive bomber an ordinary plane, a big one, looked like a bomber, but just sort of hovering. I couldn't see it's insignia, I thought it was one of ours, at least that's one of ours, I see the trap doors open underneath and suddenly the bombs started coming down. And boy did we take cover and they did come down in our area because I was spread there, I've got a photo of it, the bloke there had sort of a holiday trip for us he still had like a camera
- 37:00 and he was still taking photographs because they're not supposed to have photographs in that area, but we didn't know, but he had it. And he took several photographs and one was, he got me after I went into, it was a builder's yard that I went down in, and it had like chalk stuff whatever it was making and I went down and the concussion lifted me off the ground and half me uniform has got all this white over it, I've got the photo there. And that was the first bombs dropped in the siege.
- 37:30 But it was the night before the siege started. Now the next day we had to go and pick the prisoners up, all these Italians they were easy handled because they knew they were being...they preferred to be captured I think. And they all got into the trucks, you didn't have to order them and some of them had this and that and other things. But the Germans weren't there; they'd been taken somewhere else. We lined up into convoy overlooking the harbour. There was another couple
- 38:00 joined our convoy and we dispersed not very far apart from each other and we were going to go on back the road we came and take them back. The air raid went and down came the dive-bombers and they sank five boats in the harbour and I watched every one of them go down. And then we had, as soon as that happened two of them pulled out these dive-bombers and one of them pulled out and strafed us as
- 38:30 he was coming through and I suppose he didn't miss us by more than 20, 30 yards our convoy. And all the Italians were out of the trucks and they were going to a drain just beside and they are all running all over the place like ants. But as soon as it was all over, the siren went for all clear, back they came and hopped in the truck again, you didn't have to tell them and we had to put them back in the compound.

#### **What kind of compound were they in?**

Oh that was all done up in

39:00 concertina wire and guards on it and all that, you know; they couldn't get out, not that they wanted to get out. But then the next day we were supposed to come back and pick them up again. But the next day the road was closed and the road was closed from then onwards. And here we are in there, can't get to our unit and I'm there with 19 ORs and myself, no officer and we were there for five months.

**It's pretty unfortunate timing Ron?**

Well I don't know if it's

39:30 timing or not because if I had of gone to Greece it could have been worse.

**This is true?**

Because as you know, they retreated from Greece and had to go into Crete and got but fortunately I found out after we knew nothing about our unit, and the unit knew nothing about us. Everyone in Tobruk was getting mail delivered to their various units. We never got any mail, no one knew where we were. But then they put us on all sorts of jobs and we were doing transport work there

40:00 and they'd take the transport away from us and say the perimeter or the infantry or the Army Service Corps want vehicles, being lost, and we gradually lost our vehicles. We had one or two to get our supplies. And they'd give us all sorts of jobs and at one stage we were attached to the Northumberland Fusiliers and and we worked on the wharf

40:30 and that was the worst job to be on because the wharf got bombed every day. They were very bad there.

**Before I ask you to go into much more detail about Tobruk I think we might need to change tapes Ron.**

Yeah right.

## Tape 3

00:31 **Ron you were just saying that you had all kinds of jobs in that intern period, can you just list the kinds of jobs that that you had?**

Well they were all labourers' jobs. Apart vehicles were going we had vehicles to go we had to do anything lifted things or take things or anything. But when you didn't have that, I always had a vehicle to get round myself. But then

01:00 the navy used to come in at night. They'd only come in moonless nights, or you couldn't come in on a full moon. And they brought in, at the beginning we didn't have that much support as you could imagine. And we had to live off what we were given. And we lived very frugally we had our meal was a tin of bully beef, some terrible things called

01:30 herrings in oil in a tin, you can imagine what they'd be like in summer in the heat and army biscuits, which were very hard when you bit them but they were very...dogs like them. And one bottle of water a day, that's what we were very short of water. And just an ordinary soldier's bottle you use that to clean your teeth and everything.

**Were you taught anything**

02:00 **about survival in the desert?**

Not when you got to, not exactly I can't remember being told about survival of those living off a blade of grass or things like that. We were told what was most important what we carried and to be very frugal with it.

02:30 **I'm just surprised that they didn't tell you anything about the desert and desert conditions?**

03:00 Well the only thing they told us about the desert was don't talk too much to the natives. They didn't tell us anything about self-survival, well not in our unit anyway, they didn't tell anything to me. They main thing they harped on us before we landed, watch your rifle, every native was a thief, take the bolt out, tie your rifle to your leg when you go to bed at night, all these sorts of things, they'll come and take your rifle, that's the thing

03:30 they tell you about. Well I've seen prisoners of war, Japan, ah Italian prisoners of war working out of a compound and there'd be a guard watching them and the guard would say, "Hang onto this and I'll show you how to do it" and he handed him his rifle. And we were never taught anything like that about survival, the survival would be I would say those ones of the SAS [Special Air Service] or they had another group, the English ones in those early days from the SAS

04:00 that used to go out behind the lines and do all that, they were taught survival more than the normal bloke. The infantry might have been taught a lot of survival but the main survival they were taught was

watch the Mills bombs and Mills bombs and you know do those. But living like a native going into a jungle that might have been different; it might have been different in the Pacific, same as the army when they went in against the Japs [Japanese].

**It just seems to me your with your unit you've been put into a precarious**

04:30 **situation in the fact that you're moving transport from one end of the place to another?**

Well you had to be good mechanics too; you had to understand your engine. That was our survival, keeping your engine going. And that's where it was difficult sometimes; I've had vehicles stop in a sandstorm. I was in two sand seas and you wonder how it goes ever again. Once we were up in Mersa Matruh and the storms started and the only

05:00 protection you got, we got in our trucks each and they got canopies on them, we pulled them back, I had me greatcoat on, and some of them even took the respirator out to breathe through. And you can't, you couldn't see that wall. I remember waking up this morning and I left me hat on the inside the truck on the ground and when I woke up I couldn't open my eyes, the sand liquid, and I opened my eyes,

05:30 and I could only see the top of me hat the sand had covered it, and this is what it's like. And if I had to go and give an order in a vehicle 20 yards away I wouldn't be game to do it, because there is no guarantee I'd find me way back to me own truck in this storm, it's shocking. That's what saved us in Tobruk. When Tobruk first closed up on the 9th of April, Rommel was preparing to attack,

06:00 and he had more advantage than he did when he attacked about 15 days later because our infantry were getting into position, all the units were getting into position, we were getting into Tobruk, that he was ready to pounce and a sandstorm came and it held everyone up for about two or three days. And that's what gave us the advantage then. That was lucky.

06:30 **Can I just pause you there for a moment. We were just talking about you know how difficult the desert conditions was and we were just talking about what sorts of jobs your unit had to with?**

Well we only had 19 men including myself and when the vehicles, you had two to a vehicle, when they took them away well they gave them all sorts of jobs around, labourers

07:00 jobs, which was you had to do something and you did it. But we did we were in our wadis, which is the, wherever we were, I've got photos to show you what they are. For example when we were with the infantry that we had in sharing when we first got there, they were relief ones

07:30 that came in from out that night, they'd been relieved and were out the back, they had a cookhouse and they used to let us use their cookhouse, gave us food. But I could draw it, I used to go to the idea they used to call it to order what we had to eat, well you they gave us bread after a while, but they gave us bully beef and tin of those things. And they used to, if they could make tea or whatever it was they'd make it and share it with us.

08:00 And anything they wanted to be done, they'd take us into the harbour after the ships had come in to offload, well all ammunition and stuff and they'd send the infantry in too to help offload it off there. They wanted to get back into the front because they reckon the worst place to be was the harbour where the bombers used to come over every day and bomb. And it was like that all the time.

08:30 There'd be, I'll never forget the first time when I saw about 10 of them come over and then in the finish they were coming over in their 40s and 50s. And they had no opposition; we didn't have any air force protection. We had good ack-ack but they came over whenever they wanted to and they always seemed to know when ships came into the harbour that was at night, they had some way of being told that the ships had come in because on one occasion there they

09:00 came in on leading lights in the harbour and someone would move the leading light to another spot so that they came in on the wrong thing so that was some fun game duddery going on there. And also you could see bullets, the what do you call them they were all colours coming through the air when you fire at night

09:30 you get them on the target, different colours.

**Tracers?**

Tracers, you could see them at night. And it was the furphy went round there that some of them with codes to say that the ship's coming in, because they could see the perimeter. It wasn't much; it was only about 5 miles, 8 miles or something in between the ocean and the nearest perimeter.

**What did you think of the lack of support from the RAF [Royal Air Force]?**

Well there was no support

10:00 from the RAF. There was RAF planes there when we got there, there was an aerodrome there and they had a few, I don't know Moths or Mosquitos [fighter aircraft] or what they were, they were small planes, and they were pretty successful at first. They come over and you see the few planes dive bombers came over and they'd chase them. And you'd see a couple come back do the roll means they've shot someone



down, and they'd do that for two or three days and we saw no more air force at all for the whole

10:30 shoot. Not one plane. And the shortage of that was the fact that they didn't have the planes and if they did they couldn't have it in the perimeter, it was too dangerous.

**Did you understand that as?**

No we knew nothing. We knew nothing about they might have up in the headquarters of the army which was there, but the rank and file like me, that are not supposed to be there anyway, we didn't know what was going on.

11:00 And one night we had the thermos bombs dropped on us. Now the thermos bombs were a thermos, like a thermos flask but evidently when they throw them out they unwind themselves through a propeller or something or other and unwind something and when they drop they become a landmine. And if they drop there something agitates inside to start it off

11:30 ready, and if you go through a shuffle or get near and touch it it explodes. Well did they shot many a wheel of a vehicle and if anybody trod on them they'd lose their leg. They did that one night, dropped, and I did have one that did go off something like that, it carried it for quite a while.

**Sorry what happened?**

I had it when I was in there, I didn't take it out, it was an actual bomb that had been a dud or something unwound and just there but it wasn't, they had

12:00 gave a description of the, if you saw them a lot of them were firing at them and setting them off and an order came out that no one was to do that, they had to to put a noose around them get back and pull the noose so they weren't shooting madly at it with a rifle in a camp you know in an interior like that, it could ricochet off anywhere. It could hit anyone. But that those, they did that for quite a

12:30 while.

**What was the general chat amongst you when you could see that the RAF support had decreased completely?**

Well it is an amazing thing, and I'm just, I've often been trying to think this. At no chance in the world I don't think that we ever thought we were going to get beaten. You never, you know you always say where you've been talking about who they'd be and particularly us we never got any mail.

13:00 I was single then I wasn't married. But some of our blokes were married too; they were worried about their families and things. And there is nothing much you could find about when we are going to be there and how long we were going to be there. All we knew we were overseas. But the first thing that Morshead [then Major-General L. J. Morshead, commanding 9th Division and Tobruk Fortress] had said, he was in charge of us, he brought this out right in the very front time, and this went around to every person that was in the island

13:30 in the siege, "This is not going to be a Dunkirk, we will get out of this" he said, "We will march down the road. Everybody in this camp will tap or fire or die where he stands, every batman, every cook, every watch they could fire a rifle, we stand here until we win, no surrender" and with our flag that's what it says now 'No Surrender'.

14:00 And he gave us the confidence you see.

**So you believed that inevitably you'd just win?**

Well we never thought we'd lose, I never heard anyone really moan about it. There was a Salvation Army Red Shield in the island, in the island they call it, it is like an island.

14:30 In the siege he had in one of the buildings that did have a roof on it, he was there and he'd address and envelope for somebody that wanted to send a letter. We never sent a letter even strangely enough.

**Why didn't you try?**

That's right because they did it through the units, the units were doing it and collecting it and posting it the different units, I never thought of that actually, but no one knew where I was.

15:00 **But that must have been quite disturbing for you at the time especially when you started considering that you were going to be there for more than a week?**

That's right, well I was, because we never knew when we were getting out. I didn't know when I was getting out. We got the call one day to see the movement order bloke on the wharf, the bloke that give us the orders what to do. And he told me that we had to embark that night. I'm on

15:30 the wharf talking to him, I had to go and see him, it was midday, and this bloke called Dave O'Shannessy, he was a captain, he finished up a major and he got decorated, he had no fear of anything this bloke. And he had me in the middle of the wharf talking and he was telling me that where I had to go there was a jetty just up from where that main wharf was, up near the entrance to the harbour and to be up there by 0100 hours.

- 16:00 Do this and do that and do the other thing but be there at 0100 hours. The air raid alarm went and the sun is right above us and the dive bombers come in and you couldn't see him through the sun, you're looking up and you couldn't see him they come in on the sun. And then they started bombing and they were dropping bombs around us in the bleaking harbour where I was. You know that bloke never
- 16:30 stopped, he went on talking to me. And all I wanted to do was find out the easiest place I could run and bloody well get under and he kept me there, he didn't keep me there, I stood there, I didn't know what I was doing but I stayed there and listened to him, but he didn't care. And that's how it was and he told me what to do, which is "Right well," I thought to myself, "I've got to do it". So I went back to where we were, told the blokes that we were going that night. One bloke we couldn't take he got diarrhoea, he was in the
- 17:00 hospital, dysentery couldn't go. We got all our, incidentally all the time we were in there, we landed there in our winter uniforms. When we were in this loaded off these guns in the compound there was a lot of clothing and there was a lot of summer dresses, like men's shorts, summer dress. So we made available to some of those and we grabbed
- 17:30 what we wanted and took. And we put those in and that's all I was in from the time I was in Tobruk that summer dress that we took. And we had to get back to our winter dress, well we had kit bags, and all our winter kit was in the bottom of our kit bags which we hadn't opened since we got in there. So we had to get all this out and get our webbing out and things like that, and all our equipment, rifle, the lot. One o'clock in the morning I got to be at this
- 18:00 position. I get there, it's dark because boats come in at the night, it's dark. Go to the wharf thinking it was there and half of it's blown away through the raid that day, and I can't see it, I can't hear anyone, and I can't do anything. So I go away back with this mob and I hear a bit of movement further on. And I go further on and there's the boat, another one on a jetty
- 18:30 that's still not quite good but they're unloading, loading the wounded onto the boat and taking off stuff they brought in. And then we got that and we got onto it, and that was the [HMAS] Vendetta, the Australian boat Vendetta. And we got on there and then they left and we went on there to Mersa Matruh and they told us that the boat had to get past Sollum before the dawn because the Germans were
- 19:00 down there and they were there and we got off at Mersa Matruh and that's where we landed back in Africa.

**Just before we go well, yeah the phone.**

Kids, didn't know it was a yacht, she never been anywhere near it, anyway we got a yacht and she learnt to sail it, she finished up sailing in races with us for eight years. Then we used to go out together just the two of us on this boat that took five to

- 19:30 sail it in a race and we'd go to Rottneest for a week or a month and we hit reefs, we hit everything, I know all about her courage.

**I don't doubt that at all. But just going back to what we were talking about before the phone call, you were going into Africa but prior to that I still wanted to have a bit of a chat about some of the living conditions at Tobruk.**

Well the living conditions in

- 20:00 Tobruk, there weren't any living conditions in Tobruk, because it was a very modern Italian security armoured place when they were at their height. They had buildings for the admiralty; they had the army and all that sort of jazz. They had perimeters around Tobruk, anti-tank traps that were supposed to keep every type of vehicle out of Tobruk because they were fighting the
- 20:30 others and never thought they'd be beaten with what they had for protection. Everything was beautiful but the 6th divvy went in and absolutely bombed the thing complete, there wasn't one building there standing that had more than two walls. And very few buildings had roofs on them. So when we got there there was very little there but there was a lot of caves and the Italians used to use the caves for storing their ammunition and all their stores and things like that.
- 21:00 They were short of water; they did have water things there. They used to be luxuriously grand in the old days and that but it wasn't in those days then but for defence purpose for them they had a marvellous set up. That's why Morshead said when they ran the retreat that's the only place could go that they would have a hope of stopping the Germans. But they knew they had some advantage with us with the tank-trap because we couldn't
- 21:30 follow it straight in, we had no tanks. Then

**What were you actually living in at the time when you were under siege?**

Well just imagine a valley all rock coming down that wall and that wall there along that way. We dug a hole in the side of it and put rocks and things up and made sort of a cave of our own off that and five of us slept in that.

22:00 I've got a photograph showing us outside of it. In the clothes that we got from that compound, remember I told you we got the summer dress, wearing the same summer dress that I got four or five months before, showing the condition of it and ourselves in the same there until we went out of Tobruk, that's when we got into our winter dress but we lived like that day after day after day.

22:30 And we ate outside of it, we had our bully beef and biscuits and things, there was a dining room for that.

**How demoralising was the bully beef and the biscuits on a regular basis?**

You got used to it, you're hungry and it was wholesome. But I couldn't take the sardines, the herring in

23:00 oil, hot oil, because everything was heated, even the bully beef. I tried bully beef here now cold and it's beautiful.

**At least you don't have to put up with the desert conditions anymore.**

No, right.

**What about the insects and flies and?**

The rats, there were bush rats but they didn't seem to harm you but you had to keep your biscuits and everything in your pannikins. But you got used to them. Fleas yes.

23:30 Those because I was lucky, I didn't realise that I was lucky but I had a sleeping bag because travelling at night and that I managed to get this out of the officers where they sell them. I thought that might come in handy a sleeping bag instead of the blankets or the groundsheet, and I did find it very useful in Tobruk. But I used it for months.

24:00 And when I was leaving, another bloke of ours that was part of our unit had been there for some time but had nothing to do with me, he said, "What are you going to do with the sleeping bag?" I said, "You can have it". Well when he finally got out, they told me that every morning his main job was turning it inside out and going around trying to get the fleas out of the seams. And I lived with it all the time and didn't notice it. But

24:30 it was washing and things like that, there was a limited amount of water and we used to go every now and again get in the harbour and have a wash. And one time I got caught in the harbour during air raids and I was naked and I was in there washing myself and just getting clean. And the air raid went and of course I got to hurry out and get to somewhere but there is nowhere grass growing around or anything to get under

25:00 it is a bit of a coming down with these rocks and things and you can snuggle in quietly as hard as you can and look and you can see where the bombs have been dropped on the other side of the harbour. And I had one fear. Don't get caught under the water if the bomb drops, it can concuss on your ears, I don't know what made me think about that but it frightened me. That's while I was telling you I had to get away from the, you know explosions.

25:30 **It can actually damage your eardrums.**

Oh it can blow them out.

**What distance was some of the ordinance that was coming down when you were?**

Oh the, I suppose when they dive-bombed, there is always one big bomb amongst them a 500 pounder or something like that, and smaller ones beside them but the noise. They used to have a sort of siren going all this

26:00 screaming coming through eerroooowww, and the noise of the ack-ack. And if you are on the wharf the ack-ack was defending the wharfs and they had a couple of big ones there and boy did they make a noise and you know, it injures your ears after a while, I had to get mine fixed. And everything like hell is breaking loose. And this noise because everyone you reckoned is on top of you, the noise is screaming.

26:30 And they do dive down low because when one strafed us, he wouldn't have been any higher than the top of our building.

**What happened when this one strafed you?**

He just strafed us and went through and another one came through the same way and he was on fire. He had been caught and these flames he disappeared over the hill. But these other ones they dive out of anywhere they've got to go, and these two came round and of course they saw all these trucks with the Italians and that running around.

27:00 They would have been shooting their own blokes if they hit them.

**Oh they stopped firing because they could actually see?**

No they kept firing until they disappeared. They just strafed us and they continued straight through.

**Do you think that they purposely did that so that the prisoners could get away?**

No we had vehicles there and they could have hit the vehicles explosive bullets and things. Oh no there weren't single shots coming, strafing is a

27:30 several, like the only gun the only equipment we had to go there on this convoy and coming back was an old-fashioned Lewis gun. That is their only protection and their own rifles. We used that, we had that always available for the support on the harbour, that was always up whenever they come, we used that. But that was our only protection going back.

**At**

28:00 **what point did you start losing your trucks?**

Oh I suppose after the second week, third week, until they got orderly, you know orderly because we had ten vehicles. And we couldn't go far because if we were given jobs you know like prisoners and things like that. And the other jobs would have been done by the other units like the ones that supplied all the equipment and food and things for the other part of the army. But what they did for the

28:30 service corps that handled all the bits and pieces, they made them into infantrymen. They gave them a bayonet each and they could support the infantry as well as the and when necessary because they would have been driving around in a truck like they would if they were out on the field somewhere. Also they had Italian guns that were very good. Some of them we

29:00 captured when they were brought in there, they were there. The Italians had left them when they left. And they had the bush artillery and these boys learnt how to fire, they were taught how to fire it and they used that artillery right through the siege and was successful. Everyone was used to do something. The only thing they could put us under was labour, like Fremantle Wharf.

**Were you happy to relinquish your trucks?**

We had no option.

29:30 **But I mean personally?**

Well the only thing personally is that it restricted our movement a bit but where would you go anyway unless you were told where to go? You just couldn't go wander around the siege when we were sieged, there wasn't too much visiting.

**I mean that's a really good question, how far could you go without being in danger you know is it a matter of half a kilometre, or is it a matter of?**

Oh well the whole area

30:00 was only, the widest part would be about 15 miles, 15 kilometres, and it was very, you could drive into the roads there you know when you went into these bodies, in the end you could pick up a road or get off it, I'll show you the maps, it's all out there. I've got the whole perimeter.

**Oh we'll definitely have a look at that after we've finished because we need to take, we also need to take some pictures of**

30:30 **you in uniform too, so if you could have a look for a couple of those over lunch?**

Oh yes there is plenty of those there, but the main thing is the perimeter.

**Yeah.**

That shows you where every troop was in there, where they were. And the infantry they had these pillboxes made, big ones, they take 50 people into them, 40, 50 infantry all round all dispersed along the perimeter, and of course the Italians didn't have it too well. We captured them. But they couldn't move

31:00 our infantry they were there and then they'd be, which battalion was in there and then which company would be there, you know, and then they've got to be relieved. And they go back to the blue line you know what they call the blue line, others come up. And sort of oh it is marvellous control of this, in buildings.

**How close where you to you know hand-to-hand combat situation?**

Oh

31:30 the closest I was when we picked out the prisoners was about the closest. But I never was as close as that to them. They'd be, well 20, 100 metres or something like that.

**That is close enough?**

Oh yeah but that's the closest you'd ever get. Where I'd been would be close, but there is the difference, see the headquarters was, we were just up near the headquarters where we were

32:00 and the headquarters had to be close enough to fight everything.

**I'm curious to know what happened to communication because I know that in a lot of battles there is, what is the communications like?**

Well we never saw much communication; we always had someone telling us what to do. There is always some officer or someone come from somewhere. But I never saw boxes

32:30 where you go and have a ring up someone or anything like that, but they did have communication of course. That's where the signallers come in.

**Was it more via signallers?**

What?

**Was it more via signallers?**

I think it would be the signallers mainly laying down the cables. It would have to be, yeah. You know from one post to the other, they were pretty well organised, the Morshead body.

**It's just interesting that nobody could get word to your?**

33:00 Unit.

**Yeah.**

That's right we never heard from them. Once more when we got back to Africa where the camp we came from, they were all gone. They'd all gone and we didn't know where they were. They didn't go to Greece because the Greece campaign had gone bung and they didn't board the boat that was taking them over, they went back to Palestine and we found out that they went to Sicily.

33:30 **Sicily?**

No, to in the...against the French.

**Oh right. No I just find it odd at no point did anybody try to communicate back to your unit?**

They didn't have a, we got no letter or nothing and they didn't even know where we had gone when we got back.

**Did any of the other fellas there manage to get mail through?**

No, nobody.

34:00 **Well how do you keep your morale up under those sorts of circumstances?**

Well you did, you knew where you were and the problems you were in. But we used to wake up one morning to the other and go to sleep and there was five of us in this place we were talking, we had a couple of different types of blokes, what they did before they got in the army and what they were going to do when they got out. From this photo they are just ordinary blokes.

**With these others, is it 19**

34:30 **blokes that are part of your...?**

20 altogether, 20 of us. One got dysentery we lost him.

**Were there any injuries amongst that group of you?**

No not one. We got strafed and we got in bomb areas, we got plenty of bombing. That's amazing that bombing business, the luck you have there, because you wouldn't think you'd get missed.

**Did those sorts of experiences create a really strong**

35:00 **bond between all of you?**

Oh yes, definitely they still lived, they are all dead now, I think there is only of my lot.

**Of the 20 of you?**

Only one other living.

**Do you think that you fellows bonded together more than some of the other fellows because you were outsiders in that environment?**

I don't think so.

35:30 I think the whole of Tobruk was bonded. It wouldn't matter what unit you were in or wherever you were, when you were a rat, you were a rat. Well they wouldn't have made me president.

**Just with the mention of the word rat, I mean I think it's a wonderful Australian terminology to call you fellows, can you tell the story of how that came about?**

Yes I can, I heard it the day it was made.

**Well can you tell me about that?**

Well you've heard of

36:00 Joyce [William Joyce, Lord Haw Haw, radio propagandist for Germany in World War II]?

**I'd rather you tell me about it.**

Well Joyce as you know is a rotten traitor that went to broadcast, was giving broadcasts in Germany, from England. I think he went to Oxford or one of those colleges there, universities. And he went over during the war and was on the radio giving the gossip and everything that could hurt troops from there every

36:30 morning. And we used to hear this over the wireless, we could get the wireless, I couldn't personally get it but we got the wireless we got to know from other people telling us. He always said, "Hello the rats, oh the old rats caught in the trap," as a matter of fact he says, "The best prisoners we ever had," he says, "They even pay themselves" you know this sort of business. "What are you doing rats?"

37:00 How are your wives going, we know the Americans are over in Melbourne or Sydney or" this sort of thing he is telling all the rotten stinking things he could say. But it was always "the rats, how are you the rats". But there was the 'Desert Rats', that was the English one [7th Armoured Division, British Army]. They called themselves the 'Desert Rats'. They were the armour, the divvy armour of the English not the 'Rats of Tobruk'. We are the 'Rats of Tobruk' that's the difference. And also there

37:30 were a lot of rats there, these bushy tail rats but they are harmless, they didn't go biting you or anything like that.

**Did you take some of this propaganda seriously, or did you laugh it off?**

Well you laughed the same thing off when the Germans flew over us and dropped signs to say come with a white flag and

38:00 do a surrender, you're caught you can't get out everyone's telling you all about what's happening back, they were just going back to Alexandria where we're having that too, where just come out now, wave the white flag and put, well he says you'll be safe and that for the rest of the time, that's what they used to do.

**And what was everybody's reaction to that?**

Well Morshead had sent a result to them somehow it's in the book,

38:30 we couldn't find any white cloth or something like that. But we were too busy with it or something, and he got nowhere there, they tried everything to sort of make us feel that we were beaten. But as I explained I'm saying where I got the idea where we weren't. But I can't remember any of us really scared. I suppose numbers are numbers and you know you help

39:00 each other. But we knew we were there but I suppose we hoped we were going to get relieved. But I don't know how they were going to relieve us.

**Do you think that because there was so many of you in such a precarious situation?**

Well there were 14,000 Australians.

**Do you think that that actually bonded you together?**

Well as I say we were all in the same boat. You are asking

39:30 what the others are doing, get the furrphies going around you know and what's happening. But definitely the blokes on the perimeter, they were the ones that got...they were the main ones. They went out on patrols at night. They had to go out on patrols and go there and make it so that it was bad for the enemy there, they used to go behind their lines you know. They wanted a part for a gun, this is a furrphy, they wanted a gun or something or other and they went and pinched one of the

40:00 things out of their gun and they didn't know they'd taken it. You know artillery, and different things were evidence, were left that they'd been there that night well that's nothing worse for morale than that. But they used to go 40 kilometres a night and go through mine fields and things. That's the thing I can't understand how they can do it.

**That's extraordinary.**

Isn't it?

**Did you see any booby traps around?**

No, no

40:30 only one thing about booby traps you never see them.

**You've got a good point there. Was there a fear of that sort of thing?**

Oh there was but it's always been told about when the Italians pulled out and when they laid booby traps and things there that looked good, a bottle of beer or a bottle of wine, and you'd pick it up and it would blow your arm off and you know things like that. That's the only booby traps I heard of. They did say they poisoned the water

41:00 too.

**Was that right?**

I don't know if they did it or not but they said the water was poisoned but I know it was very, very short. Water was very strict on.

**How were you actually getting hold of water, was it delivered?**

It was delivered yeah. They did have a well there, any well that was going, that was protected well by our, whoever was looking after it the army.

41:30 And that was filled, use that, you couldn't let the taps run and all that sort of jazz. But that is another thing you see, you couldn't live without water but as long as you got a pint, a litre in the side of your... you know, you got some water but then you want to clean your teeth don't ya. You can't have a wash. The English tank [crews]; I've got a video here showing them washing their clothes with petrol,

42:00 because they didn't have any water tanks.

## Tape 4

00:33 **So Ron how did you eventually come to leave Tobruk?**

Well didn't I explain that when I had a meeting with the movement control bloke on the wharf. I'll repeat it if hadn't said it.

**Yeah I just thought we'd overlap a little bit to get rolling again.**

Well I was given advice by someone that came to me when we were in the wadi where we were;

01:00 they knew where we were when they wanted us. I had to report to the movement control officer on the wharf. You were made to walk there, no one said do you want to go there just any part of the day because it is regularly bombed. So I went and found him and then he told me that we were to leave that night. And it was a fine day and the sun was overhead and everything was more or less quiet and he just

01:30 started to tell me all about it and the siren went for the air for the bombers, you could hear them coming, you could see them coming then suddenly they disappeared because as they got higher up or towards you they got into the sunrays because they always come in on the sun so you can't see them they can do it, always midday, in the daytime. And then the ack-ack started firing which is very loud where we were on the wharf because all the big

02:00 ack-ack aircraft defence is handy to the wharfs. And was firing these often and it was loud and then they started to come down and the dive bomber dives doesn't drop the bombs, just got over us and then he hits down at you. And the more, when he hits down whether they got a specific scream on their plane or not it screams, they must do that purposely. And oh this terrible screaming noise coming down, and then there is the noise of ack-ack going

02:30 and he drops this bomb and it levels off and by that time it might be 4 or 5 hundred feet above you and then out she goes like that but always on top of the target, and then the other one follows it. There is one after the other, it depends how many are there, you never know when it is going to stop when you can't see them. But there has been up to 50 come over. When I left they said there was 80 a batch of 80 come over. And they don't go round and spread everywhere they take their target you

03:00 know really try and, if they damage the wharfs that's stopping us isn't it. Because you've got to off load it and all I wanted to do was scramble, but he kept talking to me as though nothing was going on, there was plenty going on in my mind but I heard him through and he didn't move and that's how courageous he was. He was like that whether he's bomb happy or courageous but he was there doing it. He did it right through the siege

03:30 and he had a pair of Lewis guns himself especially that he had, to attack himself. And he told us where to go. And when I went to get there that night with our blokes, we had to get our garb and everything we had to travel with. What we had in our kit bag we never used it the whole time we were there. And then with our pack on back and our rifles and we headed for this spot which was where the jetty was past leading

04:00 towards the entrance to the harbour. When I got there the one I was supposed to everything had been

hit by this raid that came that morning. And it wasn't possible to walk on it, planks were missing and everything. So I went back and I thought what are we going to do now. And it's dark, because all this is in the dark, not in the moon and I could hear someone talking further back where we hadn't gone so we just wanted to have a look and there's the

- 04:30 Australian boat, warship waiting there loading prisoners, wounded onto it and already taken off the stuff they had brought over, stock and shells and armaments and everything they brought over, food. And we were just ready to go because it was in there as quickly as possible and you've only got a certain amount of time to be in and out. And we finally got on
- 05:00 there and welcomed the fact that the sailor was an Australian sailor from the Vendetta, and I remember they gave us soup when we got on there marvellous. Anyway once we got on we were pretty tired naturally and I remember going to sleep and wasn't very comfortable and I slept and I found I was sleeping on a depth charge there ready to be thrown overboard
- 05:30 and I was asleep on them, I didn't care where I slept, I was that tired. But then they told us the boat had to get past a certain spot quickly before dawn because the the Germans were up there with their planes, because they got as far as Sollum, they didn't get into Sollum, they were still being held, and that part never got past Sollum. If we had of been, if Tobruk had fallen and he'd taken over Tobruk, they would have gone straight through Alexandria.
- 06:00 We were the only ones holding them back, not because we were in front of them fighting because if they left us there and went down themselves they would get out of there and hit us in the rear, we would have our rear all over that with them fighting them and they couldn't do it. And what's more their lines of communication were too long, they had to get to port for their boats to land there because the distance was too far to take it. And that's how we got out of Tobruk and we landed in
- 06:30 Mersa Matruh unexpected.

**Why were you going to Mersa Matruh?**

Well that was the shortest space they could off-ship us, and then of course the navy then would wiz off to Alexandria or wherever they got the next load they had to do or go back to Tobruk and wait or well they had to wait for the next dark night, if there is any more dark nights they would have gone back and taken another load off. But they were working all the time; it was marvellous. If it weren't for the navy, Tobruk wouldn't have been, there wouldn't have been a siege.

- 07:00 Because when we were running out of food, they were the ones that brought all the gear in. And all sorts of boats brought them in. There were 22 boats sunk bringing stuff into us, and there were 200, nearly 300 died. And they started and in the end in the finish they were very good.

**Yeah terrible losses. What what was in**

- 07:30 **Mersa Matruh?**

Mersa Matruh was another Italian village, another village, a township on the Mediterranean. It used to be a very popular watering place for the rich for the Monaco and all of these places. They sent the Prince of Wales up after he got married; he had his honeymoon there. Lovely, all the Mediterranean is just one beautiful colour and it's lovely. But Mersa Matruh was an Italian

- 08:00 nice built place but it was all in rubble and nothing was standing there was a couple of Arabs trying to make a living there, but you can imagine what it was like in the peacetime and it still is now very popular.

**I imagine there was horse racing?**

Oh not there.

**No.**

Not there, they might have camel racing or something in the desert but not that sort of going on you know.

**How long were you in Mersa Matruh?**

- 08:30 Oh we were only there for the, we landed and left the same day. We had a train into Alexandria.

**Did you have leave in Alexandria?**

What do you mean have leave, we were on, after we were out of Tobruk we were on leave I was in charge of 19 other ORs and we were looking for where we came from our unit. That was the first thing, go back to where we came from, so we got on. This is interesting, when I got to

- 09:00 Mersa Matruh, there is a English soldier in charge of that part there and they had a NAAFI [Navy, Army and Air Force Institute, British canteen], what they call a NAAFI, that's where the place where the English line up and get beer and all that sort of jazz, the good things in life. And I went over to them and said, "Did you get any messages back we're coming" because they said they were going to leave a case of beer for us. Anyway



09:30 we finished up with a case of beer and it was warm, it is always warm over in those places and we all got, I had 18 ORs and myself, so that is nearly two, a case of beer was about three dozen or more, we got about two bottles each and having not had a drink of grog for so long in Tobruk, they hoed into it, and when it came when the train came in to round them up

10:00 I couldn't hardly get them to get into the train to go to Alexandria after being in Tobruk. So that was quite an incident but I thought I should mention it because I shouldn't have done it but it was nice coming out and having a beer.

**Did they have racing in Alexandria?**

Oh yes we went there too.

**Yeah.**

Yeah when we got to where we came from in Amariya

10:30 or that is the name of the place; it's the staging camp in Alexandria anyway. That's where all our units were embarked for Greece or were going to embark for Greece. Our unit finally didn't embark. They sent me on this mission and I was to return back and get on a boat and go with them to Greece for the campaign going on in there, but Greece was tossed out and all the Australians and New Zealanders got turfed out of Greece by the Germans. Some of them finished in Crete and got killed and captured.

11:00 And the rest of them came back to Alexandria so while this was going on; our unit didn't have to go over. So they went up back to Palestine where they came from and then later went up to the Syria, to the Syrian campaign and they were in that, I wasn't in that, they were, and that's where they were when we were trying to find them, they'd gone. So we were getting looked after when we got back to

11:30 this place. We're getting fed. We decided to go to Alexandria. We still had our pay books when we went into Tobruk, we had our winter uniform on and our pay book always kept in our pocket because there was no spending money in there, but the money is still going in there somewhere in your account. So we all decide to go to Alexandria, and there is a race meeting on. And over there, there is all

12:00 very gregarious tracks in the races. All the horses are beautiful Arab horses and before they race they are led around the enclosure like they do in the ring here. But each horse has got a big Arab or Egyptian holding each side of them, they are dressed up in big white garbs and sashes and they look you know the part. And they led it round and they are taken off and the jockey gets on and most of them are all Arab and Egyptian jockeys

12:30 except one was an English jockey. And the English jockey got leave to ride in the races there and the horse he was on was a bay one and every horse in the race was a white Arab. This was a bay colour horse. And when we went into the front, we didn't know what we were going to back at the races or anything, the race hadn't started.

13:00 **We'll just pause for a moment.**

Now the,

13:30 where was I, oh yes. When I got there.

**You were about to bet on the English chap.**

Yeah we didn't know what horses to back or anything like that. But there was a special part of the stand enclosed and it was obvious that they had a committee or someone and there was a very old good looking Englishman sitting there with his binoculars round his neck and obviously not an Egyptian or a Greek. And I saw him there and I waved to him and he came down. I was cheeky and we were in uniform and most blokes pretty

14:00 good. And I said, "Can you give us a tip" and he's got a leather cover for his race book and he opens it up and he was English, fair dinkum Englishman. And he got this horse race, for, the clips are for wins and the strokes are for places. I went right through his book with him and he marked them. Well all his ticks started to win but they were only short prices you know, odds not worth backing.

14:30 But it came to this main race where this other one was this English jockey, jockey on the horse and it wasn't much of a horse, compared to the Arabs, I think it was an Arab but bay doesn't look as good as grey Arabs. So we went and had a bet on it and we had a bet I suppose equivalent of about 5 pound, or 5 dollars in our Egyptian money, each one had it on it.

**That is a fair bit of money in those days.**

Oh of course it was but we had a fair bit of money in our

15:00 pay book too. And you didn't think what was in your pay book and how you are going to spend it. It was there anyway.

**It was a joint bet between you?**

No each each one had a bet but I had 5 bucks on it and so did a couple of me mates. And anyway the

others we got a bit of money back from the other ones but the prices were odds on nearly all odds moral horses you know.

- 15:30 When he stood his perimeter on there, he started to sweat and you see this sweat you know and he's making a noise like horses make when they drink water you know they go when their trotting, it wasn't water of course, it might have just been things moving up. And because I know a bit about the horses I was brought up on the thoroughbreds. And anyway we got the money on and then the race is on and blow me down coming around the straight it hits the
- 16:00 front and one of our party called, you'll see his photo soon, Tom Lawler, he was away from the winning post but I guarantee he beat the horse past the winning post running down the side following him and the horse won. And oh the horse come in with all lather on his face and Tom runs up to the horse and rubs the lather off its neck and puts it all over and covers himself with
- 16:30 slime. And then we get up there and the old bloke comes and sees me and he's waving to me, he's going, trying to tell me 30 to 1 it paid. And there when they give you the dividend or pay they are going to give you, there is one place where you put in the back of these totes, you get your money and there's rows for those who backed the first one, the second
- 17:00 one and the third one, you know we're the only ones standing in the win post all the others that placed the other ones are in for places and two rows of young people. Of course we are right at the door waiting for the window to open and the the young people there next door to us you know looked like Greeks, because a lot of Greeks in these places apart from Egyptians, well dressed.
- 17:30 And the bloke said, "God" he said, "How'd you back that, how'd you back that?" he said, "It's never won a race in its life." Lawler said, "It won that bloody race". And here we are loaded up.

**So how much did you win?**

I don't know, 30 odds the equivalent of 5 pound or 5 bucks whatever it was, it was 5 something it wasn't just akas or silver or like that but 30 times 50,

- 18:00 that's 150 well that's...you can buy the bank for that. So we decided to have a night out on the town and we picked the best restaurant in Alexandria and went there and we had the time of our lives.

**Can you describe the restaurant?**

Oh it was beautiful, oh it was good thing you know, they got marble floors and dancing and we went and grabbed some young girls that were there and looked like they might dance with us and put the hard word on them

- 18:30 and they did. But it was pretty awkward on those marble floors, dancing with steel heel caps in your boots, we weren't in dancing shoes, we were in boots. And I think one bloke did slip over on the what's his name.

**What were you drinking?**

Oh the drinks were pretty easy to get and pretty cheap. The one we fell for was a Collins drink, gin and...a gin Collins drink, and we

- 19:00 were getting it at the equivalent price of about a shilling. Oh because that's the same as in Palestine, not many people drink alcohol, but the drinks here were very cheap, no problem there.

**So did you have a terrible hangover the next day?**

No beautiful, I had a great time, good food, the Italians, the Egyptian food is nice.

**What was the food?**

Well its all different things well, I'll tell you what how good the food is.

- 19:30 After this instance I was telling you about, I got back to Cairo on leave one day, when I was doing, I'll follow another story later on. But the people I was staying with in Melbourne in the hotel, Dorothy friends of the daughters, they went for world trip just before the war broke out. And they were very well known socialites and when they went to Cairo they stopped,
- 20:00 that part of the way they stopped in Cairo and then an introduction to a very fashionable woman that ran very high-class guesthouses in Cairo. And people that stayed there during the war were like the generals and all those sort of people. They gave me an introduction to her if I ever got to Cairo, I didn't think I'd ever see her, and gave her a name and told me where she'd lived and referred them to them. So I went and saw this woman, she was a very nice woman, she was
- 20:30 an Aussie. And I said, "One thing you could do for me," I said, "They tell me they've got very nice scent here, I'd like to buy some and take it home if I ever get home, could you put me onto the right place I could buy it or get it" and she got it for me, a big bottle of violets, you know, you get concentrated violets. And it cost me very little for what it was worth.
- 21:00 And I got this violet and I talked about, "Where could I get a decent restaurant or something", she put

me onto this address for this restaurant. So this day with a mate of mine, we were both on leave together. We go down this side street and can't see any actual things up for restaurants, and we come to a shop that's got loaves of bread, selling loaves of bread in the window and there is a lot of people going in buying loaves of bread. But it's the same

- 21:30 number that she told me to go to. So I looked at it, I couldn't see anything so I went back and said, "Do you know of any restaurant of any round here?" She said, "Yes that's down the passage and through the door" and it was just like the Arabs and everything getting their loaves of bread and going out this thing that, the windows of the street, and we walked down there and you honestly you think it's Aladdin's cave or Aladdin's loft. This beautiful restaurant
- 22:00 with chandeliers and garden waiters and beautiful things and Arabs and not a soldier in the place, only Europeans mainly, not even Egyptians, a lot of Greeks and see in Cairo most of the commerce is done by Greeks, not Arabs and they live well too and they were there and I made my name selected to this woman to the head of the
- 22:30 dining room, oh big bloke he was and he made us comfortable. We didn't even know what to order. So we sat down and he told us what to eat first, and then he must of said something and he said, "Yeah" and bowls and bowls of stuff came in front of us. And then I still don't know it was damn tasty, beautiful, but it turns out that they eat everything, you know a penis
- 23:00 off a bull or anything or offal how they do it. And then you wouldn't recognise the cooking; you'd never be able to do it yourself. But in the next table there were about six of about 18, 19, 22, 23 group, very attractive girls and young blokes and they were sitting down, they were going into the things and the thing was crowded the place. But we were the only ones in khaki, two blokes with this beautiful
- 23:30 lighting and chandeliers and things. And I couldn't see, there was this one bloke that kept going up and going into the toilet, there was a toilet there a wash basin and toilet, he kept going in there and he came back and he started eating again and he'd be going again. We commented on the fact that he must have a pretty weak bladder or something. But I didn't wake up to it because they eat with their hands, and we were doing it too, he told us how to eat, they eat with their
- 24:00 hands, and they go in and wash their hands after each meal. And then they come back and go on the next one but he's doing this all the time so that explains that. But we never told anyone about that and I don't suppose another army bloke was in there, was never told.

**Kept it your secret?**

Well, she told me in confidence because I was a friend of hers in Melbourne and you know there would be hell to blaze if the

- 24:30 army started to break in there.

**Sounds like a wonderfully unique dining experience you would be hard to come by an experience like that today.**

You'd never have it again in your life. Because it was definitely meals that you wouldn't know how to order, because you are ordering something in Arab or Egyptian and you are finding out that you are eating something that you'd throw in the bin.

**And a place like that would probably be impossible to find in today's world.**

Yeah. But it was very good though, it was terrific, all the bread was beautifully

- 25:00 made and the glassware you know it was top, because of course in peacetime it was tops. In peacetime the Shepherd's Hotel is there still. Well that's where all the officers went through there, Shepherds, you saw, have you ever seen Lawrence of Arabia [film starring Peter O'Toole] well remember when he went in the hotel that time and all the officers, that was the officer's mess. Well that was Shepherds; I've been in there too, but I haven't been dining in there and I just went in there to ask someone where I could get something
- 25:30 from the office.

**Did you say that hotel is still there?**

Yeah Shepherds, yeah.

**So it was filmed on location at Shepherds Hotel?**

Beg your pardon?

**That scene of the film was shot on location?**

Yeah that was definitely Shepherds, I've seen him come up there and that was Shepherds. Well though, most of those old hotels are still living, Raffles [Hotel] is running still in Singapore, all these old ones are still running; the one in Colombo is still there.

**They are certainly majestic**

26:00 **places aren't they?**

Oh they are marvellous, when you see them in early pictures, you know in the theatre years ago, they are still the same ones. But the one, this is digressing a bit, the one in Singapore my brother, son went there because he had his coffee outside, there was sort of an attachment out there where you could get coffee, but you couldn't get in. He decided to go and order a cup of coffee in there, you are not allowed to go into the dining room or stay there because you got to be referred.

26:30 But he went into actual Raffles in Singapore, and his coffee cost him oh 100 bucks or something very expensive and his wife took a photograph of him having it. So he said he can always show me he was in Raffles.

**How long were you in Alexandria before you had to move on?**

I suppose we were there for about two or three weeks. I had to find, we were so...

27:00 I was the only boss, I was the sergeant in charge of them and we feed ourselves, we tried to find out where our units were.

**Was there prostitution in Alexandria?**

There are prostitutes everywhere if you want to find them, but they were controlled. The army would be stupid to go to any prostitutes that weren't controlled by the army's but some did, but most of them got very...

27:30 When we came over from Australia, the first experience of that was going to happen to us when we got leave in Colombo.

**Before, I suppose we can wait until you're on your way back to Australia.**

Well when the Queen Mary dropped us off on the boat we were in.

**This is on the way up?**

This is on the way to.

**Yeah I thought you meant on the way back.**

The Queen Mary didn't stop there but when we got into the

28:00 lighter that took us onto the, the Lancashire here that took us onto Suez, it called into the port first at Colombo and we got leave. And everyone had been on leave and when we came back onto the boat the medico there put every bloke through a medical test.

28:30 You go through, flashes, you'd be waiting at the doorway going onto the boat and there'd be a copper there and a couple of helpers, flash it, and you had to flash it and do a little bit of exercise to see that you hadn't caught any disease. That's when they went on their own you see.

**And that is every single troop?**

Everyone that came on that boat on the way back, they did that after a certain number of days. They didn't do it as soon as they got on, they had to wait a few days to you know take effect

29:00 if they had it. But all the time we were on the boat we had lectures on cleanliness and watch your rifle and all this sort of jazz, as though the Arabs are going to come in and pinch your rifle, if I had to put it down or go to sleep without taking the bolt out or something you know. The other thing was about hygiene; about if you had to go to, get satisfied

29:30 go into the army control works, there you got a certificate and they gave you the pros and cons of it and if you did get the disease you'd have an excuse, because if you got the disease and you didn't have an excuse they'd stop your pay and send you home. And that's very bad on married people.

**It wouldn't go down very well with the wife would it?**

No because they'd have to say that you're not getting any money or any further for your pay

30:00 through the army savings and your husband is coming home.

**With a venereal disease.**

Yeah another thing that was very bad in the army was getting sunstroke, sunburn. You are supposed to protect yourself from sunburn.

**I imagine that would have been a bit of a hazard in the desert?**

It is not only a hazard, it puts you out of action if you get badly sunburned.

**Where what was your next operational role after**

30:30 **you had arrived in Alexandria?**

I didn't know at that stage. And we finally got back to Palestine and our unit. And we got back and they weren't running around the streets cheering us or anything like that, they were quiet. The other blokes you know, they were interested in where we were going, but they weren't very interested because they had missed it, they weren't in it and we were the only ones in it.

31:00 The rest of our unit didn't go to Tobruk.

**Were they surprised to see you again?**

Some of them were yes definitely because they didn't know where we were.

**What did they suspect?**

Well if you're missing, you're missing. Our program, Tobruk Sun for example, we got a program out that gives you casualties, we had over 3,000 killed, 200 missing. Even in Tobruk 200 missing.

31:30 And 600 or 6,000 whatever is prisoners and a total, our total for the Middle East was 7 or 8,000 killed. And so on and so on and so on are missing so we don't know where they are. They could be blown up or anything.

**What operations did you return to when you returned to Palestine?**

Well things hadn't changed there

32:00 much, it was less than a year from when we got there, we left Christmas Day from Melbourne, from Sydney and it only took about 13 days to get over plus the time we took to get to Palestine, so it would be the end of January starting in February say we were in Palestine and then I had to get away to start to get this camp ready for them to come to Greece and I left there

32:30 on the 6th of April and we left on Christmas Day, that's only four months. And then I was in there for about another five months what's his name we got back and it was getting onto October, November or something by the time I got to Palestine, well not even a year we had been away. All these things happened to me in that time. And then we got, my mob that I was with there, they

33:00 kept us together because we were recovery and we were, not sort of not ostracized, but we were anything hard they gave us. And we had to be represented to a place called Tel-El-Kabir in the middle of Egypt. It is a big base camp there with workshops and things, and they transferred us there and I was there, same old gag, no officer with me. I was in charge; I had to report back to head office in Palestine. They got these

33:30 blokes to do it because we were professional hard easy drivers anything, we were experienced. And then they start putting us on jobs there. There was no action there at all, we never seen a plane go over or any action, there was a couple but there were planes dropping magnetic bombs, mines into the Suez Canal. And

34:00 a magnetic mine is where they drop them in and every ship goes over them makes a click on a bomb, might be two might be 20, they would never know. But one day on the 21st of the 3rd one blows it up that boat. And that is about the only thing you got watched, the only thing was, no they didn't come over attacking you, they didn't come south much of Sollum,

34:30 because when the siege of Tobruk was on, it held Rommel back. And it wasn't until El Alamein that things got closer to Alexandria.

**Were you in, where were you when El Alamein was raging?**

When El Alamein was raging, we were just about on our way home.

**Had you had any more operations from Palestine prior to El Alamein and since you'd returned to?**

I didn't go to El Alamein.

**No but I'm saying prior to El Alamein and since returning to Alexandria did you have any further**

35:00 **operations when you went up to Palestine?**

No. Palestine was peacetime, there was absolutely no chance, the ones that were watching themselves there were the Jews because they had the kibbutzes you know the kibbutzes, well they were all over the place, and on the boundary of the kibbutzes they had machine gun section, they had their posts

35:30 all around the big farm because the Arabs used to come and do what they are doing now to the Israelis, and their problem was with the Israelis and the Arabs that's all that had been going on, but nothing else was there you just get leave into Tel Aviv and places like that, it was just a camp

36:00 and you've got to keep training going.

### **So what were your orders from there?**

Well we got orders to move this crowd, I had about 20, there could have been about 50 altogether finished up in a place called Tel-El-Kabir and that was where we were professional drivers of anything that wanted them, that had the authority. And our jobs were nameless and

36:30 often. Like go and pick up a load of trucks and shells or something like that, live shells and move to a certain place, or go to this place and do this. The last thing that they ever had to do was coming back from this to Australia when the Japs thing was on and that's when Curtin [John Curtin, then Australian Prime Minister] said we had to come back some of us, but the others were in El Alamein didn't come back, and what was left there was

37:00 sent back to Australia to go to the Pacific.

### **What did you think when you heard that Japan had entered the war?**

Well it didn't surprise us, but it was a surprise because a lot of things happened at the same time to us in Tobruk. At the same time Japan went over to Russia and made a pact with them while we were in Tobruk. And that means there was a pact with Germany and we

37:30 didn't know where we were and then you've got this Joyce over the air giving us all this propaganda. And it wasn't long after that that the Japanese that went over to do the business with Russia went back to China over to Japan. And the Russians were pretty smart, they gave him the wrong spiel anyway when he was over there, they didn't tell him what really was going to happen but it sort of made things difficult, and then there was Pearl Harbour. Everything was

38:00 going on, you didn't know where you were until Pearl Harbour and then they found out they had to go in the war.

### **So what happened when Curtin gave the orders for troops to go back to Australia?**

Well he didn't give us troops to come back to Australia. We needed to come back. And we got the movement order for this crowd of ours, this 20 or 30 whatever it was, and we were a section of the field park. Another section

38:30 like ours was up in the 7th up in the, I said it, against the French.

### **The Vichy French?**

No not the Vichy, part of the Vichy yeah, but up in Syria, another section like ours was up in Syria. Another section didn't go to Tobruk, they stayed there to go to Alexandria with our unit, they didn't go to Alexandria with our unit because our unit...to

39:00 Crete with our unit because our unit didn't go there, they went to Palestine and then they went up to Syria, and that section went up there also, a recovery section like ours. We got the wrong order. The order to go on that boat back to wherever we had to go was supposed to be delivered to that recovery, which they didn't come, they got a recovery which put them into El Alamein show and we got the one to go on the boat.

39:30 And when we got to loading onto the boat which is called the SS America, it was an auxiliary cruiser, it was a luxury liner converted into an auxiliary cruiser, it was half the size of the Queen Mary and had the same number of troops 5,000. We get on there and they all got cabins to go to, you know they ring up our names and things, cabin cabin cabin, they all went through and the bloke is ready to sail and we're in the quarterdeck of the boat which is all

40:00 steel and just like this room and big, you know, piled into it, they close everything and we are away. And we are fully packed up sitting in there just waiting; we are thinking well what are they going to do with us. We sat there for the whole day until the next day and the Yanks themselves are feeding us. We lost our contact with our unit and everything because our other unit was on the boat, the rest of our unit

40:30 that wasn't in El Alamein. So I got sick of this and I demanded to see the CO of the boat. And they took me along eventually to it and I entered the poshy part of the boat, the cabin looked like you know first class there, I knock on the door, it's wide open and blow me dead there is about four or five of me own officers of the unit drinking champagne and the CO of the boat is

41:00 our own CO. And of course I go in and bluster in and made a bit of a false move and the bloke that is supposed to be looking after us, one of the lieutenants that hadn't been long promoted, told me to be quiet. And then the CO says, "We will attend to it, we will attend to that, Hatch" and away I go. Within bleeding half an hour, we got rounded up and our

41:30 cabins were there because the other crowd hadn't arrived on the boat and they were vacant, they had the wrong section of our recovery and we got the recovery movement instead of them and that's how we got back, that's how we were going, they still stayed back where we were going, they still stayed on the El Alamein show.

**That was a coup, anyway we'll just need to wind up there and change tapes thanks Ron before**

we continue with your story.

## Tape 5

00:30 **The living conditions on the boat on the way back to Australia and you were saying that they were really quite extraordinary?**

Say that again.

**You were saying that the conditions on the boat on the way back to Australia were really quite extraordinary?**

This is on the one when we came back on the American boat.

**Yeah.**

When did I say that?

**Oh I thought you just mentioned that to Julian [interviewer] in the last tape?**

No, no, I never said, I was just saying how we got on it.

**Oh right.**

We got on the boat in

01:00 error, not our error.

**Yes.**

The movement order was given to us as a section of our own unit. And it should have gone to the ones that were up in Syria and we were supposed to go to El Alamein. But when you got on that boat, every person that moved on that American boat had had a ticket given to them of the cabin they were going to. So we got no

01:30 cabin, no ticket and we were left there when the boat sailed. And that's when I complained to the CO of the boat. And I found out that the CO of the boat was our own CO and all our officers there were drinking champagne and cocktails in his cabin while we're down below. And that's where I made a fuss and he arranged straightaway that we got out of that into these cabins that we were not supposed to have but they were beautiful cabins.

**So your conditions on there were pretty good**

02:00 **in comparison to what you'd experienced being a rat in Tobruk?**

No because the one that started me off was the Queen Mary. And I still had four of us only in an A class, first class cabin with ensuite bathroom. This also was a two-bedroom cabin made into four with an ensuite bathroom, it was a luxury liner made into a luxury cruiser, Americans.

**Anything that comes with it's own bathroom after being in Tobruk must have been a pretty good thing?**

Oh in

02:30 Tobruk we never had a tap or anything, no we never had anything. I could show you that photo in there but you got it there but we weren't dirty. If it had rained I would have been wet I don't know what would have happened. You'd find the weather was dry all the time.

**And what did you do to pass your time on your way back to Australia on this lovely ship?**

Yeah what we did was this is a very interesting thing. I told you earlier the place

03:00 that when we had our meals on the Queen Mary everyone sat down at tables and the officers were in the first class and I was in the first class being a sergeant. This was absolutely American run, as it should be run. When you, during the day you were out of the cabin, what you did after that was your business you got up on the deck and sunbathed and all like that. There was boat drill all the time.

03:30 That is where putting up mock ones, and there were submarines there and all this sort of jazz, and you had to go to your station. These were going through all the trips of the Mary and this, you didn't know what time of the day it was or whatever it was, you had to be there quickly. They taught you how to do what's going to happen if it's true, so that was quite good. Now the meal, they had rooms made for the dining areas for everybody, there wasn't a difference between an officer and a private. But all the dining

04:00 rooms were made to...the rooms had picture shows and picture things and big libraries and whatever was taken out and it was made into a dining room. But the only difference was the tables were suspended from the roof. You had to stand up to eat. Now you see the point of that, going through the Red Sea and all that, we had to get out of the heat. When you're sitting down your meals take longer

and you talk.

04:30 If you form there, you're waiting for the other bloke to finish, when you're sitting at the table and it's hot and things like that, you're not going to talk if you're standing up all the time, that makes it worse, you want to get out as quick as possible. And they had half the size of the boat of the Queen Mary and they fed 5,000 troops faster than the Queen Mary did. And how they did it was this. You get the blast into your cabin, so many times before the meal.

05:00 Along the passages the boat are red and blue lines right through, every passage, every passage has up whatever deck it was. You come out of your cabin, say it's the end of your meal, a meal you're going to get on the blue line, everyone stands on the blue line that is going to go through and get a meal, you had to bring your own pannikins and then a shuffle along that boat 5,000 troops, officers and everyone. They went down and down and down up

05:30 to the bottom where the kitchen was and you went through the kitchen and there's all the cooks there with everything on the things like a smorgasbord thing and putting everything on your plate what you wanted everything like that. And out the door and then you followed the blue line, get on the blue line and then you go up and out and that's how they fed them. And when they got you out, you knew which dining room to go to, you go to the dining room and that's how quickly they did it and how professionally they did it.

06:00 **And what was the food actually like?**

Good, very good, and so was the Queen Mary, I was in with the sergeants, but I think the men had just. The food on the one that took us from Trincomalee off the Mary to Suez that wasn't too good.

**What was wrong with that?**

Well that was a contract biline contract that transfer troops like we were being transferred and they'd been doing it since the

06:30 First World War and you'd swear that they still had the same cooks and material because they weren't very good. And they had most of the stuff like eggs, pickles, you know like they pickle them and they go bluey when they're cooked and they've got a different smell about them. And of course as a sergeant I used to have to do my turn in the mess where the men was eating, "Any complaints" because they complain about number one the food.

07:00 and then you'd have to sit down and make sure that they weren't just exaggerating. The other thing was the condition of the air, because there was no air conditioning or anything like that but how they used to get air down into these hulls where all the men were when they ate was a big shute of canvas it was heading into the breeze you know, and the air would go down that shute just to sort of into the hull, that was the only fresh air they got and at night you were not allowed to...

07:30 not a light could be shone going from anywhere. A light at sea you could it for a mile. And I know we had a sergeant's mess, we had a little room that was a sergeant's mess and oh the smoke, blokes used to smoke in those days you couldn't see the room or each other practically with the smoke. If you wanted to go out, there was a big blanket held and you had to go through a blanket first and then you close and then you open the door to get out on the deck so

08:00 it wouldn't show the light. And a bloke would get shot if he struck a match to light a cigarette on the deck because you know it shines a light too. That proved wasn't too good.

**What were the Americans like?**

Well I didn't have much to do with America. I had some very interesting men with Americans but not as a sergeant. When I got back to Australia we eventually...

08:30 we were going to Australia but we didn't know, they didn't tell us where we were going when we got on that boat. And after I climbed on they told us where we were going they said, "We're going to..." not Indonesia,

**It would be Jakarta would it?**

"Jakarta" that's right it was Jakarta, "We're going to Jakarta". The 5,000 troops are going to go to Jakarta but before we got there the Japan campaign had come over and they diverted the boat to Adelaide.

09:00 Now four days before we got there, Adelaide didn't know we were coming. They didn't know we were coming, there was no camps for the 5,000 and we were billeted in private homes.

**Just before you get to that, I want to ask you about when you found out about the news when the Japs were moving down. Was that told to you onboard the American ship?**

It wasn't about moving down anywhere. They'd landed in Jakarta.

**Right.**

They landed,



09:30 that they controlled Jakarta.

**And what was your reaction to that when you heard that news?**

Oh we were thankful I suppose. We you know, we didn't know the war, when they said, you heard what the Japanese was doing, we knew that but we didn't think that there'd be any more troops going to that area which there weren't.

**So you thought that being posted to Jakarta was actually a bit of a silly idea in the first place?**

I didn't know what to make because we didn't know what was going on.

10:00 All there was, he brought us back to support them didn't he, support the defence of Australia and that's what they considered was defence and that was it. In my company I was in, the officers they may of, where these blokes drinking champagne, they might have known about that, but that didn't get to me at all.

10:30 **You seem to have a bit of resentment to these blokes who were drinking champagne?**

Well I was in this regard, one of them was our own officers and I finished up as a major and I knew going through the rank what you should do and what you shouldn't do, particularly as an officer with the troops. Not that I'd called them or anything like that. But you don't leave those that are responsible of boarding ships and things like that, you make sure that they got a decent bed or something before you got one. And this CO didn't.

11:00 But I was very hostile at him.

**What did you say to him?**

I didn't say much to him at all; I got even though.

**How's that?**

Oh it's a funny thing. This is diverting now.

**That's OK, we can divert occasionally.**

Well this is towards it. Once we got to Adelaide, we landed in Adelaide and then we were put down to these houses and fortunately for me and these other blokes, these 20 that you see over in that

11:30 picture had a good time with me I tell ya. We were in a very nice street, in fact the big boss of the brewery lived next door and the other woman was a widow and she had a son and had two vacant flats where Jack Sutcliffe and myself we went in there. And they looked after us marvellous those people, those billets. But then we landed and to keep yourselves busy

12:00 or active or to keep them out of trouble, that would be the best way of describing it, is to keeping them marching somewhere and route marching. And that's all we did when we first started there around Adelaide. But not around the streets, up the blinking Mt Lofty to keep us going and we still had armaments; we still had our cartridges with our live ammunition. And pubs were open only

12:30 for so many hours during the day in Adelaide then, they weren't any long hours and one of the route marches we made, we'd take our rest somewhere near the pub that would be open. And of course they were in this, I wasn't in this at all. But one of the blokes there got a bit full, when they haven't been drinking for a long time they can be stupid and he started knocking bottles off the shelf with his rifle in there.

13:00 Of course the provosts came down and took his magazine, out of magazine, and thumped him on the chin and broke his jaw and he finished in hospital and out of the army. And that was the only incident that happened there. But mainly they were all, didn't do that, but this stupid bugger did. But then we all had to do a job, so the next job we got town picquet. They picked units out to be the town picquet.

13:30 I was the sergeant of the town picquet.

**What is a town picquet?**

Well you go around the town, it's like a provost.

**Right.**

Make sure there's no mischief being done and you're troops are behaving themselves and all that.

**So clearly not a job that you really want?**

No one wants it but I had to go back to report during the day to the head provost of Adelaide, "All's quiet, no problems". And this particular time I went back there was a bloke posted at the Post Office in Adelaide. And

14:00 I went back and said, "All's well" and everyone's all well, and back I go to the... "All's well". He said, "Yeah" he said, "The biggest fight amongst the troops in history of Adelaide is on". The navy and the

army got stuck into the Yanks whatever it was; there was a fight out of the Post Office. When I told the bloke "Why did you give me a bum steer for?" he said, "What can I do, carry a bayonet and ask them to stop?" that is all they had for cover, just a bayonet, that was wound around their wrist, not a

- 14:30 provost but a picquet, he said, "I went into the pub". That wasn't a good job. But then we had to go to a certain football ground and for the first time since I left Australia, our unit would be as a whole apart from the ones in El Alamein. Everyone, the officers, the COs, the whole lot to meet for the first time.
- 15:00 But we've all got to come from localities, different streets. And the order was it was winter, this is April, it was cold and it was raining, but it wasn't raining the day the order was given. Summer dress, OK, I'm the sergeant, Terry Ring is our officer, the bloke that didn't come and look after us when we were on the boat, he's our officer. So one of the
- 15:30 blokes of our orderly room they came to us and said, "What are they going to do now it's raining?" "Winter uniforms because it's winter". That means your uniform and your greatcoat. And it rained like stinking hell. We were the last to march onto the field. Now the orderly well he never told our lieutenant it was winter, he naturally thought it came from the right, not me well the mess.
- 16:00 We all line up to march and he marches first with the officers and he's standing with the officers and then we march through the gates and there he is, the only officer in winter dress and all the others, and we march through and we're nice and warm and we've got the coats on and things like that. And of course as we walked past the other sections of the other
- 16:30 blokes there is about 3 or 500 there and they're all laughing, and we get in there and gee I thought we were in trouble because I thought they would change it from that. No one in their life would think it would be from summer to winter like that, when they ask for winter. Well we line up. And then comes the CO for final examining and every face in that place he comes up and he's in his short trousers and his what's his name, summer dress, and he looked at me and I just looked
- 17:00 straight at him and I never said a word. And he never said a word to me and we went on and we finished up there that's nothing came of it. Later on in my story he does come into it again.

#### **So what happened next?**

Well we were there for not very long after that. Not long after that at all and we got a movement order we had to go to Ipswich, same mob I've got. But we had to go on a train

- 17:30 the passageway down to Melbourne that way but to Murray on the Murray railway line there. We went down, we caught the train and we left at night. That was another thing, trying to leave. All these people that got so friendly with us we get loaded this mob onto these trucks to go and they're all getting that is when the champagne flew, they're all giving them champagne and drinks and got very
- 18:00 very full and lining them up to get them on and get away and we got away. We get down the train and we all haven't got seats and we're on this train and we've got to put our groundsheet on the floor of the passengers and our bed to lie on. We lay on the groundsheet in this place on this train right through to Ipswich Queensland, back way. And
- 18:30 another funny incident happened there, we only had our travelling bully beef and biscuits rations but it stoped at one of these stations where it's got a railway dining room. We all get out of the things and they say, "Look Sarge, something to eat" I said, "Oh it could be." I looked at all the tables are set with knives and forks and they go, they're in there like a rush. We finish up we eat there and it turns out we weren't supposed to eat
- 19:00 there. But we had this beautiful lunch in there and then we went on and we finished up in Ipswich.

#### **So what happened in Ipswich?**

Well Ipswich was another part of our unit and that was the part that had the equipment and trucks to supply the workshops with all the car parts they wanted to get these transport on, broken down transport, and they were quite big like

- 19:30 a big workshop, not a workshop, like a wholesale place that supplied the broken parts for the workshop a very important part and they had about five or six of these trestle things and they were going on to New Guinea. And I don't think, yes they did, New Guinea, and that's where we finished. And we were there about 25 of us and nothing to do except tidy the place up for them,
- 20:00 with all the little bits and pieces around the place and route march around the suburbs. Come back to your camp, have your lunch, route marches in the afternoon, just to keep them occupied.

#### **Is there any chance of you getting put into a new unit?**

Where?

#### **In Ipswich?**

No, no, no I was still in the unit, if I stayed three I would have been in New Guinea, I'm sure of that. Because everyone went to New Guinea from there eventually but I wasn't part of their

20:30 wholesale selling parts. I was the one that went and got the vehicles.

**Right.**

I was a vehicle man; I went and picked up the vehicle that was broken down, get it, towed it on a low loader or whatever it is, give it to the workshops come back, get it fixed up and take it back to them. I never had to walk far when I was in the army, I can assure you of that. Then we were on this route march and we come back and the sergeant is my friend as I mentioned him

21:00 before, Sutcliffe. We were in having a beer, and when you're marching and that, you got a full brigade with the full breast blazers and everything, it was a hot stinking day. And I was in there and I was drinking a beer out of the bottle and he was drinking a bottle, had me tin hat with a thing at the back of me. And I was wanted in the orderly room. I had to go and there's a brigadier-general there and he asked me,

21:30 he knew who I was and he started asking me questions, what did I do before I joined the army and all this sort of jazz. I told him he said, "Yeah, yeah, mmm, mmm. Well we want you to sign this," I said, "What is it?" He said, "A22." I said, "What does that do?" "Oh that's an application for a commission" Oh I sign it, "That's all". I go back and Sutcliffe says, "What's happened

22:00 now?" I said, "Bugged if I know, some bloke there is talking about a commission or something". Well two days later it came through and I'm a lieutenant. I haven't even got the pips on me shoulder. And one of me good mates there Howard Day, he was a very good singer for the unit and he used to be singing these different things and he always used to take me to get me leave because I was his manager you see. He comes up to me absolutely no more than two minutes I've got me blinking thing on the notice board.

22:30 He said, "Sign a leave pass for us, we want to go tonight and see" I said, "What?" He says, "A leave pass" I said, "Gee you're making it a bit bloody hot, after all they haven't even put the pips on me shoulder yet". Anyway I signed them and off he went. But I was only there about two or three days and they transferred me to Sydney and then they transferred me to Perth. I didn't come to Perth I came to, out at Mullaloo

23:00 there the train pulled up there and dropped us out and there was the makings there of a camp; there was some sheds there for cookhouses and it was wet and raining and cold and miserable. It was just about 4 o'clock in the morning. I still don't know what's going on. So I thought we got to find something and we got our own groundsheet and a blanket and things like that and make the best we can. And there were tents there too. There was four boys, but it went very

23:30 badly for everyone for the first few days. Then we get there is an officer coming out to see us and, blow me, it was the CO of the unit that I spoke to on the boat telling him about our condition and he was big boss in headquarters in there. And he was up; our unit was part of his control. And

24:00 I said, "What's going on?" He said, "You've got to form a new unit called the infantry troops, 3 LoC [Line of Communications] Corps Infantry Troops Field Park, you've got to get it trained, you've got to do it, you got the power to promote up to warrant officer and recommend warrant officers. I said, "I'm a sergeant, oh sorry a Lieutenant". I didn't have another; I had a corporal,

24:30 one corporal in that mob and that was out of the blokes I knew. And I had to train them and I finally had this unit trained in the state farm in the Wongan Hills. And I promoted and I got the whole, and most of the sergeants I promoted all became captains, lieutenants and captains right through and it got bigger and bigger. That's how I got to Ipswich and that's how I got away from it.

25:00 **And what were you actually posted to in order to get away from Adelaide, sorry Ipswich?**

As a lieutenant. To report to the WA [Western Australia] Line of Communications, which is where the Swan Barracks was.

**Can you explain what your role there was?**

I didn't know at that stage until that officer came out to meet us at where we got put off by the railway. Then he told me

25:30 that I was to form the unit and be the CO of the unit from scratch. And that's what I did, we got new equipment, new vehicles everything and we were there in Swan Hills and the workshops was in the next paddock to us training their men and then they promoted me to captain very shortly after that. And then I was on leave one day at the Pavilion Hotel,

26:00 which was called the some other name now it wasn't the Pavilion, you know the one that was there that got bigger. Now and I was in the cocktail bar, and I hadn't been to Perth much and I was drinking there, and a provost come up to me he said, "You better get back to your camp" and I said, "What's going on?" He said, "The Japs have been sighted coming down the coast". And they were a convoy of Japanese were coming down past up north.

26:30 And we all had to go back to camp and of course the rustle went round in Perth that there was, and housing was being changed, the hotel there at Scarborough changed hands for practically nothing. And

a big battle the Americans had won changed the war and the Japanese Navy turned around and went back. And they never ever came back here again. And we as a 3 LoC Corps another army

27:00 which I was part of, we went right up to past Geraldton and everything was in order for a stoush if they landed. But then when it was all over, we were going to be disbanded. So our unit was brought back to Perth onto the flat tops of the train over the Nullarbor back to a big base in Victoria, Bandiana [near Albury-Wodonga]. Our unit was disbanded

27:30 and I'm a floating captain. I haven't got a unit I'm disbanded. But one thing I did before we disbanded, every unit had a comfort fund which they had money which they'd keep in there to buy for their luxuries. We still had a thousand bucks in it. So this wasn't going so we had a party, a big party.

**Well done.**

Very well. Now I'm floating around and then

28:00 I get the movement order to go to Charters Towers, never heard of it. And everyone is saying, "What a place to go, right in the centre of Queensland a hundred miles from Townsville inland".

**Gee.**

Never heard of it. Well when I got to Townsville a sedan car with a sergeant meet me, they took me a hundred miles to Charters Towers, and then I get to Charters Towers.

28:30 Few houses, no you couldn't see any movement, goats everywhere, beautiful bougainvillea until I got to the showgrounds. And on the showgrounds was the headquarters of the army and I was put in charge of vehicles, vehicle park in Charters Towers to take over vehicles from the American Army which had just been consumed by the

29:00 battle of the Coral Sea.

**Right.**

And the Coral Sea battle was run by a system of ex PMG-type machine, what do you call them, operators, that ran this air traffic control from Charters Towers, all surrounded by big heavy fences, guards, these girls

29:30 and the Yanks, and there was a big air force there, two air forces and it was all Yanks. And here am I taking these hundreds of blinking vehicles over to the Australian Army and it got so big that I had to go to Queensland as well, to Townsville. I had the two parks but I've only got a small group of soldiers in here doing this and they've got to do mechanical work on these things to get them in some sort order and put them in line, there is

30:00 lines and lines of these vehicles.

**And they were all American vehicles?**

Mostly American, yeah.

**Where had they come from?**

Americans commandeered every possible thing when they came to Australia, their own vehicles, a lot of ours too, but it was the air force was there but the army. And then it came out that no officer was to drive his own vehicle.

30:30 That came out for every officer in the army virtually. And here I got this crowd and a bloke that does the mechanical work has got to go on guard duty twice a week anyway as well, we didn't have enough guards there is a big place to guard. People are breaking in and pinching things and so on. So I wrote to the general in charge in Canberra, in Queensland. I think it was Sturdee. To General Sturdee [Lieutenant-General Sir Vernon Sturdee

31:00 for his eyes only on the envelope. And said that recognising courtesy that officers should not drive their own vehicles, I am objecting on the grounds that I'm responsible for over 6,000 or whatever the vehicles were and I think the Commonwealth Government think me fit enough to be responsible for over

31:30 hundreds of vehicles, I'm quite capable of looking after me own and that it will give place for people that badly need staff even to be on guard. Stop, sealed, for his eyes only and I post this, it got taken away. I get a ring from Townsville and he said, "I got something here for you" I said, "What".

32:00 He said, "You got the authority that Captain R J Hatch VX9656 is allowed to advise all provosts that he is allowed to drive his own vehicle and take any passengers he wish and be responsible for them" well that was that, but then I get a ring from a colonel from Townsville one

32:30 day, I can go and drive and park in the street and everything. And he said, "Are you going to the nurses' do?" I said, "What nurses do?" He said, "There is a nurses' do on." I said, "I don't know anything about it but I might, I don't know it's on". He said, "If you go, will you give us a lift?" I am to give him a lift to the nurses do because I can drive my own car so that

- 33:00 didn't work too well with other officers. But straight after that I got made it a majority because they came, oh that's right they sent out another person from the cabinet who must have been due to that letter I wrote to the OC [Officer Commanding] and these blokes were picked from businesses, things like Broken Hill or things like that were doing
- 33:30 work for the army, going to camps and seeing if everything was in order. And this bloke came round to see us and when he came, he came to examine what I was telling you about the shortage of staff and things like that and I told him I was and said, "I was glad you went and had a look and saw it" and about a week after that, they made me a major. And that's how I became a major.

**It sounds like you are having a fairly pleasant sort of a time there at Charters Towers?**

It was marvellous, it was really good, I didn't mind Charters Towers at all.

- 34:00 Because I was the town major.

**Well you must have had a reasonable sort of a social life being?**

That would be fair, that would be an understatement.

**Understatement?**

No you are invited to different things, like they had a camp field hospital in and the nurses had a do and I was even invited to be a best man at a wedding for one of them. Oh no

- 34:30 we were there and I didn't, I could do my prerogative, I know what it's like going through the ranks.

**Were there any Americans in that?**

Yes there were quite a few Americans but I missed the main of them, they had no trouble getting girlfriends I tell ya.

**Is that right?**

Oh they produced things like silk stockings and perfumes, they could get everything that we couldn't.

- 35:00 **Is that because they had more money?**

Oh they did have more money there is no doubt about that, we couldn't compare with over the Yanks compared to the Australians. No the Australians were very poorly paid but because things in Australia were very poor when we left. You say living on five bucks as a day as a private.

**How much resentment did that...?**

That it was the resentment was more so with the Yanks,

- 35:30 the privates more than the officers. The privates for example when we were in Charters Towers there were Americans there and because they got there before the Australians to Charters Towers at the weekly dances at the halls and all that, they were all Yanks, and of course they had the best girls first and yeah. And when the Australians went in, that's when the fighting started and it did. They used to

- 36:00 go to all the balls and then the Yanks sort of didn't react to that, their commands did because we were there one night when they were all on leave and they'd rounded them up and all the provosts got every Yank that was on leave and rounded them up and they're herding them down the street just like sheep and they came to a Salvation Army on the corner and they stopped and you

- 36:30 see them all of them throw money into the ring for the Salvation Army, you know they're good hearted blokes.

**The Salvos?**

They rounded them up, they took them away and you know all the time we were in Charters Towers we never saw them back, they never came back because it didn't give them a good name either. Not being responsible but they didn't like it the Aussies, they couldn't get a girl. Because the girls to be fair to the girls, they were getting a better deal with the

- 37:00 Yanks than they were with the Aussies.

**Sure.**

They, the Aussies couldn't afford to give them what the Yanks did.

**Was it all about money or was it?**

I think it was. A pair of silk stockings in those days was unheard of during the war and suddenly a girl gets landed with a pair of silk stockings with the Yanks they carried around them like peanuts, they knew why they were going to get, what they were going to do with silk stockings.

**I just wonder always if it's more than that, if the Americans were actually more**

37:30 **gentlemanly and polite to women?**

Well some women that did would continue with them reckon they were. Like the girl that Dorothy Prentice when I lived with in the same hotel with for years, when I came back from the Middle East, she went to all the good schools in Melbourne and all this sort of jazz but she was waiting for the Yanks in Melbourne. And when they moved out of Melbourne she followed them to Queensland and here's another thing I bring into this hour.

38:00 In Queensland, when I got posted up there I was coming on leave from Charters Towers back to Perth and I knew Dorothy was working in the headquarters of MacArthur and I knew where she lived and I was told to look her up when I was coming through and I did. And when I was coming through I went to her

38:30 unit where she was staying and she had this American officer that she was going around with there and a couple of others and they invited me to come to a party, while I was in Brisbane. And he said, "Look can you pick me up at the headquarters?" I said, "What headquarters, where are you?" He said, "I'm in the Bain's Hotel in Brisbane"

39:00 MacArthur's headquarters he took over the big hotel there and this bloke was the G staff [General staff], which is the big staff. When I get there, there is a couple of marines on guard outside the Bain's Hotel with sub-machine guns. I go up there I was a major they gave me this thing they give their own major. I said, I've forgotten his name this bloke

39:30 but, "Major so and so where will I find him?" "Oh he's upstairs in the so and so" "Oh thanks very much" and I just walked through and up I go. I go up the stairs and in the passage I see no one because all the doors are closed. And a chap comes out, an American Army bloke with all ribbons on "Who are you, what are you doing here?" I said, "I'm looking for major so and so" "How did you get in?" I said, "Through the

40:00 front door" "Did you?" He took me into this place and told the bloke I was going to find, and after we walk out and that's right he told me he'd meet me somewhere later, so I go I meet him later and he says, "Remember those two blokes you saw outside, the two marines outside the door?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "They are on their way to America now". To be able to walk into MacArthur's

40:30 headquarters like that.

**Bizarre isn't it.**

That is something that is pretty hard to believe, but it happened.

**Oh there is lots of things that happened as part of the war but they happened, that's why we're here. So did that end your tour of duty at Charters Towers?**

No I went back, I went back from leave and I was always invited to go to the...

41:00 they had a base there for the air force and a mate that was a squadron leader in the air force was a Brisbane bloke and he was, they took him out for the rest of the year, and it was terrible and he was there and I was his mate because I knew him very well. And he used to invite me and we went out socially together. And I was in their mess the night of the day that

41:30 peace was declared on Japan and when that was happening, I knew I was not staying here. You know in that job because I had been five years in the job, five years in the army, and I left a good job to go back to it and leave was owed to me so I took my leave that night, because I could wind up I had the money that I could do it and it was

42:00 official.

## Tape 6

00:49 **So you're trying to arrange leave?**

Yes I was. I did go back from this particular leave because they made

01:00 me the contact between the Australian government and the disposal of all vehicles under my control to go back into the business world. Because all these car dealers and things didn't have any cars to sell and that's the only place you could get them from was to buy back army vehicles to resell to the public.

01:30 And I was the go-between the army and getting the vehicles the army and the dispersal to the private market. And that was big too because you got the instructions to get them made up even the tyres; see all army tyres have got an arrow on it to say it's government property or things like that. They sell all these parts, its got to be

02:00 neutral, neutralising all this, otherwise the person can get picked up for stealing. And that was quite a

big thing, but that's when I got that started in Townsville. I was dealing with the people and I still wanted to leave and that's when I went on leave to try and get out. And I went back to Perth and I went to the headquarters he's asking for leave,

- 02:30 that I wanted to get out of the army and they wouldn't discharge me, they were going to keep me in because other things had, a lot of blokes went to Japan for example. I had to not only leave my contract for the army but I had to stay in for 12 months if they wanted me after war, you know peacetime. And they weren't going to do that and I thought that was wrong. But Bramble himself in charge of his own business where I was a manager
- 03:00 before wanted me back because he was ill in hospital. He had been ill and he was going to hospital. And what's his name, the politician that was the labour bloke that was going to take over before the last lot, Beasley, Kim Beasley. His father had just got in as the Labour
- 03:30 representative for Fremantle and I've got to get out of the army because they weren't going to release me properly. So we had a meeting with him and told him my conditions of where I, they want me back in the factory where they had me before, the proprietor of that factory it was well known was ill in hospital and the army
- 04:00 won't release me. I said, "I'd been five years in the army, I'm drawing a pension, I'm drawing major pay," I said, "It won't disadvantage me but he wants me". He's just writing away on his table and he gave me a cup of tea and he said, "I'll see about it". Three days later I get an urgent signal from the Minister of Army
- 04:30 to Swan Barracks to St Kilda Barracks to release me forthwith pending discharge. And that's how I got out of the army.

**You made your own way out?**

Yep. But I had to prove to them that I could do it.

**Were you married at this stage?**

Yes. I married when we went to Charters Towers. They had a hospital there and they were short of

- 05:00 staff and two nurses came up from the northern hospital 1 GH [1st General Hospital] and army nurses and one turned out to be my future wife.

**Was it love at first sight?**

Oh second, second sight. But she, we brought up three children; two of them are living in Perth now.

- 05:30 One turned 60 the other day and the other is two years younger.

**How many years have you been married?**

I've been married...I had two wives that is, this one here she is 39 years, her husband died and he was a major of the Ghurkhas in Malaya, he married my wife

- 06:00 who was a nurse over there and then he married her, she was a top nurse and he became on the staff of the general that was looking after the war Templer [General Sir Gerald Templer, commanding in Malaya 1952-54] and he had her going round the villages teaching them to fortify their villages during the war. And he's dead now,

- 06:30 my first wife's dead and here we are, we're here now both had experiences.

**How many years were you married to your first wife?**

Oh about 20.

**And how did you meet Mrs Hatch your second wife?**

They put on a bit of a party, one of the bank managers of Charters Towers did, not Charters Towers what do you call this place up here that I said,

- 07:00 I am getting mixed up with Charters Towers and the place where I went to form my unit here in Perth, oh God past Northam.

**Past Northam?**

Yeah you know where Northam is?

**Yeah**

Well another 60 miles onwards.

**Cunderdin?**

No, no on the same road going up Geraldton way.

## **North of Northam?**

Oh God.

**There is a lot of towns out that way.**

No it's only a little place

07:30 Wongan Hills.

### **Wongan Hills.**

Wongan Hills, we were at the state farm at Wongan Hills. I was training this mob of new unit, Wongan Hills and the hotel is the Wongan Hills Hotel, the state hotel. And that's where we used to go and drink, like we made our mess. And then she came up with another nurse to help in the hospital. That's where I met her.

08:00 **So instead of Charters Towers, you mean Wongan Hills?**

Yeah Wongan Hills, it was Wongan Hills where I met my wife.

### **Your first wife. Where did you meet your current wife?**

I met her in Perth. When I got out of the army, oh that's right I did go back to Melbourne because when I got out of the army I got my discharge out of the army, George Bramble died and

08:30 I wasn't going to go back then because for five years I wasn't even near his businesses. And they were all set who was who, so I stayed here. And here is the part now that I can tell you where I said I know a bit about Korea. When the Korea was on the same thing happened as it did in the First and Second World War. The war started there and they didn't have any equipment.

09:00 They didn't have any uniforms. And when they thought they'd get the uniforms now would be a time to go to Korea, they could just put the tenders out for army uniforms and they'd be rushed. They never got a tender to tender for them because the people that were making uniforms during this Second World War were made to - compulsory - made to make those where they couldn't make private suits and things, and those big

09:30 companies were back making private suits and things and they didn't want to break into army contracts again and kept right away from tendering until the whole of Australia they couldn't get tenders to do it. They had the government factory in Melbourne the only ones trying to make the uniforms, which they couldn't do the quantities. So they sent around to all states someone from the Department of Supply to meet the manufacturers of a particular town. They came to

10:00 Perth here and I had a little clothing factory that I started here, which I got friendly with a bloke that had a warehouse here, but I had the experience from being a manager in the other one in Melbourne before that. I just went to the meeting and he said he was wanting them to tender and he got no answers. But he wanted them to tender for the pants and the battle jacket, not the old-fashioned ones we used to wear, the battle jacket and the trousers. And he wanted them to tender for

10:30 those as just one pair. Well that wasn't so good because most people that make coats suits made jackets but they can't make trousers long trousers, not like that mass, trouser manufacturers make their own trousers in a separate factory. And I said, "Why don't you break it down? Have your contract for your jackets and a contract for your pants." He said, "That's no good khaki there is two different colours in the khaki" I said, "So what"

11:00 I said, "When you get to the manufacturer" I said, "You put them in a case a certain size a coat and you put in with 30 others or 3,000 others and you seal it up, the pants the same you put in another case, they all go into bulk store and someone wants pants and someone wants this, they don't go opening the cases to see if they can match them, they just send them out", I said, "They never match again." He said, "I see your point." I said,

11:30 "You break them up and we'll contract for the jackets," He said, "How do you do that?" I said, "I'll build this, get the machinery, I'll build it up. We can do it". What we had to do was buy the material from an ordinance store in Midland. I had to buy the material. I said, "I'll do it on one condition, that I can go to your government factory in Melbourne and have a week there and no one's to stop me going any part of that factory or asking any questions".

12:00 Right they arranged that. So back I go to Melbourne and I go there and I sit on these benches where these girls are making these suits. I see the bloke cutting them out and how they cut them out and they gave me the patterns and they showed me how to lay the patterns out and save six inches on a lay by doing it certain ways. And each laying is about 20 or 30 sheets and each one's got four on it, there's 120 or 200 jackets to be cut out at once

12:30 and you save back well, that's three of those make a yard see what I mean, you save material there. So I was going to gain there for starters just on materials, I reckon I could do better than them. Anyway I started. And I think we got 10,000 we practically printed out this Korean battle army



- 13:00 because they couldn't get uniforms. They started a war and they couldn't get uniforms and that's the same as me going in at Caulfield that time when they gave me a hat, a coat and a pair of boots and I had to wait for the rest of me equipment.

**So the experience came invaluable to you after all?**

Well I knew all about clothing, I knew a manufacturer. I could see how we could get them to make more suits per head

- 13:30 down there because they were working for the government to another thing. All I had to do was put them on piece rates, we had two examiners going through them each time from the government and if they were one bit out, they threw them back at this machinist and had to open them up and do them again. Well if they get paid extra for making more, and more wages, they weren't going to get it thrown back at them and we doubled their quantity that they could make.

**Have you belonged to the RSL [Returned and Soldiers League] over the years?**

Who?

**You.**

- 14:00 Yeah.

**How important has the RSL been to you in your post-war life?**

At the beginning it was very good. I joined the Claremont RSL straightaway and I was a member of that for years. We had a good RSL; we owned our own property Bay Road. And they sold that and now their RSL is up here at the Bayview Terrace behind the bowling green.

- 14:30 But I know no one up there because they're all Vietnams; all my contemporaries are dead. But we had a good time up there originally. But I was all over the place up here, I ended up in Armadale for a while and I was away from it. But now I'm a member of the number one in Perth and that was the first one that started, I've been addicted to

- 15:00 that one and we gave a monthly lunch every year, third Monday, about 150, over 100 sit down for a formal meal lunch, which that suits me.

**Do you belong to any, sorry?**

Belong to any what?

**Do you belong to any other associations?**

Oh I used to. I was the founder of the Claremont Coast Leagues Rotary Club.

- 15:30 Formed, was asked to form that by the Perth Club and I got, the boys he's the headmaster of Christchurch Primary School and another bloke he was a chemist and myself, we formed that club and started it. Peter was the foundation president and I was the foundation vice president. I was president of the Seaview Golf Club. I
- 16:00 was a member of Royal Perth Club and I was a member from the beginning from Claremont. I used to play rugby but I got injured but I did play a bit of Australian football in the army. But then when I came out when I got injured in rugby in New Zealand when I was younger I took on golf
- 16:30 and I was fairly you know more than better than average at golf. When I started playing here again I got down to one handicap or something. And I played in the pennant sides and played in a couple of championships. But then I got a few injuries here and there and I gave it up when I was about 70. But no I was 50 when I gave up playing
- 17:00 competitive comp [competition] but I stopped playing golf when I was 70 but I still played that, but competitive comp I used to play in the pennants and do all the trips you know. My kids are growing up, my teenage children boys and golf is not a game where you can fraternise and have kids as well, they don't get any pleasure out of caddying for you. And they wanted a boat, and the only thing I have against a boat, the Queen Mary is the only boat I've been on that I wasn't sea sick on.
- 17:30 I get seasick. I used to travel on a boat to go from Wellington to Christchurch when I was playing cricket; I used to play cricket for the state or province they call it. If you have to play down the South island you had to go across on this ferry. Bigger than a ferry it was a 10,000 boat or something. And it was a nice trip and I got on the boat and it hadn't even left the wharf and I was seasick. So
- 18:00 that's what I think of that. So getting a boat was the last thing I wanted. But I was thinking of something to go round the river catching crabs or you know something like that. Anyway I got not conned into it but they told me about this boat but I went and had a look at it and it was bigger than I was expecting but it had a decent engine in it. I could stand up and the gunnel came to here but I found that was the name of the wood that goes up there. And
- 18:30 I boarded and when I went to finalise it he said, "I'll rig it up and let's have a look at it". I go back and it's got a 33-foot mast on it; it's a yacht and I've never been on a yacht. Anyway I kept it and I didn't

have a crew and I used to get them from the golf club at Seaview on a Friday night if anyone wanted to have a sail and I knew nothing about it. And Paul Rigby, have you ever heard of him,

19:00 the artist, the painter [best known as a newspaper cartoonist], he was one of me crew, he knew nothing, another couple of hard doers. But I learnt to sail I joined the yacht club, I learnt to sail and then in the finish me wife knew nothing about it, she used to come out. And we used to race, and we raced it and it took five people to run the boat when you're racing and she was one of them. We both learnt from absolutely scratch

19:30 and I still got seasick every time we went out in it. And I finished up winning a lot of trophies and a lot of other things happened there too but you've got too bad lowering this mast to come under the bridges when we're coming back from Rottneest and things like that, so I had a launch built, which I had for a while and then sold it. That was the best

20:00 thing I ever had was a boat.

**It's a great hobby isn't it boating?**

Oh absolutely.

**How important is Anzac Day to you Ron?**

Well it's always been important. I generally they've been, go to school mainly, I used to do (UNCLEAR) Tobruk Sunday and he they would they'd come out and talk Sunday and

20:30 they ran it for a while and they'd ask a few of us out there to the service every Anzac Day. But I used to always march on Anzac Day in New Zealand when I came over and I went to the Scots College in New Zealand, Scots not Scotch. And I was in a pipe band there and then when I was about 12, 13, I was a drummer first,

21:00 and we marched in Anzac Day there, they've got an Anzac in Wellington. But everywhere I went, you know, Anzac Day's always been, our schools always had Anzac at school. No, I had relatives in the war, the First World War. I had an uncle in the First World War; he came back gassed and died very shortly afterwards. I had an aunt that was in the first war, got a Royal Cross in the First World War.

21:30 My father didn't; he was too young to go to the first war and he's too old to go in the second war.

**Fortunate for him.**

Yeah. But his three sons went.

**What does Anzac mean to you as a returned servicemen?**

Same as a trip at Moora does, only if you can only remember for only one thing. It commemorates the dead that were left behind, nothing else.

22:00 That's what Anzac Day is for.

**What do you think about on Anzac Day?**

Well naturally you can't help think about Anzac Day and those blokes that were left there or got killed when they read the ode. Do you know how it goes? Those...

**We shall not forget or?**

Words to that effect. And that's

22:30 they're gone forever and that's what Anzac Day is; they get recognition that they deserved and when you think of it how in Tobruk over 200 are missing, not even buried or found so they're the ones, and it sets an example to the kids growing up really isn't it.

23:00 **Well I was about to ask you how did your experiences during your service change you as a person do you think?**

As a person well it did change me in one way, but it's a way that you never think of changing any man. I knew nothing about freemasonry. I'm a protestant. I knew nothing about freemasonry. I know my uncle was a grand master or a master but I knew nothing about it.

23:30 But it was when I was working for Holeproofs, they used to have lunch every day over at the club there where there is a billiard table and we used to have a game of snooker, bridge in the lunch hour with the executives, and I was one of the executives. And one bloke was evidently a freemason and I was introduced to him and as I found out later the way I addressed him and things I did,

24:00 he thought I was too a freemason. Then he started asking me questions, which you need to know, you would know the answer to and I didn't know what he was talking about. And then I realised he asked me and I said, "Well I'm not a freemason". And you know the way it was going and he got me to join the freemasonry.

- 24:30 And I joined the freemasonry just before war was declared. And I joined the university freemasonry in Melbourne. And they put you through degrees to get your full thing. And I done one degree, you've got to do three degrees. I done one degree, now the other degrees are done at different times and then onwards the next month or the next month after that.
- 25:00 But war was, I was still in the army but I was still in Australia when it got to that stage and I was sent on final leave, so they arranged that I got through the two degrees together. And oh no it was before my final leave, it was when I first joined the
- 25:30 army, just joined the army in Williamstown Racecourse. And when I said I look like getting final leave we said "We don't know, we look like getting final leave before six months" and they said, "Well rush through the other two degrees". They put me through the other two degrees so that I was a full-certified mason. Now when I went into camp, we were only allowed leave on a Saturday,
- 26:00 and a Wednesday night. If you went out on Wednesday you had to come back on Wednesday; if you went out on Friday, you could have Friday off and come back on Sunday and so on, that was the only leave we had in camp. When we went to Williamstown I was in a camp, our beds were in the middle of Williamstown Racecourse, which was outside the bookies the races,
- 26:30 it was concrete floor, open sides, a tin roof and they put the tin up high all around it to protect if from the...it was mid winter when we went in, bloody cold I'll tell ya, and lights were out at a certain time and turn the lights out at 9 o'clock. And this particular night wasn't a Wednesday and it wasn't a weekend, it was a Tuesday or a Monday say. And we hear trucks coming in and a lot of cheering and laughing.
- 27:00 and we wonder who the hell that's coming in, oh laughing and singing songs and a few of those blokes were in the same part where we slept in this concrete bloody joint with all the beds all around the joint, about 100 of us. And this bloke comes in with this voice and starts singing oh beautiful but loud, "Shut up you mug, go to bed" who is making they are all come out we finally get to bed, next day we
- 27:30 found out through the grapevine that the local Masonic Lodge in the district where we were camped invited the masons of our unit to be entertained because the CO was a mason, the 2IC was a mason and about two other officers were masons, and they soon found out who the masons they had in the unit and they were invited and they took about two or three bloody truck loads of blokes
- 28:00 to be boozed up in the...and have a great time. Because I wasn't in there and they're saying who was and what they'd done in and I found out who it was, that's what put me off freemasonry, it didn't put me off the principles of freemasonry. I think it's very good but to do that in a camp where no one else knew anybody they all different nationalities, different religions but they find they can be given a day other than the
- 28:30 proper days to go on leave and headed by the CO and I didn't like it. I was wrapped up in freemason at that stage because I'd just joined. The great things they did and so and so, and that's the truth.

**Well you got to have principles and.**

Yeah and I never ever took advantage of that ever, that gave me a lesson.

**Ron what would you like to pass onto younger generations of Australians in future**

29:00 **about war and your wartime experience?**

Well I think passing on anything could be any good to them because most kids either they like it or they don't like it. And some of the things that you pass on could be good for them but the last thing is you get through to them.

**Well don't you try sharing both with us?**

Yeah well the thing is, it is very hard to do but the only thing you can do, its how they are brought up

29:30 really, you know kids that get into a bit of trouble some don't get in some trouble, it's how their parents bring them up for a start isn't it.

**Well let's not worry about what kind of young people they are, let's just consider the fact that there are going to be younger generations ongoing in Australia in the future and if they want to find out directly something from a war veteran, something about World War II, what would you like to impart to them?**

30:00 Well it's telling them, you can't tell them not to join, because that's, you can't sight war you can't tell them well you've got to join up. They've got to find out number one what war is about to start with, you got to tell them, you the father or you the judge, you got to believe what you tell them haven't you. You got to believe that what you are going to tell them is the right thing, so you yourself have got to believe

30:30 whether it's the right thing to tell them if the war breaks out, be the first to go and enlist. You can't tell them that or first in gets the best dressed. It's not that at all. They got to go into war or into there as a volunteer or be conscripted. And if they can volunteer, well it's a good thing to volunteer if they feel that they're up to it, to do it because they got to have somebody and they would help. But

31:00 it's not important that they volunteer because as the war gets worse they are going to be conscripted anyway.

**So what have you learnt from having served during World War II. Is freedom something that must to be fought for or has to be fought for?**

I think the principle of freedom is good. If that's what you fought for originally to win if you got it, but I notice freedom is the best to fight for if you're not right to get the freedom

31:30 like some of them are doing, but if it is a necessity to live or die or to exist, that's what's it all about isn't it.

**Would Australia have its freedom today if men of your generation didn't go to war?**

Oh yeah a lot of them didn't. They had reserved occupations and things like that, a lot of them had reserved occupations, and a lot of them didn't want to go

32:00 because they were just in the stage where they just got married or something like that. A lot of people didn't want to go on account of you know young children. It's a big thing for them to make up for a man that's married with kids, saying that you're going to go to war and forget them. That is virtually what they've got to do. And I saw some marvellous blokes in the army that really lived their beliefs and I saw some that didn't.

32:30 You know whether they lived it, there was no way they were going to jump, they weren't eccentrics or anything like that, they were just normal blokes, good blokes. But I noticed they'd keep together too. They'd go out on a limb with a couple of others you know, it's easy to pick them.

**I'm not quite sure if I understand what you're saying?**

Why?

**Are you saying there are two**

33:00 **types of soldier?**

Well there is a soldier to go to enjoy the war, put it that way. They get carried away with the fact that they are going to be in the war or going to be in the army or the services. Because there are certain conditions that a lot of people get advantage from that but when it is a fair dinkum war breaks out. I got carried away when I first wanted to

33:30 join the army because I was brought up in New Zealand where they had the preference on compulsory training. We were trained as soldiers in New Zealand. From the jump go and very loyal to the British Empire, always been loyal because they depended so much on England except when they went through the depression, when they wouldn't buy our butter fat. But they always called it the old country. The old country and

34:00 always had the old country. And this is another funny thing that happened. I was in Claremont and the postmaster told me the story about the Greek had a restaurant there. And he came into the restaurant; he could speak English very well. And he said, "I want to put some money to the old country" "Oh no problem". So the postmaster there made out everything to go to England. "No, no" he said, this is true,

34:30 "Not going to England," he said, "To Greece". The old country, well Greece is the oldest country in the world but it was always New Zealand, England was always called the old country and that's how we were brought up, I can't remember having a pair of shoes that weren't made in England. Or if you wanted a good... If you go to merchant shop over there when I left or buying something, say underwear or

35:00 shirts or singlets you know, "Do you want the New Zealand singlets or do you want some good ones?" The good ones are the English ones; our own were just as good but you know, they reckon they were imported. Or we never got...we could have got Australian cars; we wouldn't buy any from Australia because they wouldn't buy our potatoes. So we didn't buy any from

35:30 Australia. We used to buy our own motorcars from America. We had all American cars when I left. All American wireless sets. All the latest of wireless sets that didn't come in vogue in Australia for 10, 10 or more years after I left.

**Speaking of the old country, what do you think of the republican debate?**

Here? I think it is certain to be a republic and I'll be voting for it.

**I beg your pardon?**

I think I vote for a

36:00 republic.

**You would, after having fought for...?**

Yeah well we fought for, that's what got us in into it, the Queen and the King, but we enlisted because we were fighting for our, who came to our assistance whenever they could. It didn't happen after the Japanese came up here, after losing the [HMS] Hood and a few other things. They lost all their power and they had to look after themselves.

36:30 And that made us more isolated. No I think we always had every nationality for Britain and we always had respect for the crown, but this mob that are there now there's no way you'd get respect for them. Except the Queen, she's the only one that is a symbol of what we thought the crown represented. Now they're all divorced and they've done all the worst things in the world. Every one of them, there is no exception.

37:00 Even Queen Anne [Princess Anne], she's had a bit of trouble.

**What about American imperialism?**

Oh I don't know much about that but they at least as a nation, they get behind the wheel when they want to. They can sing a decent song which is a national song don't they irrespective of what it says, it goes the same way, it's got a good feel about it. But it doesn't get any excitement out of me by singing our national song, Australian one.

37:30 That doesn't give me anything.

**Well I guess that brings us back to the question of patriotism in Australia today?**

That's right yep patriotism is what you can get yourself for yourself and them as well sort of business. But the Americans as a whole, they rise to the occasion don't they, their songs and if they're going to go to war they write the right songs and you know always punching, we're different.

38:00 And most of the good, well take the Marseillaise the French [national anthem], that makes you put a bit of red blood in your belly when you sing that song. But could you get any red blood flowing through you when you hear the...

**I have to say I'm afraid not.**

No that's just right, there is no thing about it, it has to be changed for a real...

**And as for the patriotism of young Australians what do you think?**

Well I think in the ones I see they're pretty good but

38:30 everyone's going through a period. And my kids we were very lucky with them. I had one child during the war, the eldest one, and the other two were born just after the war. They grew up in an era where there was no dope that there is now. I don't think there was any marijuana either, but they grew up in that section and they can't be blamed, give credit for not doing it. It wasn't the thing done; it wasn't done at all.

39:00 But these other poor buggers that are growing up its going through it, but it's as though it was meant for them wasn't it.

**Well perhaps drugs are having an influence on our patriotism.**

Well drugs have an influence; bad drugs I believe have an influence on everything. It makes people...out of a sensible child, a sensible man makes them into a murderer by having to supply

39:30 the money for his drugs that goes into holding up a newsagents or something and shoots a person through the head.

**And as for the growing popularity of Anzac Day today?**

Yeah well the kids in the school are getting better for Anzac Day.

**I'll just pause. Just before we thank you for speaking with us today Ron, I would just like to underline that this will probably be the last question what do you think about the growing popularity of Anzac Day?**

I think its

40:00 the emphasis on the fact that Anzac Day is, there's been a lot of war since Anzac Day, like our Second World War. It's amazing how many wars there are, there is a Korean War, there is a Vietnam War.

**And as for the popularity increasing?**

Well I think it's been the masters at school responsible for this. Particularly I only know of schools that I know of, you couldn't get any better

40:30 than Christchurch Grammar School for a start. They're wrapped up in the best; they've got the best cadets in the state. We as Rats of Tobruk, we got a new monument we had to get done because they banged into it, we got a new surround, we raised \$60,000 to do it. And I got the idea that if we when we

formed up, and from us. And 'Craggy' School became extinct it was now

41:00 banned, no one was going to live there anymore and I approached Christchurch because they've been going for a hundred years and would they sponsor us for the rest of the time, they took it over. So therefore the masters of 'Craggy' have gone to another school and they started off another thing there with Anzac Day. It is a type of, teachers that are doing now in the schools.

**Can I ask you quickly then how you feel when you see many young people attending the Anzac Day parades?**

41:30 I think it's marvellous, I think it's marvellous because the well the kids are learning quicker now I reckon about good things. They are, they know what's good and what's bad, but you get the ones that try to lead the good ones on but some of them, I think it is getting better.

**Well I'd just like to thank you for speaking with us today Ron we're on the end of that tape**

42:00 it's been a pleasure.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**