

Australians at War Film Archive

Donald Mead (Don) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:44 **Don, can you give us a summary of your life?**

Life? Born in Croxton, Northcote, Melbourne 1921 and I was the youngest of three. The eldest was my sister and brother

01:00 in the middle, and my father was a builder. You call them "developers" these days. He built a lot of homes out East Kew and Thornbury way. You'd probably be familiar with that area? Then of course the Depression came and he went under, like most of the builders did, and I think he died of a broken heart at 45. So we lost him during the Depression and things were pretty tough but I had a very, very strong

01:30 willed mother, and she pulled us out of it, and we had our ups and downs. We all split up and lived with other members of the family. I think that we moved from that area down to Albert Park behind Uncle Fred's and I think everyone has got an Uncle Fred haven't they? They've got to. Anyway, so my mother won an Obstinate Artist, what they

02:00 called an "Obstinate Artist". It was a little sketch in The Sun and it was a picture, and this was a chap in a barber with a lot of hair, and it was clip, clip, clip, and you had to put what it was, and so she put "A uncut volume", and she got second prize. She won one hundred pounds. Oh it was like winning 10 000 dollars in those days. We had the Salvos knocking on the door and all the no hopers but she bought a little business in Albert Park, and it was

02:30 no bigger than this room, dressmaking. She went into the dressmaking business and she did all right. That pulled us out but I had to leave school at 14. I couldn't stay to get my merit, which I regretted but I had to bring money in and I got a job in electrical. Later on I did 12 months at the South Melbourne Technical College and gained the equivalent so I could get apprenticed. So

03:00 my mother took me around to all the places and I got a job at the Baker Owen Company in South Melbourne, and there I was apprenticed, and I joined the cadets in the AASC, which is the Australian Army Service Corps. We drove A Model Fords in those days and horses. We had leather leggings. I'll show you some photos of that

03:30 afterwards with spurs on them and everything. Then I loved the discipline and from there I went into the militia [citizens' military force], and that was a little bit more senior, and more camps centred. I loved the life. I really did. I used to get time off from being apprenticed and I had to go to Collingwood Tech from Albert Park, you know push a bike or on the old cable

04:00 tram. So the war broke out and naturally being in the militia I volunteered, and went into Caulfield Racecourse, and put my age up to 19 because I had to have my mother's OK, which she wouldn't have given it to me. They don't ask for your birth certificate, so I put my age up to 19. From there we...

04:30 our sergeant major and the sergeant of the cadets joined with me, and we all went up as an advanced guard to Puckapunyal. What we did, we cleaned rifles and all the sort of thing before the mob group came in. It was a new battalion, not a battalion, a company. It was called 1st Australian Corps Petrol Park and you've got no idea of some of the

05:00 addresses on the letters that came in, car petrol pump, and all this sort of thing. It was amazing. Anyway, I thought we were going to be caretakers there. We joined on the 20th of May 1940 and I was discharged at Royal Park on the 20th of November, 11 o'clock the same. That's been the story of my life you know?

05:30 Exactly right to the hour five and a half years, and so I had to go back and finish my apprenticeship, which I did, another three years. It was a bit tough going to night school at Collingwood Tech with all the young blokes I can tell you. I think I was 24 at the time. Anyway, that was it. I finished it and I met Faye at a dance,

- 06:00 and Freemasons. They used to have a dance up at the end of Collins Street and Freemason dancers ran them. I joined the Freemasonry because all my uncles were in it. The worse thing I ever did. However, I came down of course I didn't pay to go in. I was upstairs. I came in and I saw this beautiful young girl in a flowing...you know in those days with floral cotton. She looked beautiful.
- 06:30 That was Faye and of course in the interim I did some...I used to be a dancing teacher of a Saturday night, Don Young's Dancing Academy, Capitol House. I went in there Saturday nights and taught young girls how to dance you know, the quick step, and the fox trot, and the modern waltz, the tango, and the rumba, and all this. Faye had two left feet but I soon fixed her on that. That was no
- 07:00 problems. And that's the story of how I met Faye and she was going to the Lauriston Church of England Girl's Grammar School, and she was a boarder there. Faye's father was a returned soldier. He was in the First World War and he had a big farm at Stanhope west of Shepparton, not a soldier settlement [post-war scheme to put veterans on the land]. They had a selected... and
- 07:30 Harvey came in later. That's Faye's brother. There's only the two of them. I think when he was nine they shot him down to Geelong Grammar and he didn't leave there until he was 18. So they didn't see much of family life. Faye went to the local little school and then she was... her grandmother was in Cobham and she used to live in there, so she didn't have much family life. However, we got married in 1950 and then I
- 08:00 put in for soldier settlement. I couldn't settle down to working for a boss in a factory, so I put in for a soldier settlement up in the Goulburn Valley and I got one, and I was 15 years there, and got sick of that. In the interim of course I'd seen this place. I'd been up here with my mother in 1947 and I said, "This is the place I'm going to retire." And I did.
- 08:30 It took me 35 years but I finally made it and that's what I was looking for, to come up here. So I had my own subcontracting business in security gates and doors, and gates that opened electronically, and all that sort of business. So I gave all that away and came up on the farm, and we had four children, and then I... see there was no future for my children.
- 09:00 Poor old Ross, the eldest boy, we had to take him into Numurkah, catch a bus to go to Shepparton to the technical college, and it was a bit of a drag on the kids. So we sold out and came down to Melbourne, and moved into Black Rock. So on soldier settlement I became president of the RSL [Returned and Services League] and treasurer, and
- 09:30 and also president, and player in the football club, and president, and captain of the cricket club. We started all this up and I've been going for donkeys. It all falls through during the war and so we were pretty good. We won a premiership for the first time for 35 years in the footy club and the next year we knocked off the premiership in the cricket club. We did all right. But I was responsible for Legacy [charitable organization for veteran's families] being the president but
- 10:00 there was no widows in those days, so I used to run the golf days in Nathalia. Legacy Days were the digger's days and the digger's days were a riot because they bought a farm about a mile down from Nathalia, and it was an old farm. They bought the old house and that became a clubroom, a little creek running past it, and laid it all out. We had sand scrapes. We couldn't have
- 10:30 grass. You know you hit the ball and it stops. It doesn't roll off. Anyway, so we put on our Legacy Days and the proceeds went to Shepparton Legacy. Then our digger days, well that was a beauty because we had to have a licence from the police to run beer and so forth, which we did, and we had certain rules, and regulations they had to
- 11:00 adhere to, had to have compulsory stops at different spots to have a rum, and I had a friend of mine Lloyd Wright. He had a big hardware store in Shepparton and he had a Gypsy Moth on the aerodrome. So in between milkings I came down to Kanamatsu [?] and I bought 100 table tennis balls, and all the ladies were painting one to 100 on them. We gave trophies away for all this and it was amazing
- 11:30 to see how many blokes with table tennis balls instead of their own golf ball but all these little things, and he dropped all these. He flew over and dropped them all down. Plus another year, you know the little lolly bags you used to get, the little white lolly bags you used to get? We bought quite a few of them and filled them up with flour, and sealed them, and we dropped these. I got into trouble because there was flour everywhere but we had a lot of fun and to
- 12:00 make money.

That's fantastic. That sounds great. Well that's a fantastic summary. I think we've probably brought you pretty well up to date.

That's about the soldier settlement life. We pulled the old hall down and built a Mount Gambier limestone, and I welded all the steel railways lines we got. You're sitting on that you know? So that's briefly and then we came to Melbourne

- 12:30 and I worked in real estate in Shepparton with a friend of mine, who was in the air force. I went in as a sub-agent. I got a sub-agent's licence. I only lasted 12 months. I couldn't stand the dishonesty that was going on. It was shocking you know. Then I went to Lucas and that was an experience.

We might get into all those details afterwards because we want to go back and get into your wartime experience as well.

That's OK.

So that's great summary.

13:00 **...go back to your early days during the Depression. You said that life was hard during the Depression. Can you tell us in what way was it hard?**

Well we were split up. I went and lived with an uncle and my brother lived with an uncle, and Mum and my sister lived with Grandpa Asquith down in Elwood. Then I was moved around. My father...

13:30 we had a bungalow at the back of the house and I went to live with him. I don't know. It sort of spoilt my education I think in one respect, although I don't regret it. I wouldn't have changed it at all because it was a wonderful experience. It learnt how to do unto others and that was the secret I think of the Depression years. You could leave your door open, you could walk down the street and never get molested.

14:00 Of course they had policemen walking around in those days but everyone helped each other and it was a wonderful experience because everyone was in the same situation. I got into a lot of mischief at times you know, wagging it from school and going to the Merri Creek, and all this sort of business.

What sort of entertainment did you have?

Only what we made ourselves.

14:30 That's about it. You know living in a house with a lane at the back and the dustman coming around with a horse and cart, and the milkman yodelling, and you take your billy over, and he gives you a pint or two pints, and puts a wet bag over the thing, and away he'd go. Then the clothes prop man would come along, "Cloooooothes props." You know a bit of gum with a fork on it. And the mussel man, he had a

15:00 tin he rattled around selling mussels. Then the baker in the front. They had two wheel carts in those days and they'd have to stop, and open the back door to get the bread out. Well that was a natural for Dun. The moment he took off, I'm one behind and I'm helping myself to the bread. Every little bit counts, all these little things. As I say, I had a brother. He was a real villain. He thought of all the things and I did them but he

15:30 wrote a letter to the teacher excusing me for being away, and he signed it W Mead Esquire. That killed the lot. Of course I got into trouble and my father took me to the police station, which was opposite the school, that was the little school in North Fitzroy. I never wagged it after that.

You said that your father

16:00 **died of a broken heart?**

Yes I think that the struggle was too much for him. He was a heavy smoker too you know and I think that he had a heart attack, too much worry. See he was too soft. He was not a businessman. He had no business acumen whatsoever and he kept his workers on, and ran out of money, and he should have got rid of them straight away. It would have helped but that was the problem. He was a wonderful tradesman, a terrific... he was a carpenter,

16:30 his own architect. He built a whole avenue of houses in East Kew, Irymple Avenue. The cable trams used to ride out in those days and the car man would say, "Pimple Street." And off you'd get. I used to run behind the old cable trams. They only did about ten miles an hour but the best one of course, when I went down to Albert Park, the cable trams, and you'd get a tin,

17:00 a four gallon tin with a bit of rope on it, and drop it down the middle, and it would wrap around the cable, and down the street. All the dogs would be yapping and going on. You'd see this tin whipping down. All these... you know you've got to experiment. I had a friend, he used to go to University High and he was a ratbag the same as myself. So we made... I invented the Bangalore. Now the Bangalore is a tube that

17:30 they send underneath the barbed wire in the war and it had lengths on it, and they'd keep... and they have the charge in the front one. Then they'd blow up the barbed wire. Well I invented that years ago at Albert Park. I'd get the brass tubing and we'd fill it with nitrate. You know the old fashioned photographers, when it flashed? Same stuff and we'd poke that in, seal both ends, poked

18:00 it all in, sealed both ends, drilled a little hole in the top, laid it on the concrete around the Albert Park Lake, and put a big fuse on it from here to the end of the garage. It was six o'clock in the evening and all the cars were coming home, well half past five. It was dark you know through Albert Park to St Kilda and there was all these tree guards with new plants in them. So we lit it. My

18:30 God it was daylight. We got a fright. I got on my bike and "schrooommm", and there was a "boooooom." There was bits of brass thrown everywhere, and I only lived opposite there, and I got home, and Mum said, "Did you hear that explosion?" I said, "What explosion?" I went back the next day and I'd blown a hole in the concrete from here to here, and there wasn't a sign of all the tree guards. They'd just

disappeared.

- 19:00 So we experimented on smaller ones, little pencil ones we'd put under the park seats where the drunks were sleeping. We lit those and blow them, and they'd walk away. The last one must have been a beauty. We did all this.

How did life change for you when your mother won that money?

I think life was a little bit easier for us. We had a house and we had

- 19:30 a couple that shared it, and then she got a bigger apartment house opposite the Albert Park Station. That was opposite the park in a small street and we had three lots of people, and they paid the rent, and so forth. I had a bungalow with my brother in the back and we lived up top, and there was a spare room up there. Faye came and stayed with us then because my mother said that she looked that skinny, that she

- 20:00 needed building up. So Faye used to stay in the little room up the top and she was a dental nurse in Brighton. She'd get on the train and go to work, and come home, and she's been a dental nurse ever since. She still is. She's the oldest dental nurse in Australia. There's no doubt about that but the best.

Excellent.

She still does it. She's called on and there's a very big shortage. Last week she did about three days with Doctor

- 20:30 Yakamov.

That's excellent.

A hell of a nice bloke. He's a Russian but born and bred in Tweed. Then she goes down to Tweed South to another dentist. When the girls get sick and that they've got no replacements.

So just going back to your story. When you left school how did life change for you then?

I think it changed for the better because I was earning money and I was apprenticed, and worked hard.

- 21:00 In those days we had to work Saturday mornings also, 44 hours a week and we had a very hard, strict boss. He was a Pom and he was a chain smoker, yet if anyone was caught smoking bingo, and all this sort of thing. He was a good boss but to me well, you had to work hard and you had to
- 21:30 school in Collingwood two nights a week, and one afternoon. See that was a bit of a drag because in those days you worked hard, no mucking around and this morning and afternoon tea business, no way. So naturally I got used to that but I was born into that sort of situation, so I took it. I wasn't the only one. There was thousands exactly the same as me and that was life. I suppose
- 22:00 then getting into teens, 15 and 16 I used to go dancing with my sister. She introduced me to the dancing academy but that's about... I enjoyed the dances. The Church of England Albert Park had a big hall behind it and that was Saturday night. All the girls would bring a plate and we had our own little circle, and we used to play tennis together on Sundays
- 22:30 behind the South Melbourne footy ground, and all that sort of thing. Sunday nights, the Catholic Church had their dances on Sunday nights. Of course the Proddies [Protestant] wouldn't do that on a Sunday, so we'd go up there and they'd come down Saturday night, and we mixed it. I played a lot of cricket. We started a cricket team from the factory in the electrical trade and that's when I started my cricket career. Well,
- 23:00 I started it earlier than that because my uncle, Uncle Fred, his wife was Auntie Rita. She was half Chilean and half Australian. She had a Chilean father and a nanna. She was a lovely person and her sister Peggy Antanio was the bowler for the Australian women's cricket team that played England, and Rooney Conlon trained her, and he trained me. It was my job to bring all the cricket gear home from Uncle
- 23:30 Fred's, go behind the South Melbourne Tech School and we had a wicket there. I had to bring all this over on a truck from here. We had the nets and everything on it, and all the gear, and he trained me to be a fast bowler, and I was better than that bloke. That's [Dennis] Lillee. No but that was it.

Your mum was involved somehow with the cricket team wasn't she?

No, no.

She didn't sew for them?

No she never had any sport in her whatsoever.

She didn't sew

- 24:00 **clothes for them?**

I'm sorry, yes, yes she did. When Peggy... they brought in the split skirt. All the Poms were shocked, "Oh

I say, a split skirt of all things.” But they had more freedom too. She made all their skirts for all the girls. They were mainly from Victoria, the girls. I don’t think they had them in New South Wales. They’d come on a Sunday morning

24:30 from miles around and have their practice. Well now Peggy was a real tomboy. She should have been a boy because at that time the boys were kicking a football towards and she’d have her... you know I’d bowl them down swift to her, no problems. She’d cart me too but she was a googly bowler. She was a fantastic spin bowler. She’d have her session, go and play football with the boys. She’d over-mark them. I’m not joking and kick a drop kick.

25:00 **Wow. That’s fantastic.**

But that was the sort of person she was.

Good on her.

We enjoyed a lot and played tennis, and so forth.

So how did you come to decide to join the militia?

I suppose that seeing the... my father was never in the war or anything but I don’t know. I just sort of thought, “Well gee this will be good. I’ll be able to learn how to drive a car or a truck.” I was dead mad on vehicles of course,

25:30 not as much as they are these days but there wasn’t so many around. But no, I learnt the discipline, how to drive, how to repair and do the work. We’d go away for weekends. Broadmeadows was as far as we’d go... oh no, Seymour. We enjoyed it. It was really good. You get good mates and the discipline was good because that’s why I think that we should have it now to straighten up some of the hoons around. They’d

26:00 soon find discipline and mateship because if you did anything wrong in a hut the whole hut suffered and you can imagine, so that’s the best lesson in life. I loved the discipline. I loved it and I looked like a St John’s Ambulance man. I could show you photographs, navy blue and white but no, I really did. I was allowed to take a 303 rifle home in the tram, this great thing. The

26:30 first time I fired it, God it went “bang.” I was skinny, long skinny bloke and I was a bit cautious after that on the rifle range. I like it. I liked the discipline.

When you joined the militia did you have any idea that you might actually go to war?

No the thought never entered our head really, apart from the fact we got paid once a month, a few shillings. I don’t know what it was, the first Monday of the month.

27:00 No, that never worried me. I can remember too going to Anzac Day marches when I was a kid and I was impressed with the old diggers, and that sort of I suppose was in the background. I had an uncle that was in the First World War and I suppose, like many thousands of others exactly the same... because I was in Sea Scouts, and all

27:30 this sort of thing, cubs and so forth. That’s the start of discipline you know?

Did your uncle talk to you about his experiences in the First World War?

No not really. He was in the ambulance at Lone Pine, the chap on the donkey and all that. He was in Gallipoli and in France. He came back OK. He might of got a bit of gas or something.

28:00 No he never talked much, not really.

When you went to those Anzac Day marches and saw the diggers what was your view of war at that time?

Well, shooting rifles and going to camp, and that we all liked. I suppose that’s what it was. I’d talk to old diggers and so forth after the march, and so that... it never dawned upon me of course that there’d ever be a war but we were prepared.

28:30 Let’s put it that way and only for the militia... they trained the 6th Division, which was the first one. They’re the ones that trained them and they’re the blokes that had the commission, and they came in. Like our Major [Geoffrey] Homewood, he was our CO [commanding officer] in the 4th Div ASC [Army Service Corps] and he became our CO of the First Australian Corps Petrol Park but we had a lot of officers that were from Caltex Vacuum Oil Company and all

29:00 this sort of business. They never had a clue but they were... they didn’t have to do very much.

When you were with the militia in those early days of training. Was the training difficult in any way?

No, no, I don’t recall it was. It was mainly squad drill and how to pull a rifle to pieces, and the old Lewis gun. It wasn’t anything about transport in those days. It was done in a drill hall.

29:30 But when we went away to Broadmeadows and had tent life, it was really good, a holiday. When we

were kids our father used to... we were always going camping and rabbit shooting, only about 20 miles out of Melbourne in those days. So we did a lot. We had family, two other families, and they were all girls. Bill and I were the only boys amongst them and you can imagine what was going on of course. Anyway, we always were

30:00 open like. We loved to get out and go camping, and shooting. I never had a gun of course. I might have shot someone, not a rabbit.

So you talked about enjoying the mateship. What was it about...?

You were thrown together. See I had an experience from the militia and I was prepared for it when I went into the AIF [Australian Imperial Force].

30:30 You met... some of them were hard to get on with, different chaps and we had Jewish boys in there, and they were all right. They were great fellas. Gee whiz I made friends after the war when I had my own business. You've got no idea. I was in security doors and I had a lot of Jewish clients because one of our sergeants was a Jew, and he was later the president of the St Kilda Football Club.

31:00 He was in one of the oil companies and I got a lot of customers through him.

Sorry to interrupt but when you were in the militia, at what point do you remember thinking there would be a war?

Well I suppose I was too busy. I didn't think much about it because I was too busy with the apprenticeship and studying at the time. It didn't worry me so much. See there was

31:30 all this Hitlerism and so forth. You don't worry about that when you're 17 and 18. You don't worry about. We never knew it was happening, going to happen but when it did it didn't worry me. I thought, "Well this is it. I've trained for it. I'm going in." And so did a lot of my mates. A lot of them didn't but that was second thought to the adventure, the adventure of the whole

32:00 thing.

Can you tell us about the day war was declared? Do you recall where you were?

I can't remember.

That's all right. That's OK. You don't remember Menzies speaking to Australia at all?

No.

Did you have much information in terms of newspapers and radio? Were you informed about what was happening in Europe?

32:30 Not really. I suppose got The Sun every morning and just read it, "Huh," go to work, and that's it. I'm too busy working and studying, and going to school. That was the main thing but when it happened it was a bit of a surprise in '39 when they moved into Poland and we thought, "Oh well. This won't last. This won't last." But it did and that was it, and they got a bit serious naturally.

33:00 You're walking around in a uniform and next thing you've got to. You've got to do the right thing.

Can you tell me about moving from the militia to the AIF? How did things change for you?

It didn't change much, just went up to the Caulfield Racecourse and bang, and slept in a horse stall. It used to smell a bit and that was it, and then they gave me a uniform, boots and that, and that was the whole story.

33:30 Then bingo, up to Puckapunyal.

You could have stayed in the militia I guess. Why did you decide to move into the army?

I think that I was getting sick of the factory, although we were playing cricket and so forth but I got sick of it. I couldn't settle down. I thought, "I've got to do something better than this." Don't get me wrong. I was not patriotic or anything like that.

34:00 It was just that I liked the adventure. See I can only stay in a place for 15 years and then I move on. 15 years there and 15 years there, 15 years, 18 up here, time to go but I'm too old now. That's what it is with me. I've got to try everything out but my mother made sure I got apprenticed and had a trade behind me, which I'm very thankful for, and

34:30 anyway I had to come and finish it, and that's the best thing I ever did. I could have walked out but I had no qualifications. I'm a qualified electrical engineer.

What did you mother think about you joining the AIF?

She didn't want it, no. She wouldn't sign the thing at 18 no way. She didn't want me to go naturally. Of course her two sons went and my sister married an air force bloke but he never went out of Australia. It wasn't his fault of course.

35:00 It wasn't their fault. They had to be kept here. He was a flight sergeant and he was a foreman with Lofts Lifts in Carlton, and he was skilled engineer, and they didn't want him to go. So that was it. So there was the whole lot of us in the armed forces, the three of us.

So when you put your age up and signed up, how did your mother react?

Very crossly. You know, lecture, lecture, lecture, lecture. It didn't make any difference.

35:30 I think deep down she was pretty proud. Then my brother of course, he met a lass and lived in Albury, and he married her. This is after he joined but he joined up and went into an infantry mob up there, and he used to write, and go crook, "Oh I've gotta get out of this." So I claimed him and they didn't know I was only six months older than him, so I claimed the eldest brother you see?

36:00 So I claimed Bill and he came down with me. He didn't... he was lucky. He stayed in Palestine all the time with headquarters but we were attached to the 6th Divvy [Division]. We were corps troops.

Can you tell me about signing up that day at the Caulfield Racecourse, what the atmosphere was like?

You joined the line through and there was about three or four blokes there, and some of them were in uniform. Well I think

36:30 they all were in uniform. Sorry, they were because this captain... I forget his name now. He was in charge of our workshop. He was talking about this new unit and they wanted ASC [Army Service Corps] militia. They grabbed us and bingo, and that was it. You carried your rank through. I was only a private but you took that in and that's how they trained most of the blokes, from the militia. They wanted the militia, the militia

37:00 all the time because we were trained and it was a good thing. The only problem was you had to go through all the rigmarole of squad drill and all this. And going to church on Sundays, compulsory and I soon put a spoke in the wheel of that because Sundays I became a Catholic, and they didn't have to go, until they woke up to me, and I was put on the cookhouse duties

37:30 cleaning all the coppers out. Oh that lasted a few weeks.

After signing up where did you go from there?

To Puckapunyal.

Where is that?

Puckapunyal is up near Seymour. Do you know Seymour?

Yes.

Well it's just out from Seymour.

What happened at Puckapunyal?

We went up, our company sergeant major, Jack

38:00 Williamson... Ken Andrews was our sergeant cadet, so the three of us went up on the train. They got some army truck to drive us into Pucka, "Here's where you are. There's a big straw heap up there, so here's your palliasse [sleeping pallet], you go up and fill it with straw, and bring it back." And that's where it was. The three of us went into a hut and so when they started to arrive, we

38:30 we were more or less... well I don't know what they did. I know I was cleaning the grease off rifles. I didn't like that very much but it was all right, cleaning and so forth. Then a few more came in and they helped out, and then gradually it was over 700 people strong, 700. Then the 7th Div ASC next to us and then there was the 2/2nd Pioneers, the 2/14th Battalion Infantry, and so on.

39:00 Our life at Puckapunyal was good. We learned unarmed combat and we learned how to throw a hand grenade, and we had rifle practice on the range, and bayonet, and all that. We did all that and parade ground, and route marches. God route marches. There was a big mountain out at Seymour and we marched up to the top of that. It bloody near killed me and most of us,

39:30 and Tommy Guest, he was "Guest Biscuits". That's before your time. Tommy of course, he was a captain and he had this whopping great Delarge car, and he did it. He made it all right with the help of about half a dozen blokes. God he was.... I can show you some of our Par Honore, the paper we printed in Puckapunyal, and there's Tommy sitting up on his stretcher with his batman, and a couple of

40:00 blokes carrying him up the top of Mount Lofty I think it was. And going down to the Goulburn River for a weekend and I've got photographs of that in the two-man tents, and all this. Even the Pioneer boys, they were the greatest. They were corps. They were Pioneer Infantry. They marched from Seymour to Albury and their mascot was a bulldog, and they had a

40:30 fantastic band. They were all specialists. You've got no idea. When they practiced they were doing jazz and this, and we were next door to them. Every big town they came to they raffled the dog but the dog

was with them the next day when they started off. All the way up to Albury they made some money out of the dog and they marched back. So they were really tough boys. And the greatest thing was when they arrived in Palestine we were there at the old train with our trucks to cart them into

41:00 the Hill 69. It was a wonderful thing. See it's comradeship. It really is. You have a football match and you have cricket, and you talk, and laugh, and joke, and things, and you go home for a week, and every second weekend you went home, and come back, and my Mum would come up, and visit us with cake, and all this sort of business, and the wives would come up, and the men would disappear up around the hill. You can't stop human nature.

41:30 It was really great, a great time.

Tape 2

00:32 **With 700 blokes at that camp at Puckapunyal how did everybody get on?**

I suppose they had their differences. We had some Ruddies, some Irishmen and fight God. You've got no idea. They get drunk and then go up and down the lines, and he'd be "Come on out you. Come on out." Wild Paddy oh God but there was all different characters. We had a chap opposite. He had a bit of Italian

01:00 in him and he'd be joking about when he used to sell fruit in the market, and all this sort of thing, and different blokes of different walks of life. It was really funny because we had a lot of fun but I was one off the... I was a bugler there too. I used to have to get up and wake all the cooks up to go and light the fires, had to bugle,

01:30 and we had one bloke down the end, then there was me, then my brother, and then there was ten up there, and ten down the other side. He was a bit of a you know? He didn't fit in, so we thought, "We'll fix this bugger, that's for sure." So I grabbed his boots and my brother went right up the line, and in between the huts they had these big tins to piddle in. You wouldn't go right up to the toilet when it was wet and of course you can imagine they were full if the boys

02:00 had been on the beer, and so forth, and so they went in the tin. We rally and "Where's me bloody boots," and all this sort of thing. We got all dressed and we raced out. Well I was the bugler. I came back and I said, "Have you thought about looking in the piss tin?" There they were. He improved then. He improved a lot. It's marvellous what you can

02:30 do to some people but they don't get the message. But this was the comradeship and it existed more so when you got into the Middle East, when you got into the tough parts but we never lost our sense of humour. Going over we went in a big convoy, the [HMS] Queen Mary, the [SS] Aquitania. We were on the [SS] Mauritania and there was two New Zealand ships,

03:00 smaller behind us, the [SS] Awatea and the [QSMV] Dominion Monarch. Anyway, we got to Colombo and then we were put into this stinking old ship. It had Lascars, you know the Indians and it was a shocking thing. I forget the name of it but some of the boys made some money shovelling coal into the thing. See these Lascars wouldn't work. They're the lowest of the low you know but

03:30 they had a sacred goat. Like in Colombo it was the ox and it could go anywhere, into a shop, and if it did its business you put up with it, and they all ate betel nut. It was a red stain and they'd spit that on the ground, and flies everywhere, filthy, filthy. Anyway, this was the goat and of course one day some bright spark hung a thing over its neck, "OC [Officer Commanding]

04:00 Troops." This bloody goat is walking around with "OC Troops" on it. We were lectured then, "You're not allowed to touch them." "No we'll chuck the bloody thing overboard." And we had a chap called "Aspro". His name was Nicholas and naturally Nicholas Aspro [drug company], and he had the biggest head of anyone in the AIF. It took four months for them to get him a hat. They had to make a special hat for him. His head was... and he was well educated you know. He was a real toff

04:30 and he was a funny man. So what they did, they got a seat off the toilet. This was going up the Red Sea and they got one of the... it looked like a goat's behind. It was shocking food and they had this plate on the toilet, and they dedicated it to the deep, and he read... he made the service. Well you've got no idea what he said. I forget it now but over it went and all these sort of things.

05:00 Some of them... the sense of humour and it increased. I think we were too busy when we... do you want me to continue?

Continue absolutely, continue.

And so we eventually...

Oh I see continuing, just one question before we go to Palestine, just a couple of things. One is why did you decide on the transport unit?

Because as I say, being a young bloke at 17 or 18...

05:30 a car, got to learn how to drive and this is what I liked, I like about it, A Model Fords, and Marmon Herringtons. They were Fords. They were four-wheel drives in those days. But I just like the... I suppose the uniform but mainly the cars, to get and drive a car.

Did you have any idea of what

06:00 **the transport unit would do in wartime?**

Yes, supply food to the frontline.

You were aware of what would really be involved in that?

We didn't really touch on that. We learned how to... the food would come in. We'd have to parcel it out and put it on another truck, and get it up. It was done but it was done in the camp and this is what you did, load, and unload, and so forth. They used to

06:30 do something to the trucks and you had to find it within a set time, and all this sort of thing, and lots of things they did. One was to jack up the back wheel and the bloke would run up, and put it in gear, and nothing would happen. You know the wheel would be turning. Another one was they'd put a lead pencil from the spark plug down to the frame of the engine. You couldn't see it because the lead pencil is

07:00 you know? When the spark started it went down there and they couldn't start the car. You've got to wake up to all these things and that fooled everybody.

Can you tell me about the formation of that transport unit that was known as the Petrol...?

Oh the Petrol Park?

Petrol Park.

I think it was probably started because of

07:30 the armoured cars, the tanks, the vehicles, they had to have a unit in corps troop. See you've got army and then you've got corps, and then you've got the battalions. Now the idea is that it's like a football... when you get a football team you get your strongest men defending and this is the same

08:00 as the army. You get your best men defending and that's exactly what it is, and so we were not just Petrol. We became general transport companies after that. We got rid of that Corps Petrol Park over in... and this is what it was about. We were, the corps were there to support the battalions. If there was any breakthrough the

08:30 corps infantry would go in and then they had corps tanks, and anti-tank, and it was a whole big sort of an army by itself, just for defence. Later on of course when we went into the desert we started in our vehicles. We got all our vehicles and so forth, and I got

09:00 a truck, "9094", a Maple Leaf. They were Canadian, a wooden... they weren't all steel. They came later. A Maple Leaf to drive and going through the Sinai Desert, that's from Palestine to Egypt or to the Suez Canal. It's all desert and there's this black strip through it you know? We'd stop to fill up the trucks with petrol. Of

09:30 course they were four-gallon tins in those days, pretty thin and soldered, and you'd fill your tank up, and throw it up. You'd be gone about 100 yards and they'd disappear, the Arabs. You know they'd be waiting and they'd grab anything. It was amazing how they can hide. I'll tell you another story about the "scarab" too in a moment. So they were fantastic really, the Arabs. However,

10:00 we got through Cairo...

Before you got to Palestine, when you were leaving Australia, can you describe for me that convoy of ships and the day of departure?

Yes. The Mauritania was at Port Melbourne and we were up... my Mum and my sister must have hired a boat with a few other people, and

10:30 waving. We were waving. They saw it, "There's Donny and Billy." My sister got that excited she nearly fell over. Luckily my mother grabbed her or she'd have gone in the drink. However, that was the last and then we went down out the heads, and then we met the other convoy, all the other ships that had come from Sydney, and then we went to Perth or Fremantle. We went in and got more people on, and then

11:00 Queen Mary of course was sitting out there with the Aquitania. So then we joined the big convoy and HMAS Canberra was the... you know, looked after us on the way to Colombo. You could smell Colombo when you were 24 hours out I can tell you now. I told you what it's like and the smells you know.

What were your thoughts when you actually left Australia when you were leaving that day?

Adventure.

11:30 Adventure. Oh yes, you know everyone was the same. Oh yes, "We're going on a boat trip. We're going over to the Middle East." Wouldn't be able to get... nothing would... ever in our lifetime be able to afford to go over there but on no, see the world and we did, in a bit of a hard way, but we had our moments, but it was an adventure I'd do again.

12:00 **So what were conditions like on the Mauritania?**

Good, oh good, yes. They had a bar and so forth but we used to have a bit of exercises, and running around the thing, all this sort of business, but nothing much really. It didn't take long.

How big a ship was the Mauritania?

It wasn't a steam ship. It was a big passenger ship, like the big... the big...

12:30 not quite as big as they are today but as big as big. They were big P&O [Pacific and Orient line] boats, ships rather and no, there was plenty of room, although we never had a cabin. We were all down below in the hull and they had tiered bunks, and they had these big... a canvas with a big sail would go up, and the air would get into that, and blow down this big round chute, and keep the air in it.

13:00 Oh no, you could go up the top and I immediately got my hammock, and swung it up underneath up top but that was the only crooked part. It was a bit stuffy and all this but you got over that. It was a nice trip.

How crowded was it? Were there many troops onboard your ship?

Oh yes it was full. I couldn't say how many thousands but over a thousand easy.

13:30 Well our unit was 700 strong, so you can imagine there was quite a few.

When you arrived in the Middle East can you tell me about your first impressions when you arrived there?

I think the most impressive thing, coming back to the old ship and we're going up in convoy...

14:00 I've got a photograph there... in the Red Sea, and to see the ships in the horizon with the red, and the smoke going up is a sight you'll never forget, and it's so smooth. See the red hills, it's a reflection of the sun in the... but to see this at sunset. It's magic. We arrive at Ismelin [Ismailia, today]. That's where the start of the Suez Canal is, the Bitter Lakes and a bloke

14:30 was standing there, and he says, "Where've ya been? Where have ya been." Good Lord. So that was one of the 6th Divvy boys. They'd gone over to train because there was no... they didn't do any training. They just bunged them straight over to Palestine and Cairo, round that area. So that was the start. Then we stopped at Port [Bur] Tewfik along the Suez and bunged us into stinking cattle trucks,

15:00 filthy, with square wheels, typical wog stuff, and that was the worst part. God we couldn't get off quick enough. Then we were at Hill 69 for I suppose three or four weeks.

Can you describe the conditions there for us?

They weren't bad. We lived in tents naturally and we had bamboo things that the wogs had made so we could lie...

15:30 we didn't have camp stretchers or anything like that. We had a canteen and the old wogs would come round selling oranges, "Very clean. Very hygiene. George." We were all "George" you know. Though I must tell you the habit of these particular Arabs. They relieved themselves,

16:00 take a bit off grass and you know [demonstrates wiping backside]. So the left hand, you never shake hands with it that's for sure. Insult. Then they'd be selling you oranges with their left hand you know. Nice and hygiene isn't it? Very prophylactic. "Very clean. Very hygiene. Very prophylactic, George." So all these funny things but to go around and see the mud huts of the Arabs, the way they

16:30 lived, and that's never changed in 2000 years my dear. They're still the same, no hygiene, no running water, no electricity and all this sort of business, and they used to stink. You know, to keep the mosquitos away they used to burn camel dung. That would keep everything away. The stink of the place. And they never bathed. Well they couldn't but they reckoned by putting a lot of clothes

17:00 on it would keep the heat out, but oh God they used to stink and it's exactly the same. There's no difference.

When you arrived at Hill 69 what were the weather conditions like?

Bloody hot. Hot. I can't recall ever having any rain. It may have but no it was pretty hot, hot and dusty, and so forth.

And at night? Was it also hot at night?

17:30 Oh mosquitos and oh yes.

So it didn't get cold at night?

It was no humidity. There was nil. It was a dry heat but see we got used to that. This was our... we were trying then to go into the desert. That was the big test but no, I can't say that we... we'd get leaved to Tel Aviv and

18:00 that was all right. You'd go into the shops and go and see the belly dancers, and all this sort of business. I'll tell you something too and I've got a photograph of this, the Jews, the Jewish people built desalination plant. It was a big, big building right on the sea front to change seawater into drinking water. Now they did that in the 1920s

18:30 or late 20s, 1930s. They were able to do that. Why can't they do that up here and it's magic. That's what the Jewish people did for the Palestinians, the wogs and they're doing it now but see... no I won't get political. That's not right. They were sort of standoffish, the Jewish people. When we came out of the desert,

19:00 when the Libyan and Syrian campaign was on, and we went to Haifa, that's the deep seaport in Palestine, and a lot of the Jewish people ignored us, and so they didn't mix with us. So I think that's fair enough but they were a bit standoffish.

Can you describe the scene in Tel Aviv for me?

It was typical Arab and

19:30 not so many Jewish people because that came after the war when Churchill moved them all into Israel. I bought a camera, a Leica I think it was, and plenty of film and there was a lot of these places. The Jewish people run the businesses.

What was the city like? Can you describe

20:00 **the city life, the buildings?**

They're all white and it's no good saying it's a typical wog place because they didn't have big high-rises or anything like that, and the beaches were nice. I don't know. There wasn't much traffic of course. There was a lot of bullocks

20:30 and that pulling carts. There weren't very many vehicles.

We've heard from different people about the brothels in various cities in the Middle East.

Oh yes.

Did Tel Aviv have many brothels as well?

I don't think so. I don't know. I know about Beirut. I can tell you a lot about that when we get to it and so no, we weren't worried about that. Look we were schooled before we left. There were coloured...

21:00 on the screen in the hut, rec hut about VD [venereal disease] and that would put anybody off honestly. Well you see that's what it was and no I don't think that... I don't know.

Can you tell us a little bit about the schooling about VD, what they showed you and what they told you about it?

They showed you about gonorrhoea and syphilis, and all this sort of... the people with all these things all over

21:30 them, and so forth, and that would put you off. It was pretty you know awful but it really went home and that was it, but because... you see the medical people were very strict on this. They took over these brothels and you weren't allowed in until 12 o'clock, and they had to have the prostitutes examined, and tested,

22:00 and you had condoms or if you didn't you had to squirt things down your penis, and all this, and all that sort of thing. That would put you off anyway but that's what would happen. You want me to jump over to Beirut and I can come back, to talk about brothels?

Yeah sure, absolutely.

Now the brothel system of course, that was French mandate, so you know what the French are like and the brothels were there

22:30 in Beirut. There was a carpentry shop in the middle of it and we had the job of taking the... the wogs would sit down, and they'd make these trestles to put your... you know what you lift up and carry a body away with?

Oh a stretcher?

Yes stretchers. We all got one. We got them from the Italians, a heck of a lot. You'd sit them on and we'd

have to wait over an hour to get a truckload.

23:00 So we'd wander round and the MPs [military police] let us through while they were loading our truck, and to talk to some of the women... now there was an American University in Beirut, and a lot of them were girls from different places, mainly Greek and so forth, beautiful people. They had to go into prostitution to live, otherwise they'd starve. They couldn't get home. I used to be friendly with a couple of them and I'd take... Mum would send me

23:30 condensed milk or cake, or something, and you'd think that it was Father Christmas. I felt so sorry for them you know? There was a lot like that.

How did you come to be friendly with them?

Well just talking to them, just talking. Most of them were behind a steel door the same as out the front here and you'd talk to them through that, and then you could go in,

24:00 and have a talk, and I tell you what, coffee, Turkish coffee, wow. You could float a teaspoon in it but it was beautiful, sweet and the aroma was fantastic. They had these little charcoal burners on the dirt floor or not so much there... they had probably tiles etcetera, and they'd give you this coffee, and you talk to them in broken English but

24:30 a lot of these young women from... they could speak English all right, the Greek girls, and it was a delight to be able to speak to them. They were quite refined and it was unfortunate. They had to do it or starve but it's hard to say that... if I was a millionaire I'd have given them money, get out of it or something, but they couldn't go

25:00 anywhere. There was a war on and that was it.

What did they tell you about their lives as prostitutes?

I don't think they mentioned it. We didn't talk... we talked about other things. We talked about Australia. I think that's why Melbourne became one of the biggest Greek places in the world, out of Greece I mean. I think some of those women would have probably come... migrated to Australia but there were

25:30 other Arab girls. See now if you were an Arab... I witnessed a wedding and there was a lot in this village, and the bride and the groom went upstairs, and did what they had to do, and the sheet had to come out with blood on it otherwise she would go into the brothels. She had to be you know? That's their law.

When did you witness the wedding?

When we were at

26:00 Hill 69. I wasn't going to tell you that but that's life and that's the way... that's their religion, and that's so. I don't know whether it is now but that's what it was and those girls were cast out of the district, and they had to go and become prostitutes.

How many of the men in your unit would have gone to those brothels?

I wouldn't have a clue.

26:30 I wouldn't have a clue really. There's a lot of sad stories and funny but you struck a lot of people... I struck a lady from Oakleigh. She'd married a Lebanese and she had a little restaurant on the way up to Hims, up on the Turkish border. We drove through there and be

27:00 carting... we had the job of moving the Australian canteen from Palestine. We reckoned that was the best job we ever had. In Beirut they had a distillery. They made beautiful wines and that. The French drank wine. That's another story I must include if I can remember it.

We'll get onto that. Don't worry we'll ask you about that.

27:30 We had Almazum Lazziza. It was shocking beer and then they sent a Cooper, a Cooper's beer from... brewer from Adelaide, and he came up there, and of course the water was sweet. It's just like Melbourne water. He gradually got the Almazum Lazziza back but then we had the job of bringing the beer off the ships.

28:00 They had crates, four dozen and they were all stacked in straw so they wouldn't break naturally. They'd dump them on your truck and then we'd come up, and take them to the... we came straight through to Beirut or we had to go up to the Turkish border. You'd have two days drive and all this. Well you see going up we'd have one truck of miscellaneous stuff and then a beer, and then a miscellaneous, and then a beer.

28:30 The first truck had a corporal or a sergeant and he missed out that's for sure but the others, what we would do, my spare driver would get out on the... and you're going up hill, slowly. He'd get out on the bonnet with a couple of bottles of beer and hand them in, and we'd get chocolates or cigarettes, or whatever back, and this is what happened see? I got enough beer in my truck to... New Year's Eve I think it was in Hadid.

29:00 We had grog right up to... we had an EPIP [English pattern, Indian product], a big sort of a marquee but I had a secret thing cut into the bottom of the truck. My mates in the workshops did that for me. So they got some beer and we'd put it in there. One of the chaps that was in charge of the natives there, he... the RSL brought him out to Oakleigh after the war. He was a decent bloke.

Just going back to Beirut and before we leave that discussion of the brothels, can you describe how

29:30 **those brothels were organised and what they looked like?**

Of course they were there before the war but being French, well you know the French are pretty easy and all those sort of thing, and that was... I suppose some of them were French women, but there was a big French... there was a lot of French. The policemen were French and up Alley Hill all

30:00 the big mansions, they were all French people because you must remember [Beirut] was the banking city of all the whole Middle East. Then they'd bank between that and the Swiss Bank, very... pretty wealthy but there were a lot of people pretty poor too because they never had agriculture like we have. They have olives and they have goats, and a few sheep, and this lady used to have

30:30 roast lamb. We made sure that we made it to her place and so forth. She was a very nice person.

So can you describe the actual brothels for us?

Just ordinary mud brick, some upstairs. I think they had stone on the floors and they had mats, and so forth, and just ordinary wog houses,

31:00 in the city itself, part of Mohammad Ali Square in the middle with a bit of a garden, a few date palms, and you go in that section. They were two storeys and you'd walk down the street, and there was a little factory where we'd wait for the load of trestles, and so forth.

Were the girls actually in the streets waiting for customers or were they...?

No, no, no, no. They were in the house and you can just go in, and they say, "Saeed

31:30 George. Very clean. Very prophylactic," all same thing you know. "Shufti gerbic," no "Shufti kus." Show us your you know and she'd lift it up. "Very clean George." But we learned to sing naughty songs in Arabic and all this sort of thing, "Shufti gerbic, shufti kus, (UNCLEAR)." "No money. Too

32:00 poor." "Ah George, you got plenty lira." It was funny. We used to have a lot of laughs with them but we never really... we were too busy. We were on the go all the time. That was a pretty hot war but see that was mostly 6th Divvy that got out of Greece and Crete. They were sent back

32:30 there to rest in Palestine and then they were into it again.

But you were all young blokes with hormones raging through you I suppose. It must have been quite difficult to be without women?

I don't know that our... bully beef and biscuits would help. That's where I got this, lack of vitamins. We lived on that and the Poms were better off than us. We'd go in the desert. There were

33:00 three or four truckloads and we'd get together, and say, "Look there's a supply dumped there." They had McConachie stew and tinned sausages, oh what a beautiful banquet to get hold of them. So what we'd do, we'd drive up. We'd get out. "What did you do you silly b...? You nearly run us..." "Oh no, no." We'd be thumping and rolling round, and the blokes in charge would be coming in, watching the other Poms. So the other boys would go round the back and knock off all their McConachie stew, not all,

33:30 and their sausages. Of course they became aware of the Aussies at the time you know but that was another thing. You were always dirty in the desert, couldn't wash.

So when you went along to these brothels, sorry just to stay on that before we move on,

34:00 **how much would it have cost to visit one of these girls?**

About a lira. What's a lira? About two or three shillings or something, or five shillings, something like that. I don't know what the value was in those days. I don't know.

Were you all supplied with condoms?

Yes you could get... there was a centre there that you went to and you had to go. If you didn't have them you had to go. Even if you did you had to go and squirt

34:30 these little things up your penis, and so forth, and wash yourself.

Squirt these little things? I don't know what you mean.

It was white stuff, a little tube, like toothpaste with a little jet, and you just squeeze it, and put it up, and that killed all the syphilis germs, and so forth. Oh no, it was run pretty strict and it was open only for so

many hours and they would close it up.

35:00 They weren't open of a night time. It was 12 o'clock say till four o'clock or something like that but I didn't really worry much about it because we were never, hardly ever in Beirut. We were on the go all the time and a trip up to Turkey and that, took about a good day and a half I suppose. We'd sleep in the truck. We had our

35:30 own stretchers and we'd sleep on... if it was petrol or it was beer. At that time it was beer. I won't name my spare driver but he was a hell of a big bloke and he was a heck of a nice bloke. He taught me how to drive as a matter of fact. I'll call him Robert because Robert is a mate of mine. He's a retired lieutenant colonel you know and I was a corporal. So we got on very

36:00 well. However, no it... I forget what I was going to say?

You were talking about Robert the driver.

Oh yes. Well when we came through from the desert before, that's when the war had started with the Vichy [French forces] and the Germans in Lebanon, we were pulled out of the desert, and we came through the Sinai, and we had a continual squint in our eyes. We never

36:30 had sunglasses or anything and the moment we saw these gum trees our eyes opened up, and the greenery. We stopped and started to eat the gum leaves. We got so homesick, "Good old Aussie," broke off some, stuck them in the truck, crazy. But as we got in it was all starting into Palestine with greenery and your eyes opened up, and I can remember

37:00 that. Oh yes on the way there was four trucks... this happened. We stopped to have a cup of tea. Now we had a desert billy tin. Well that was half a petrol tin cut in half with sand in it and you poured petrol in it, and it just burnt, and the flames came up, and you boiled your billy in it right? And made your tea right? So we stopped and had that. Anyway Jock disappeared, said, "I'm going to p...."

37:30 He disappeared over these olive groves, over the rocks. Anyway, sergeant said, "Where's Jock?" "Oh he's just gone to relieve himself." He said, "Hurry. We're on our way. We can't wait any longer." So they went and I'm still there pushing the horn, and out comes Jock jumping over the rocks doing his pants up. We get in the truck and take off, and he's got two eggs in his hand. He said, "How about that Don. I got a naughty

38:00 tin of bully beef and two eggs change." Oh jeepers he was a funny man. He found them. There was a farmhouse there because all the people had come back at that time. The armistice was signed and all the civilians came down from the mountains. It's very mountainous in Lebanon and they all came back you see, otherwise they all fled naturally when the war was on.

38:30 **Just going back to when you first arrived in Palestine and that first camp, can you describe that camp for us?**

Hill 69? It was a bit hilly and we had tents there, and we didn't do very much because... we set up a canteen, and all this sort of business, and nothing. I think we just lobbed around and talked, and blokes smoked, and so forth, and got bored.

39:00 The best thing that happened was when our trucks arrived and then we got the move, to move up to the desert. Sometimes if you wanted to go to Palestine you could go, no problems. There was a truck to take you and to pick you up, and so forth, go into the cafes, and have a meal, and all this sort of business but it was pretty boring at times. I suppose

39:30 we were bored. When you look back and you think, it was a bit boring but it wasn't really. I can remember when we moved up and I told you this about throwing your... in the Sinai Desert, and then they disappeared, well we went across on the Suez, and Cairo was a very busy place. They've got shops everywhere in the streets and they're selling oranges, and watermelons. So as we're going throw Jock took out his bayonet, and he stood on the running

40:00 board, and he stuck it in a big watermelon like this, and chucked it inside, and got another [yells in foreign language and waves arms in the air], and we had an old wog chasing after us. "Ah impshyella." "Go away." Then we enjoyed these two big watermelons. Well that killed the monotony, the boredom. Then

40:30 things got exciting, got very exciting.

How long was that journey from Hill 69 to...?

Cairo?

Cairo?

I suppose about eight hours, about six to eight hours to the Suez Canal and then we hit Mersa Matruh in a sand storm. Well you never want to be in one of those. There's no such a thing as a sand storm.

41:00 It's a dust storm because sand is too heavy but they call it "sand storm" and we had to put our respirators on to breath, and we hit these barracks. It had been some Egyptian Army barracks and

they'd laid all these landmines around the darn thing, and they hadn't had time to find them all

41:30 but we did, in our trucks. I did. I went on one and it blew the blooming wheel off, and I think I've still got the lump in my head when I hit the top, and Jock wasn't in it fortunately, not Jock... I shouldn't have said his name.

Tape 3

00:32 **Can you tell me about the first conflict that you were involved with?**

I think the first real conflict was the breakthrough of the Germans. Oh sorry, we were against the Italians at that time. There wasn't very much conflict. Our main job was to get the diesel petrol, food

01:00 ammunition to the frontline or to the dumps. Then they would go into the... that was our main... from base right? I suppose that... and bring back Italian prisoners of war. Now I liked the Italians. They were happy because they... they wouldn't fight. As you know, they just surrendered in the thousands to one bloke but we'd bring them back. We put

01:30 18 in the back. We had the trucks and we had the canopy over the top, the canvas canopy, and that was all rolled up, and Dagos or the Eyeties, or whatever you call them, the Spags, they were a happy group, and they all sang... now in that day Diana Durban I think was singing "Amapola". Remember "Amapola"? "Amapola bum de dum...." It was a bit of Italian and they all sang this, and they were as happy as anything.

02:00 They were singing away and they had their guitars with them, and so forth. From Tobruk back to... we'd bring them back. We'd bring them from the frontline to Tobruk. Then from Tobruk they were shipped down to Alexandria to the prisoner of war camp and you'd stop every now and again for them to relieve themselves, different with the Nazis. We wouldn't. We'd let them piss themselves as far as we're concerned. They were really arrogant,

02:30 never trust... however, it was a night. We'd have to go through... stop a little bit of a night time to get to Tobruk. Well we'd have 18 at the start. By the time we got there in the morning they'd be all over the... they'd join you out of the desert. They'd be sitting on top of the thing, on top of the spare tyre box, on top of the cabin, sitting on the front bumper bar, hanging on the each side. I had

03:00 about 30 by the time I got them... 30 of them. They're all happy, singing away. On one of the trips we had a... he was only about 16. He was a boy and he came from the border north, and he had blue eyes, and blond hair, and so we kept hold of him. We snuck him into the camp and got him some clothes, and he'd come out with us, and hide, and we'd go out, and he'd come with us but I had to give him up in the end. They found out

03:30 and they said, "Oh Don, you've got to." And he had tears in his eyes and I never got his phone number, not his phone number, his address because I'd have loved to of sponsored him you know? But anyway, hopefully he got back and is still alive today.

How did you communicate with him?

Well I couldn't. I just grabbed him out of the... and he talked to me but it was... I don't know.

04:00 Then of course we were pulled out of the desert when Churchill sent us over to be slaughtered in Greece and so we went over to load our trucks, and we went over. There was only a section of us there because the Germans came down too fast for us. We would do this Mad Mile. They called it the "Mad Mile." Over there

04:30 and in the Middle East too, they have a road, and then they have these big storm waters, the same as in Singapore if you've ever been there. When they get a flush you know like that and in Greece, and this Mad Mile was between the mountains. It was a straight line and I'll you as soon as you started the bloody Messerschmitts would come down, and those culverts were full of trucks, and that. They were pushed over out of the way. But I've got a piece of paper there that

05:00 a CO of an infantry battalion that we got out of the frontline wrote this letter and it's a beautiful letter, thanking us, and hoping... that no matter what they did, we did it for him. He was so grateful he wrote to our CO and I've got the copy there. But it was a very hot and very quick war that, and we had to get out. So Rob and I, we drove

05:30 down to Kalamata. That's where the ships were and we set fire to our truck, burnt the whole thing, and a lot of them did this. We were lucky. We just got on a... a corvette was just pulling away, so we jumped up straight on it, left everything else and we ended up in Alexandria. Well we were lucky but a lot of them went to Crete and they got slaughtered in Crete by the German paratroopers, and a lot of them just went to Palestine. But there was a Fifth Column

06:00 in Greece and we were camped in a olive grove, and we woke up one morning, and there was a sheet, a

white sheets in the paddocks next.... or the field, with an arrow pointing towards us, you know? So we got out of there pretty quick smart.

What do you mean there was a lot of white column?

No, no, they call it Fifth Column.

Oh Fifth Column.

Fifth Column spies or people that like the Germans and didn't like the Brits, so this is what they used to do,

06:30 probably Germans anyway would do this but peasants, acting as peasants. There was a lot of that.

You said Greece was a slaughter. Can you explain that a little bit more?

Was a slaughter? It wasn't... the Germans came down through Yugoslavia and it was very mountainous, and to get the troops up there, to get the artillery to knock off their tanks, was a bit... it was a mighty effort. The Australians did hold them back for a...

07:00 but they were too strong. See we never had an air force there. The only air forces there was shot up not down. They only had biplanes and... see Churchill pushed us in there. It was all a political thing to you know, get the Greek people on our side but it was a very... should have left it. There wouldn't have been any Crete but a lot of our unit were on their way. We passed them. They were

07:30 going over. We were coming back with all our vehicles on it and everything. It was a stupid thing, should never have been there. Then we went back up the desert the second time against Rommel. Well that was a different situation all together because they were pretty strong and we brought back prisoners but we only had 12 in the back, and with a spare driver sitting with a Tommy gun. We shot the mongrels too. We never

08:00 stopped to relieve themselves. They could piddle their pants as far as we were concerned but they were arrogant and so we had to get rid of them, dump them and get rid of them, a different thing. The Italians didn't like them.

When you say they were arrogant, what did they do to display their arrogance?

Well they think they are Jesus Christ, they can walk on water. Briefly that's what it's about but a lot of the German people now

08:30 are quite all right, but this is their training. See those troops were trained and they had this big Hitler movement. They didn't know anything else. Of course they were bloody good fighters. The Aussies knocked them off that's a bet... well as I say, then we were pulled out. When the Americans came into it they came from the west. They came in

09:00 and of course then the Brits had sent out Montgomery, and he got a lot of... he got his men, and he got the tanks that he needed, and that was a different story. So they just went straight through them. Then we were pulled straight out into the Syrian campaign and then of course when the Japanese came in we were the first to move. They moved us out.

09:30 I say at Tewfik... there were 720 of us. Well a few left because some of our boys were killed and taken prisoners of war by the Italians and the Germans but by and large that... we were to go on the Orcades , and it was anchored out in the

10:00 Bitter Lakes. It just sat there. Now there's a high tide in the Suez, up and down. You can only stay there for a while then you've got to go. So there was two of these big... what do you call them... sort of tankers or something, barges. They used to take the fuel and water, and food out to the ships right? So there was two of them and we walked over the first one. We were the first to go. So I grabbed my brother because he was...

10:30 "Come on, you're coming with me." We went out and we started off first. Now we would have been the first on the Orcades. Halfway out we got engine trouble. It was on old steam thing you know, coal, wood and it took an hour, and in all this time the other lot of boys come out on the barges, and there's my mate Ernie, that we worked together, and in the army together, and Chocos, waving an Italian guitar. He loved the guitar. He used to play

11:00 the banjo, ukulele, like George Formby and he used to write music. We'd harmonize when we were kids. Anyway, they went out there. They all got on the [SS] Orcades. By the time we got going and we got out the side of it, and the captain said in his megaphone, "Sorry fellas, we've got to go. We're lifting anchor." And away they went and we're sitting... I've got the photograph of us alongside the Orcades. Now that's how close we came to being taken POW [prisoners of war] because they all went to

11:30 Java see, and the Orcades didn't need an escort because it did 30 knots. It could outrun any of the battleships or the destroyers, so they went down. So we eventually with our convoy and we loaded all our trucks on all the other cargo ships. We started a big convoy and hit Colombo. Then we were on our way to Java. Three quarters of the way down they got a signal to go back to Colombo. Java had fallen. They

- 12:00 caught all our boys and what's his name, the famous doctor... I'll think of the name in a minute but all the beautiful nurses you know? There were a few thousand onboard that Orcades and they all went, and I've got photographs of Ernie taken as a POW. His mate Robbie bought the film back and gave it to me.
- 12:30 I was president of the unit association. He gave me the copy and it's one of them that Ernie's got this look, and he's got a white armband, and they drove ambulances. I've got it over there.

What was the reaction from your group when you heard that they were taken?

We didn't know. We didn't know where we were going. Now we had a pretty big convoy going down. We woke up one morning and there was two

- 13:00 battle cruisers, British battle cruisers hiding in our convoy, and one was the [HMS] Cornwall I think [actually Repulse], and the other [HMS] Prince of Wales. Two days later they were sunk by Japanese and they were hiding. So we were coming back to Australia. We were the first convoy and we were on the old Salwing [? SS Suilven]. That was a sort of a small cargo and we were all down in the hull.
- 13:30 Anyway, we had a problem. In the rough sea the old Salwing would go 45 degrees. It struck a line of bombs in the Greek campaign getting out and it sort of weakened part of it. When it went that way we'd all get over the port side to level it off and Mickey Wright my mate, he was with the vehicles, all our vehicles, and they stayed with them. He said, "We used to look and Jesus, it's got to go this time."
- 14:00 So we were that slow. There was a scare of this raider, a German raider in the Indian Ocean. So the convoy left us. We were on our Pat Malone. We ended up going down near the damn South Pole. 48 days we were from the Middle East before we hit Fremantle. Then we came up to Fremantle and that was it. God. Then we went around, came round into...
- 14:30 they went on and we came to Adelaide, and I joined the RSL. I'm the oldest RSL man in Australia incidentally or here anyway, from the Middle East. I mean there might have been some but I joined that in King William Street, the RSL on the 11th of March 1942. I've got a thing I'll show you later in my memorabilia up on the lift all about that and all that. But also
- 15:00 oldest returned serviceman, not RSL but RSL and the oldest. So that was just a bit of luck. I should have been there 48 days before then. Well a bit sooner.

Was it good to be home after all that time?

Oh yes. In Adelaide... do you know Adelaide at all? Hunley Road, Parklands, that's where we were camped. All our vehicles were

- 15:30 brought up to Brisbane but I was an electrician in the workshops before we left. One of our electricians that was in it, he transferred into the Salvation Army. The last time I saw him he was in Queen Street and he had a table. He was in the Salvation Army. He had the uniform. I'll show you his photograph alongside the Orcades and he had these three beautiful young girls
- 16:00 sitting around. "How do you do it?" That's the way it is. By and large I suppose we drove the workshop vehicles through, through to Goodna and see they were too heavy. They never had the trains to... and that was a fantastic trip I can tell you now. It was really something because the chap in charge, the captain, we stopped off at
- 16:30 home in Melbourne at Royal Park, and saw Mum, and so forth, a couple of days, and she was excited.

What was her reaction when she saw you?

Oh tears in her eyes, the same old thing. But anyway we used to write letters and Mum would send... I've got a photograph later on. Up in Morotai she sent... she used to make these cakes and put them in a tin, and seal them with sticking plaster, and put plenty of wine in them you know? One of them, we got it on a table.

- 17:00 My little mate Johnny Nick, he's got a chisel and I've got a sledgehammer cutting Mum's cake, all these sort of things.

What sort of things would she write in her letters to you?

Normal things but I couldn't tell her very much, "Am OK." There was a standard thing in the Middle East, "Is well, OK," and that's it because everything had to be...

- 17:30 the lieutenants and that, they censored all that stuff. See I could have sent a lot of... I did send a lot of stuff home. I had a German helmet and a Vichy French helmet, and a captain and a major's cap sent home in a big box and all this but the photographs I got are mainly now what I've kept. See all the ones of the action all went onto the Orcades because all our gear
- 18:00 was put on there first and some Jap got all that.

So the trip to Goodna? What was that all about?

Well, we still had the old vehicles and the dust on the canvas about this thick. Johnny would go ahead.

He was a Don R, what they called the despatch rider, and he would go ahead. An officer would be in a car and he'd make arrangements for us to

18:30 camp in the showgrounds or something like that but when we were going through we'd stop every now and again. All the young girls would come out and put their name and their phone number on it, in the dust and you should see it. One of them, he had that much lipstick put on his windscreen he couldn't see through it. He had to wipe it all off and all these little things. We were great heroes but that was great. Everywhere we went we were feted and he would organise a bath. He'd go up and say, "Tell Mum...." He'd pick

19:00 an old lady and she's out there waving, "Righto Mum. Can we come home for a bath?" "Sure." So Johnny and I would have our bath, and it was good, and the girls organised a dance, and it was really good. It took us a few days to get up to Goodna but that was the story there. Things changed from then. 24 of our boys went into the... the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] came around and they wanted pilots. It was

19:30 called the... I forget now but it was the Brit's idea to get people like this and train them. Well see, there was 26 of our boys went into the RAAF. They went in two or three nights a week to study and do all that. They all passed their exams and they were shot off to Canada. The Commonwealth Air Training Scheme [actually Empire Air Training Scheme], that's it. They became fighter pilots in the big battle and navigators, and I saw

20:00 most of them when they came back with their badges, and caps.

What did you do after you went to Goodna? Where did you go?

Well we were broken up. See we lost 207 of our boys POW and we had to get reinforcements, so we got a lot of New South Wales boys, and Queensland boys.

20:30 The only problem was in 1942 at that time the army was that close to revolting because they were militia boys that had their rank confirmed and there was no way... see I should have been a staff sergeant but I remained a corporal, and that was it. I had to take orders from thingo too. Our CO [Commanding Officer] did his best to get rid

21:00 of them of course but then we were all split up and then we were given jeeps, and trailers, frontline stuff. See we then were transferred to the American Army and this is what I wrote the history of my unit, and sent it to Canberra, that our unit was the only unit in the 2nd AIF [Australian Imperial Force], in the Second [World] War that was represented in every theatre of war including

21:30 Burma Road, and including the Battle of Britain. So no one else has got a history like that because we were then attached to the Americans. We were moved around to Hollandia. That was Dutch New Guinea and that was MacArthur's Head Quarters later on, and I've got a photograph of that. There was 5000 WACs, American girls, Women's Auxiliary Corps something. Five up on this beautiful...

22:00 like saturnalia, up on the hills. Of course you know what used to go on. Well, we got friendly with one of the young... there was a battalion of Negroes and Cubans, and this Scat Johnson married a starlet and he used to have his wife sitting there in the nude, a photograph of her. He and my mate Jack, we'd go out to their dances, and we'd sit there behind the curtains, and

22:30 they were fantastic. We'd eat in their mess. Now they'd start the mess, now before the food came someone walked... they had the piano and everything, you know the Yanks. The bloke would sit there and he'd fiddle, ad lib on the piano, and a bloke would come in with the bass, and then the drums. The Negroes oh. In the end they had 14 or 15 playing it and you could hear it... it's very hilly over there, and you could hear for

23:00 miles, and miles, and fantastic. You've got no idea of the concerts they put on, just ad lib. Then we'd line up for food. The food ooooh, chilli con carne with strawberry jam in it and ice cream, and Schlitz beer. This is the Yanks. We were to leave that but we went in. We loaded our vehicles on the big LC, landing craft transport,

23:30 the big ones and we moved a lot of our vehicles, and we did the landing at Morotai. We were there for a few weeks and then we had to grease up our vehicles with the marine grease. See if they couldn't get in we'd go down and you'd have to have it all greased because of the condition you know? We did all that and that was a job and a half I'll tell you what. Then we got the word to say,

24:00 "Well we're not going to so and so. We're going to make another landing." We didn't know of course but it was Labuan, northwest Borneo, an island up there. That's where we finished and we had to clean all the grease off them. But then we did that. We were with the Yanks. They were pretty good and Labuan was a... it was... Labuan there was about 150

24:30 Koreans, marines and the Koreans were worse than the Japanese. They were the Independent Company, Australian commandos, got them [enemy Koreans] bottled up in this area and what they [the enemy] did, they tunneled under, and they must have come down past our camp on the road. There was a swamp and then our 106 General Transport Company,

- 25:00 the mother, they had all these ducks, you know those amphibious ducks, and they'd go out, and the Liberty ships would dump the cargo in there, and they'd bring it in, and dump it straight onto our trucks, and then we'd take it up to where the infantry blokes were. However these Koreans, they tunnellled under and they came down. There must have been 60 or 70 of them. They came down and we woke up to all the shooting,
- 25:30 and the screaming because they got stuck into the Americans, and they just cut them to pieces. They still had their swords and things like that. They also had these big twin Cadillac-engine torpedo boats. They were keeping 24 hours a day. They'd go round and the Americans, that was their base. Of course 20 millimetre cannons on them
- 26:00 and these stupid Koreans, they started to shoot. Of course the drums of petrol exploded and the oil, and the Koreans just stood, and they slaughtered them. The next day of course our boys were in that. I can remember one sergeant. He was a funny man. When all the shooting was going up, he got a fright. He said while he was in mid air and he put a steel helmet on and his boots.
- 26:30 Anyway, that was a very hot little moment and I've got all the photographs of it there, and there was one bloke, when we had the truck, and they were throwing the bodies up on it, and the bloke was spraying them with disinfectant or whatever it was. "One, two, two and a half, two and a quarter, one head coming up." They dug
- 27:00 a big hole and bulldozed the lot but they started to stink but that was a bit dicey.

What was our role?

Lucky they didn't get into our camp. I don't know what our sentries were doing. They must have gone to sleep to let them through but that was... they found also evidence of cannibalisation with the Koreans.

What evidence did they find of that?

They just got caught there.

- 27:30 One of the cargo ships or Liberty ships they call them, struck a mine and all the canteen grog was in it, and it flooded. So you could go out there and drink as much as you like but you had to get back but then they bought all this
- 28:00 whisky and gin, and stuff all wet, and dumped it in our vehicles. Well you can understand what happened. We had a talk you know with some of the boys because they had an MP, a military policeman in every vehicle. "Slow down in such an such a spot" and we'd be hiding, and jump in the back, and throw them out." You'd break half of them but we'd end up with getting the whole blooming... except the CO, drunk. It was beautiful King George
- 28:30 the Fifth whisky and Gilbey's Gin, oh dear me. So that brightened the place up a bit and of course then the armistice came, and then we had to... 20 points or something. The married men got first and then the single ones, and you know. Then you came home but that's about... and as I said, I finished up in Royal Park, and signed off
- 29:00 November the 20th exactly five and a half years...at 11 o'clock, right to the hour.

Going way back now to Tobruk, what were some of the preparations that you did for Tobruk?

Well we weren't in Tobruk. We were just transporting stuff there and...

- 29:30 the Germans came through, and they surrounded Tobruk. They couldn't take it fortunately but they bombed the hell out of it with these big Stukas. They screamed down you know? And Lord Haw Haw [English-language pro-Nazi propaganda broadcast]... I had the job... I loaded two big water cylinders into my truck, great big long things and I used to take water,
- 30:00 get into the... fill them up, come 100 miles down to Siwa. That's inland and that was a bit of an oasis or that's where McLean's long distance, long range force... these boys were the craziest buggers that you've ever seen in your life, big beards and they had Austin pickups with a Vickers gun, and a Lewis gun. They'd go out at night and shoot up the aircraft, the enemy aircraft.
- 30:30 They were wild men. We had a job of not only getting water and food to our boys, the Calvary they called them. They were in... holed down in Bren gun carriers. They were little... Bren gun carriers had two tracks on them and so forth but they had the radio. They would have to signal if the enemy was coming through and they were all over the place but we had one that we
- 31:00 serviced, and we used to go in there, and listen to Lord Haw Haw. He was talking about the Rats of Tobruk and all this, and those boys, that would be the worst job in the world, in the stinking heat, and all camouflaged. We'd bring them water and petrol, and whatever... if we had some things from Mum or something, we'd give them some. Of course when we left we had to brush our tyre... the Messers [Messerschmitts]
- 31:30 used to come up and they'd see that, "Oh there's something there." So we had to do all that but... that was one. But we had a secret cache. We'd leave a lot of stuff with the long range boys to pick up, petrol and water, and so forth, and that was one job that was pretty good. Well, very sad because we... right up

near the front there the Poms had a petrol dump and we took a load... see we were under the

32:00 British command then. This lieutenant, he was an ex... he was in charge of it, only a young bloke and he speaks like this you know, real Oxford accent but a good Pom, and we got friendly with him, and he was a great bloke. On the last trip we did there and I said, "Where's Lieutenant So and so?" He said, "Sorry he's dead." "What?" "Yeah a bloody reconnaissance plane came over

32:30 and threw a hand grenade in his tent, and blew him up." That was sad because he was a nice Pom. He was good, well they were all good Poms but the only problem was we had two camps where they had... Piccadilly Circus was one, you know, a sign up and something else was Westminster or something, and this, but we weren't often in camp, but we were attached to the Poms, and we were on the go all the time.

33:00 I can remember one time we took a load of three-ply up. It was all camouflage stuff and you know what it was? It was camouflage for the I Tanks, the British I Tanks, to look like vehicles right. And they did. We'd pull up and they'd put these things on. Now the Germans came through the wire and I've got photographs of all this, and then some Japanese got those. That was the action

33:30 and they came through, and they thought they were trucks. Well, they came through with their half-track and their infantry unit. They poured through and they [the British] oh blew Christ out of them, honestly. They just... the charger in charge of the tanks would pull a thing and the whole thing would fall down, and they slaughtered them. Of course they could only use it once and that was it, but that was one of the little things that we witnessed, and quite a few of those little incidents. By and large

34:00 we didn't have a great deal of casualties because we never got into the fire. That's the closest I think that we ever got because were up on the hill. We could watch it. It was only Jock and I actually. I call him Jock because keep forgetting which name it is.

That's OK.

But anyway, that was... and there's another job that I... one of the worst jobs is in a tank, in the stinking heat you know?

34:30 You could cook an egg on it they were that hot. Those poor buggers mate, gee they did it hard.

When did you have to be in a tank?

I only just looked into them. I never... I just looked into them and they were I Tanks. They could only do about ten or 15 miles an hour, yet the Tiger Tanks could do about 30. They murdered the poor old Poms but they didn't in this case, in this incident. They stopped them. That was Calais

35:00 89 they called that. That was the biggest tank breakthrough in the war up till then and then of course I think it was... that was before we went to Greece, that's right.

What were the Vichy French like?

We had the job of... now De Gaulle came in and he was there with the

35:30 armistice, and he gave them the opportunity to join the Free French or they were sent back to France. Now I can't understand this. We had the job of bringing those that didn't want to go with De Gaulle and the officers, and that, they all smelled of bloody cologne. You know they were real poofs. They were. They were queers but we loaded them and brought them down to the port at

36:00 Beirut. The [SS] Ile de France was there and they all went back on the Ile de France, back to France and Germany. In the interim there were ships of our boys taken prisoners going back to Germany and we sent all these. Phew. That's war isn't it? Funny things happen. That was the thing I was going to tell you too. When we... see in our trucks we had these two gallon tins. They were British. They were very solid things and

36:30 the water ones were lined with wax strangely enough but we had water, and we had petrol, and each side, but when we got to the barracks they had great barrels of red wine. Phew. Out went the water and in went the wine. Unfortunately, the wine had a sort of reaction on the wax and we couldn't drink it.

37:00 But that's just one of the things, one of the heartbreaks of war. By and large the Froggies were all right. The Free French boys were all right. It was a sort of a funny war but it was a real hot one because I've got those two shells sitting up there. They were Vichy French anti-tank shells. I grabbed those and I got them done up in Beirut. But no, the French were a bit standoffish

37:30 because a lot of them were pretty high up in the social world and all this, and the wogs were... aside... this is the French mandate, same as Noumea. Have you been to Noumea? No? In Noumea they just don't want to serve you. They ignore you, the French.

What were the 6th Division blokes like?

Great men, oh terrific. Oh yeah, they were real... well they were very famous as you know

38:00 but there was a... I think it was the 18th Battalion went to Scotland and Faye's uncle was the CO of the

Forestry Unit that went over there. They never saw... when they came back through New York they had the ticker tape... never saw a shot fired or anything. Of course they just spent... when they came back of course... but that was there. They lived in Scot... and her uncle... there was two uncles,

- 38:30 he married a Scottish lass, and he was a lovely person because you see Faye's family were mainly Methodists, and she was a girl that really startled them you know. Can you imagine? Her grandpa was a... Grandpa Crooks, that's Faye's maiden name, surname and he was the... what do they call them, the minister of the Methodist Church.
- 39:00 You go to a church service and you go to sleep you know? But by and large I suppose that it was good to get back of course after the war and get back to civilisation.

Tell us some of your experiences of having to take the transport to the frontline?

Well we had... we didn't get to the frontline. It was always behind. Ammunition,

- 39:30 we took ammunition. Then they'd have their smaller vehicles bringing it to the frontline. It was mainly food, water and ammunition, and because... the first time where we were noted for they had these 25 pounders, the artillery boys. Now they were pretty deadly,
- 40:00 on wheels. So what they did, we bolted them onto the tray of a truck and these trucks incidentally were... when we went up against the Germans we got a lot... lost a lot of our vehicles. We got these Canadian All Steels, CASs and they were all steel, and the engine was inside the... they were hot things but they were four-wheel drive, and so what they did, they bolted... they took
- 40:30 the wheels off, and they bolted it into the chassis, and bolted them. So here you've got a mobile 25 pounder. They murdered the tanks because you could drive them all over the place and they were quicker you know? Back up, "Boom." Our workshops did that. We had a big workshop. We had problems with our vehicles with the Maple Leafs because we didn't have shock absorbers. They weren't
- 41:00 invented in those days and so you'd hit a hole but it would probably be a bomb had gone off or hand grenade, and it would be full of sand, and you'd hit this, and the main spring would break. You could drive it slower but this is what happened. So that was a problem but we'd have to come back. When we came back we'd come into the workshop and it would be trucks everywhere, and this Western
- 41:30 Lysander was a British surveying thingo you know, funny looking thing with wings like this, and loud noise. They'd fly over. I remember this time I was getting done... the spring and this feather thing came floating down. You know a message, "Your dispersal is f...ing awful." And we went "shwicht."

Tape 4

00:41 **Tell me about the Messerschmitts?**

In the desert the Messerschmitts would be right... come over a sand dune. You never hear them. You would never see them. They'd be up with the sun behind them and we'd have a

- 01:00 convoy of vehicles. It could be eight or ten or 12 and they'd see the dust, and down they'd come. They'd come behind you and knock off a few of our boys, and you didn't know. You didn't see them. Before the dust we had the old... the Maple Leaf... the windscreen was like normal, like you have and of course the sun would hit that, and he'd pick it out.
- 01:30 He'd be miles away and he could pick it out. So when the Canadian Steel came in they were this way, so they didn't reflect but the dust was always there. So what we did Jock and I, we found a... we got hold of a... we had an Italian Breda. That's like our Vickers... our whatsaname gun... I'll think of it in a minute, Bren gun. We bolted that onto the
- 02:00 frame up behind... see there was a cabin there and then there was a big timber thing that held two spare wheels, and we bolted the Vickers gun onto that, and we sat back, and we got a... we pinched an armchair from an old wog house, and sat that down, and tied that down, so that you're sitting behind it right, and ready. That was good because... but we never got a chance to use it. We shot a few
- 02:30 gazelles, little gazelles and that. Well we didn't shoot them. We frightened them you know but that's how they'd creep up on you and you had no hope. A frightening thing once happened. One burst coming in shot the two blokes, went over me and shot behind me, just got... that's how lucky. He must have been looking after me I think and you think of that sometimes. You know "bang."
- 03:00 See the same in Greece. They had the air power. We didn't. The Poms didn't have it, although we had... oh another thing, which is funny. In the desert when we first I was busting. I had to relieve myself right? So I got... I found a little bed of thing and I sat down, and did me business,
- 03:30 and looked down, nothing there. "God I've forgotten to pull me underpants down." But when I looked further here's a... this scarab. It's got a big beak and it was rolling it up the sand. Yeah. These were all over the place. scarab, Arab, the same thing you see? That scarab is the thing on their flag and that's

my first

04:00 introduction to a scarab. Oh yes you've got no idea. You never know when those things are around but that was a bit of a fright.

Tell us about transporting the 1st Battalion POWs. Where did you take them?

The first POWs?

The Italian ones that you were telling us about before?

Oh down to Tobruk and then they shipped them down to Alexandria.

Tell us about that trip.

04:30 **What were they talking about or how did you communicate with them?**

We didn't really. They were in the back and most of them were singing, and enjoying themselves because they were free, and so it was a happy sort of a thing but as I say, as I said before, the Germans were a different kettle of fish. They would nick off. The Italians, they joined you, joined in the night.

Did you take them to a camp?

05:00 Yes there was a big... there was a camp at Tobruk and barbed wire, and they loaded them onto whatever ships were available to go back to... they'd come up, and deliver all the ammunition, and all that, from Cairo or maybe Alexandria. Then they'd take POWs back.

What was the atmosphere like at Tobruk at that point?

I've been in Tobruk once but

05:30 we were on the outskirts mainly and we'd be too busy going or coming you know? I've got photographs there of Tobruk but the atmosphere was... it was pretty normal. The boys were out on the perimeter, the artillery and the machine gunners, and the infantry, and they'd send out patrols, and so forth. Our activities were mainly inland. There's a big

06:00 Qatar Depression runs right... a great big valley. If you got into that you could never get out. You bottled end up and you can't get out but see we were round the back of that, and we were quite a few miles... see Siwa was 100 miles and when I had the water truck, that was 100 miles down to Siwa, and that's where the desert group, long range... McLean I think his name was, and Churchill's

06:30 nephew was one of the COs.

What was going on down there?

That was their camp. It was a headquarters and then they would go from there of a night time... well they'd start off. They all had beards and Arab things over their head, and their machine guns, and they'd wait till the dark. They'd move up during the day as far as they could or the dark, they'd still go on in and make sure they weren't seen, and then they'd...

07:00 early hours of the morning they'd just drive up amongst the aircraft, and just throw hand grenades at them, and set them on fire, and all this sort of business. They were wild boys. They were really wild. Some of them were New Zealanders and Poms, Australians. No, I don't think there were any Australians. They had Australian hats but they were mainly Poms and New Zealanders, and they should have got VCs [Victoria Cross], the whole lot of them. They were wild boys.

What do you

07:30 **mean they were "wild boys"? Describe what they were like?**

You can imagine beards down here and they looked wild but they were fantastic. To go through the hardships they were under. A lot of them got killed you know? A lot of them, a lot of them. If you read the book... there was a book in the library about McLean and his long range desert group, and they did a pretty good job.

What did the camp look like?

The camp was a...

08:00 mud brick. It was only a little sort of a village and we had to give them water, fill up their water cans and put them on their vehicle, and so forth but it was a wog place. That's what it's about. Then there's sand dunes. On our truck we had these steel tracks, about from there to there and they'd hold them, the same as

08:30 the tracks that they put... if they're going in to put an airfield down they... it's an American idea. They lock them all together right? We had one on each side of the truck. If we got in the sand we'd stick them out, drive a bit out, stick them in again, until we got into you know... pretty solid ground. We did this one time. We came across some oil in the sand. We dug under and it was a leg with a British flying boot

in it,

09:00 and back further... and then when we looked there was a head, and there was the wreck of this Wellington Bomber. So we had to put that on our map. See we had compasses and maps. If we got caught we'd have to burn them or destroy them but we wrote where it was and they came out, and buried them, and gave them a proper burial. There was a few of the boys in the wreck

09:30 and all these sort of things you know? By and large if you didn't have a sense of humour it would get at you I suppose. Some of the boys got bomb happy and so on. When you look back and you're lucky to come out of it without a scratch, although a bump on the nut. That's about all. I think it might have affected me.

10:00 When you think of some of the boys in Tobruk, they were copping it left, right and centre. Those Stukas had a gadget on them that made them whine. They'd frighten hell out of you. They'd whine and they'd just point down, and let their bombs come down, and of course the boys were underneath. That's why they'd call them rats, Tobruk rats, the Rats of Tobruk.

When you first go into the Mediterranean what sort of training did you do for the desert?

10:30 None. I'll tell you what the motto is, our motto my dear is "improvise." That's what makes the Australian soldier the best fighting man in the world. If anything happens to his leader, he improvises and that's born in us as Australians.

11:00 The other one is "The impossible we do immediately, miracles take a little longer." That's our motto. See I was never in the frontline. We always copped it from the air mainly and so looking back I suppose it was a great experience, and very lucky, very

11:30 lucky.

What was your base camp like in...?

Well we never saw it much really. Where the CO and the officers were, they didn't do anything. They didn't do anything because we were under British... we were under... they told us what we've got to do but sometimes see, I was hardly ever home. We would deliver

12:00 those two big tanks of water to different points and that would take a day and a half, and then we'd have to come back of a night time, back to camp, and then go into your tent, and have a sleep. Then the next morning you were out again. Well one time there was a sandstorm and a German officer walked into the camp, and they got into him very quickly. They took half his clothes off as souvenirs. Anyway, one of the boys... oh what was his name? He was

12:30 South Australian I think. I forget his name now. He had appendicitis and they had him down the end of a big... some of those big... in the desert there's these great big sort of caves, and there's water in them, and he was in there, and he had appendicitis, and pretty bad. So they had to take him to Fort Capuzzo. That's up on the... near Sollum coming up the hill at Bardia and that's all

13:00 6th Divvy, and Fort Capuzzo was an Italian fort, and it was riddled with underground tunnels you know? The Pommy Hospital... they'd made a hospital there and we took him in there, and God you've got no idea. The lights weren't very bright and the stink oh. They had no way of getting fresh air into it and I got out of there pretty... but that was one thing we had to do. Then we'd get

13:30 orders to go and see So and so, and So and so. That's all they did there. They had wireless... we need so many here, there wherever. See you never knew where you were going. This was I suppose the beauty of it. You were on the... to stay in the camp all the time would drive you round the bend but we had a lot of excitement. It's what you make of it I suppose.

What was Bardia like?

Bardia was... we never got...

14:00 that was the 6th Divvy before us. We came in just after and it was a little... it was a town. It had a pier on it you know. It was right on the water. As a matter of fact, it had an Italian general in there and a lot of naval blokes, and they surrendered in the thousands to two blokes yeah. At Bardia and Sollum... Sollum was... you wound around and round. It was very

14:30 mountainous there and round, and round, and round. You get caught on that and you're history but the 6th Divvy took that, and Fort Capuzzo up the top. See the fort had all the... right around they could shoot into the navy and all that but they captured all that. I suppose the Italians... the Black Shirts were the ones you couldn't trust. You know they'd put their arms up and they'd have a hand grenade in it or something. So you

15:00 couldn't blame the boys for shooting them after they had their hands up and they did. You couldn't trust them but by and large they were all right, and I felt sorry for them poor buggers, but they had good food. Ah that's where I first came in contact with dehydrated vegetables, never ever heard... the Italians had it and they had their cabbage, and everything was dehydrated. All you had to do was put water in it and boil it

15:30 in your Dixie, and you had fresh vegetables. We were a bit late getting there of course and of course all the grog and vino had gone. The infantry boys had knocked all that off. Sometimes we weren't busy and it got a bit boring.

What would you do for fun?

Play cricket. Make a ball or something and play cricket. Oh yes they had

16:00 cricket bat and ball, and we'd play cricket but not for long. We were too busy. See being corps transport... another thing, when we first hit Mersa Matruh coming through we went into this barracks and the Second 1st Pioneers, who were a New South Wales mob, and were they a wild bunch. They had that much Italian equipment. They had motorbikes. They

16:30 had three-wheeled motorbikes. You know the delivery boys in the old days? They'd pedal along on these. Well they had these things that... the same thing only they were motorbikes and all the rifles, and ammunition, and they had them all piled up in the middle of this parade ground in... and it's only small, and they set fire to them. Well there was bullets going everywhere. The crazy lot of bastards you know? They just let... oh I'll never forget that. I

17:00 had my heart set of getting one of their little 22 pistols. All the officers had them. I saw them but none of them wanted to sell them, so I got 44, you know like [US actor Clint] Eastwood? "This is a 44 and it will blow your head off." So I had a 44, strapped that on but otherwise we only had rifles and they were behind us on our things, stuck behind the driver. But I had my 44, never fired a shot of course.

17:30 It was only just fun but I sold that to a wog when I came through Palestine. He probably used it against the Jews. I don't know but that was... you see everything was scrounged. You can't blame us. We come into a place like Lebanon and all the things were available, and the French but

18:00 there was a lot of Vichy trucks and that, but they lost their wheels and tyres for some unknown reason. They were flogged off to the wogs you see? Now I'll tell you what, we used to sell them petrol and it was clear in those days, and the taxi drivers were the ones. You could... there were plenty Liras there from them but it got that way that the army had to put a red dye in it. That stopped all that because if they stopped

18:30 it and they saw red on the taxi driver's carb, he go up.... You know they've got no sense of humour have they? You try and make a few dollars here and there. Oh dear me. There was the time I came out of the desert with a whole lot of Italian sild. I must have had about 200. You know the little sardines? I had them in a toolbox I had made, fitted and had Mum's

19:00 tinned stuff that she'd sent me, and so forth, and all this sild. I stopped in this particular village. I was telling you about the Australian lady that had the café there and the roast lamb, and we were talking away to her, and the kids, the wog kids came round, and they knocked all me bloody sild off. The lady said, "Look George. Look out." Then they went and I'm running down the main street with me bloody rifle, and I've got one stuck in there.

19:30 I chased after them. I wasn't going to... naturally. I put a bullet in the air but she said, "You better..." This was the first time I'd met her and I was coming back with the rifle down the main street, and the lady said, "Digger, you better watch out. There's a lot of MPs come through on their motorbikes." That's the first time she spoke. She came from locally here in Melbourne, so that was it. Every time we'd come through, we'd stop and have dinner there, and pay her of course.

20:00 Yes so that was good. That part of the war was OK you know? Then I met up with my brother. He was up at Hims, up on the Turkish border. He had a petrol dump there and I stayed one night with me brother Bill, and during the night... I slept on the floor on a stretcher, and I heard this noise, and he woke up to see his boots disappearing under the flap of the tent.

20:30 He grabbed his rifle and went out, and "bang. bang. bang." And I woke up and said, "What's wrong?" He said, "A bloody wog's pinched me boots." Anyway, the next morning apparently the Syrian police were around and what happened, Bill had shot him in the backside, and blew his testicles out, and killed him, and he was laying in this guttering,

21:00 in water, and Bill went over, and he said, " You know what? That bugger, he had about 1000 Lira in a money bag round his waist and he had all the gold in his teeth." He said, "Jesus Christ. I could have knocked them all off." Yeah so he got him but that's what would happen, bloody Arabs.

He got his boots back?

Oh he got his boots back. He had them round his neck, the wog.

21:30 Yeah so that was Bill.

And what did the Syrian Police do?

Well they couldn't do anything. What could they do? They found him and well too bad. He had the boots, pulled him, took him out, put him on the truck and drove him off.

How did you know where your brother was?

Oh well I knew he was up there. He was part of our section up there. They had a section up there that had a dump, a fuel dump up there. So we used to go

22:00 from Haifa with the fuel straight up to there. That took a couple of days and then come back, and do the same trips you know? Like moving the canteen service from Palestine up to Syria was a big thing too.

Tell us about that.

I did, all the beer we knocked off.

The beer you knocked off, yes.

You know, behind the truck.

Yeah.

Oh yes, that's right. The beer was... the bottles were in...

22:30 there was four dozen in a crate with straw so they wouldn't rattle about and we would drink beer just like water. We'd have it underneath the seat and I had it in a little secret thingo, so I could take it back when I hit camp, and save it. Anyway, on this particular... on the way we'd

23:00 stop and have a beer, and put the empty one back in the crate. Jock used to do that and when we got to the staging camp where we had to undo it, there was a sergeant checking it off, see? So we lifted this empty one out as though it was heavy, plomp it down and Jock had his big foot underneath it, and he pulled it out, and it went "Clank, clank, clank, clank." The sergeant looked at us. He said, "All right boys. All right. We'll let you off this time." Four dozen

23:30 bottles of beer. Anyway, that's the good part of it. A lot of those funny little things happened.

What was your brother doing?

Well he was in charge... there's a photograph of him. They were in charge with the boozier or whatever it was, distributing the petrol to the infantry other vehicles. See it's a depot and that was to keep the transport up there. It was the first time

24:00 I run into the Russian Army. They had some Russians up there at Hims on the Lepo. They were the filthiest, undisciplined people I've ever seen. They were, their army. I was very shocked, no shave and oh rubbish. Anyway, that's the difference.

Where were they staying?

See they came down into Turkey to establish

24:30 their army in there in case the Germans came through. Another thing too I forgot to tell you. The South Africans, mostly Negroes, they were building a railway line from Beirut right up to Turkey along the shoreline and big cliffs, and they made tunnels through, and I've often wondered if they finished it. That was to get material up into Russia or in through there

25:00 but they probably did finish it. Of course we left the Middle East after that and we left all our stuff there, and the Americans took over. They took over most of that part but I suppose what could the Americans do? We had to come back and stop the Japs from getting into Australia. That's basically what it was about but before that I think that we were on our way to Burma to stop the Japs getting

25:30 into India. That all changed of course when Java fell and thank Christ for [Prime Minister] Curtin, the Labour man. He said, "No way. They're coming home." So he brought us all back home fortunately and that's the story. Of course New Guinea, what can I say about New Guinea? Milne Bay, New Guinea.

When you were in the Middle East, what was the first

26:00 **time, because you said there were a lot of good experiences. There were some really fun times. When was the first time that you felt really under threat, that the war was really scary?**

When the Germans... when we came up against Rommel, I thought well... and he was having so much success, and he was coming through pretty quick but then he had his lines of communications too long because he had to rely on

26:30 Italy for all his equipment, his ammo, food, and everything, and he got too far ahead. See he moved very quickly but he was up the frontline with his men. He was no dill but our mob have to go back to Cairo and then come back. They were all sitting on their big fat arses in Cairo, stupid. We had some good leaders, [Major General Sir George] Wootten and Vasey [Field Marshall Lord Wavell] or

27:00 someone. They were all good blokes. They were with us but the Poms had this different idea and they were that slow but that's how Rommel got through quick. He had the equipment but then of course as I say, they had the 25 pounders on the back of the trucks. They knocked them off too. It balanced the scale.

When did you feel under threat with your vehicles? When was the first time you experienced real conflict?

- 27:30 I don't know that we ever really did because we weren't really engaged up on the frontline. The closest we got was the camouflage and so forth. There was no necessity for us to be there and that's as far as they went. Then the Germans were pushed back by Montgomery when he came in and he got all this equipment, and
- 28:00 the Americans coming in the other side, they had him bottled in. See they had to fight the Yanks and so that was... but we didn't know much about the Yanks. We didn't know when they first invaded Morocco and came through that way. They were different people, not like the Japanese. They were really morons but the
- 28:30 Germans were all right. Rommel was a nice bloke you know? He treated the POWs as men and better than the Italians but no, it's strange, different leaders. He committed suicide in the end but I can't remember that... we were too busy. You slept in the truck as you were driving
- 29:00 along. You'd have a nap for a couple of hours and then he'd take over, and I'd have a couple, a nap for a couple of hours. You were on the go all the time, so if you're busy you can't think about things. When you're sitting on your backside and doing nothing is when you think about all those things.

What were some of the things that happened at the camp mess?

The camp mess? Nothing that I recall. I don't think we had a mess.

- 29:30 We were never there. Our mess was two tins, one for your bully beef and biscuits, and the other one for your tea. You know how... desert oven, put the petrol in and boil your billy. We had plenty of tea and condensed milk if it was OK. It used to get that rock hard in the end, so we'd throw it away.
- 30:00 It was a crummy show in the desert. There's no doubt about that. You know you could never have a bath or anything like that. When I got the tanks of course it was a different thing all together because we were caught in a dust storm and we sat there for about six hours, couldn't do a thing but fortunately Mum had knitted me a polo... a thing over your head, and you only
- 30:30 have your eyes, because she thought it was going to be cold in the desert and it was sometimes, very cold. The temperature dropped down to zero and the only thing... we had our respirators. I'd take that off and I'd go and get Mum's... what do they call it? Helmet? Some helmet and put it under the tap, and stick it on my head, and put the gas mask on, and all this sort of thing.
- 31:00 There came a time of course when we had dieseline and that used to leak a bit, and that was a devil of a thing. Once it hit the rubber on our gas masks it all just crumpled up, not crumpled. It all just... they were useless. You had to throw the darn things away. I don't know.

Where did you get caught in the storm?

Anywhere out there in the dust storm.

The six hour dust storm, where was that?

- 31:30 Oh that was down about 100 miles down off the shore inland and that hit you. You never know when you're going to hit you and the other ones are... as I was saying, at one time we were at Piccadilly Circus, and that was our camp, and you saw the dust storm coming with the Poms. "Come on son. It's f...ing
- 32:00 Rommel, f...ing Rommel." And away they'd go. Ah you know and we stayed there, no Rommel. Then they'd come back, sheepishly drive back. They were like the Dagos most of the time, you know "Schpttt." The Italians had one forward gear and four reverse. They had pretty good equipment too. Their vehicles were terrific but they had a lot of
- 32:30 First World War gear stuff and their rifles... because they just walked into Libya and Abyssinia. They only fought the poor old Arabs, you know the woggos with bows and arrows but the Indian Army soon knocked them out, kicked them out of there but I don't know. I can't understand the stupidity of war. See, we're getting it worse now [2004]. We've got these fanatics and that's all religion.
- 33:00 It's all religion. Religion is responsible for nearly all the wars in the world and you start to wonder why don't you? Can you imagine anyone walking on the water? I've tried it.

I'm sure you have.

Was Piccadilly Circus a camp?

It was a

- 33:30 sort of a crossroad for different... in the desert and it pointed... they called it Piccadilly Circus or what's some of the other big towns or things in London you know? They had these all over the place, so you knew where you were going. If you got to Piccadilly Circus, there's unit so and so, and there's unit there

in so many kilometres, and so forth, so that's basically what it was but we used to, being a transport unit, we plomped right in the middle. So

34:00 we knew where we were going if it was night time, and we were down, out in the desert. See we used to have rocks and petrol tins with rocks in them, so they didn't blow away. You get into a dust storm and it really... you know 30 or 40 Ks an hour and with the dust, and so we knew where we were going, although it did cover it. There were only tracks. There were no roads or anything like that. It was just

34:30 tracks and if you got off the track, and got on the sand, you'd get bogged. There was all those sort of things that you know... but we knew, we knew where we were going and we always looked for it because we had our own little map, and a compass.

What were some of the other camps that you went to?

Well I don't think that... none of importance really. If there was a camp or something, well

35:00 it was off the beaten track somewhere.

Would the blokes invite you in for drinks or anything?

Oh no, there was nothing like that no, not in the desert. That's why I was crook on the 6th Divvy infantry boys knocking all the vino off the Italians. They lived very well, spaghetti and all this, terrific.

Did you get sick out there in the desert?

35:30 No. See there's no viruses that will live in the desert nor in the South or North Pole. You can't get anything. You can't get anything wrong with you. The flies were a bit bad but they didn't carry anything. See no virus would live. So that was one good thing about it but the only thing was you had to squint your eyes. You know like this and of course these days they've all got sunglasses and so forth.

36:00 We didn't have those but I think that it was a period that I wouldn't like to go through again. Do you know what I mean?

Why was that?

But I'm very glad that I did because it gave me an insight of how the other people live and even though, going from there up to Syria, and we were camped... Syria.

36:30 Lebanon is on the sea and there's a big mountain, and they had a train going up through it, and it went up the hill with a big gear, and it couldn't go along the line. So the gear would go up through the mountain and they had holes in the concrete over it, so that the smoke would get out, and the snow was all on top of this because we were there in the Christmas of 1941, and it was snowing. We were

37:00 camped at a place called Rayack over the other side and that's where the air force mob, the Vichy French Air Force... and that's where our third, Number 3 Squadron, Australians knocked them off very quick smart. But we were camped there for some time. We didn't have a great deal of things to do. So I was picked out to go with this English major

37:30 and drive him around in a utility, and he was a terrific bloke. He married an Egyptian girl and they lived in Cairo, and he was commanding officer of the Jebel Druids. Now they were wild countrymen, Arab and they were fantastic horsemen, and he was the commanding officer of them. I used to drive him around to

38:00 a lot of places and we'd go into cafes, and they have big buildings out there, and he was friendly with all these women, and their daughters. I was invited with him to sit with him and I enjoyed all this. It was great. I did a week of that and that's the best part of it I think. I was driving him around and he was a real good scout, and we had a lot of fun together but he was busy, and I saw these Jebel Druids, you've got no idea. They go up

38:30 around on a horse and up, and spear things, and oh jeez.

Did you see it?

I watched them practicing yes. Well he was the CO, the commanding officer, and my word they were fantastic. I went through from there to Balbec [Ba'labekk today]. That's a place of ancient pillars and that. That's where I found out how they joined the pillars together. You know there's still the big Roman pillars? Well they make one about

39:00 that big and they drill a hole right through it in the middle, and when they've got them up they pour lead in there, and that's what keeps it together. See lead. They didn't have steel or anything like that and they'd pour lead in it, fantastic. Then I went to... what's that big place? See my memory is going on me. Oh the next big town, big city there. I went there but sometimes... see the big mountain up from Beirut

39:30 was the Cedars, Mount Cedar, and it had snow on it all year round, and that's where we had a battalion of boys, Australians, doing ice-skating and skiing. They were infantry and we went up there. There was another track up the other side, very narrow and we used to drive up there in the truck, and that was

fantastic that place. All the water is so beautiful, like Melbourne

- 40:00 water, sweet and you never see an Arab drunk. It's against his religion but yet they used to knock off this arak. Now that's ouzo. You add water to it and it's very powerful. Now when we first came to Beirut we didn't know anything about this. So we would drink it, little glasses, down and gulp, and we were walking around. Next morning
- 40:30 you know, your mouth felt like a cocky's cage. You never drunk it again. So what the Arabs do, they sit there and they have a bit of a talk, and they smoke their hookahs. That was the thing where the smoke went through the water. They would have a big table of tomatoes and peppers, and all this. You know the salad? They'd have this bread and it was like cardboard, and they'd pick it up, and eat it,
- 41:00 and they'd have a little thing of arak, straight down, and then they'd gargle with the water, straight down, and they never get drunk, and that's how it was. You never see... I've seen plenty of drunk Australians of course but never saw honestly an Arab drunk and yet they drank a lot of ouzo or arak. So that was a lesson.

Tape 5

- 00:35 The memory of... one of the things that's in my mind was on Labuan and our POWs came in, and I hadn't seen or met my boys in my G section. Bill Miles, did I tell you about Bill Miles with the peg-leg? I didn't? Well,
- 01:00 I've got to start there.
- OK.**
- When we first went up to Puckapunyal they had a shed right up the back and it had hot air in it. Now Bill Miles was nearly my uncle. He used to court my mother's sister, the youngest one. Now Bill was in the... he was a road inspector for the country roads board and he slipped off the tram in Swanston Street, and his left leg went underneath, and it cut it straight off there. Now
- 01:30 he got into the AIF. They put him up there he screamed that much. He was a big man and so they put him in charge of that, and that's where I met him, and he said, "I'm getting board with this Don." I said, "Well look hang on and I'll see what I can do to get you transferred into our mob." So I went to see the CO, Homewood and he said, "We've got a doctor coming up and I'll see if I can get him to be his batman driver", which he did.
- 02:00 You thought he'd won a million dollars and Bill came in with us, and he unfortunately was taken POW. Now he was in the hospital helping out the doctors and the Japs couldn't understand how a man could get in the army with a peg-leg. Of course gunners when they come through, the sergeant and that, he'd have his peg leg there. "You can't go out on the rail
- 02:30 road that's for sure." So Bill used to help the doctors in that way and when the prisoners came out, Olly Gleeson, he was a wild Irishman, and he was a funny man, and they all came off reasonably fit. They weren't... like the Brits came in and they were stretcher cases. They were skeletons. You see they gave in. They didn't improvise.
- 03:00 Our boys, they'd go out and they'd eat worms. They'd eat grass. They'd go through. They'd get shot if they were caught but the Poms wouldn't do that unfortunately, but see Olly said that one of them, he'd cooked up this stew and he had it in some sort of a billy can, and he yelled out to some of the boys, "Come on. Come and get this." They could smell it. It was beautiful. So they sat down and one of the blokes had the bones,
- 03:30 "Here Snoodles. Come on. Where are you?" And Olly said, "There ain't no Snoodles. You're eating him." So they ate the dog you see? Well that was... but to see those boys come back. I tell you what, I broke down afterwards but then I used to go and see him. One of the blokes, he had no legs and he put his arms around me, and kissed me. You know... sorry. Sorry.
- 04:00 **That's fine.**
- That's one of the things that sometimes when I'm asleep and I dream of those things because they were great blokes you know? I'd go and see them, and take them a beer. They were sent there to fatten up and they came in Catalina flying boats, and aircraft, and ships in the end, and this was a stopping off point before they took them home
- 04:30 in the [HMAS] Manoora, the hospital ship. But by and large some of the things that they did to them were disgraceful. I heard a lot of things I don't think were ever printed. We had a little bloke. I forget his name. He was a little country boy. He was a terrific bloke in G Section, Wally. Wally somebody or other and they used to put bamboo shoots up his anus yeah, and he
- 05:00 died in agony, and these bastards did this to him. You haven't heard anything. A lot of it has been kept

back what the Japanese did. That's why I can't have... I can't have the Japanese. I'll have them selling badges on Badge Week down at the airport, yes. Yes I've got signs up in Japanese and one or two... you can't blame the youngies but I just can't have Japanese. The things that they did,

05:30 bayonet women and shoot them, and all this, the nurses, shocking. That bay... I forget now where they caught them. {Sister Vivian] Bullwinkle and [Sister Betty] Jeffrey were there. I've met the both of them while I was president of the RSL up in Numurka. They came across...that was a POW march in Australia. I was the president at the time and I had the pleasure of meeting her and Jeffreys, wonderful women.

06:00 See the things that they did you couldn't imagine, the Japanese, to do to human beings like that. That's one of the things that I'll never forget. There's some periods... oh the time the burst that missed me and when back behind but by and large I suppose that's about all the suffering

06:30 that I can remember.

I'm curious about Bill and how he did manage to get into the army?

Yes well, he was probably so determined. He was a very determined man and so they put him... they got sick of him. So they gave him the job up there in the army to look after the dry-cleaning or where they dried their clothes. You'd wash your clothes and take them up to Bill. Yes he...

07:00 I got him in. He was happy as Larry but unfortunately... he didn't go on the railway. He was reasonably all right you know and he used to come to our place a lot after that, with his wife when he got married but some of the boys didn't fare too badly. Let's put it that way. Although I know of one incident with one of our

07:30 terrific sergeants in workshops and he was a hot headed bloke, and he told this... he was a sergeant major, Japanese, and he's yelling out the way they do, and he told him where to go. So he put him out in front this sergeant and made him dig a hole because he was over six foot tall, dig a hole, and stand there. He bashed him to death with his rifle. Now

08:00 see how could you do things like that? All he said was, "This bloke, don't forget him." So they didn't and he got hung fortunately. They have never apologised. They have never spent... given money like the Germans and Italians. Some of them got about 25 000 dollars, not enough of course but it's something isn't it? They have

08:30 never done that, the Japanese but they're a democracy now so we've got to forget it. When I die I'll forget all that. But they do stay in your mind. I think of it sometimes, especially when we have our reunions and our march. Gee I think I've got every march since we first started. After the war we had a reunion at

09:00 Flinders Street Station. They had a lot of private rooms and we'd book one out, up the stairs and that. We rolled the niner up, set it up. One bloke was leaning against the window and broke it, and I think when we finished they rolled the niner down the stairs. We weren't allowed to go back there unfortunately. They kicked us out. Is this interesting for you or... the reunions?

Absolutely. Yes.

09:30 Reunions we had in a hall out at the Richmond bowls club, behind the town hall. Before that we had another... there was a big hall in... I forget the name of who had it. We started in there right and unfortunately they sold it to a Greek... some Greek mob, and we couldn't get in there. So we came down to

10:00 my house in Black Rock. I had a fairly big home and a big rumpus room underneath there, and I've got all the photographs. They're all there, the whole lot of them. So we had it there and then the next year we got one at Richmond, the Richmond Bowls. Now that was pretty good. We went there for years and years, and years. I was president about 25 years. I was able to get a lot of this stuff too you know.

Those reunions were obviously really important to you.

Oh yes.

10:30 **Why do think those relationships that you formed at that time during the war were so important?**

Well mateship and all the POWs, and the boys that died. My mate Ernie, you know I was telling you about Ern, Mickey and Ernie with the guitar? Well he was on his way to Japan in one of those ships and an American submarine put a torpedo through, so he got drowned

11:00 because it went down. He went and all those sort of things that happened, and to see the boys again and even Tooter Marks, he had no legs either. So we'd push him along in the wheelchair and all that, great to see them. Then I organised a bus to take them from here to the reunion and all this sort of thing, and even Brigadier Rossie, he organised

11:30 the Anzac Day march. He became a friend. What he did for us, he would send a special sticker to Mick, who was my secretary. Unfortunately he was... Ernie, Mick, Don, Mick and Ernie. He only died last June.

We'd stick it on the car. What the system was that I would... I was at Black Rock. Mick was at Middle Park. This was after I came back from

12:00 the soldier settlement. We'd leave one car up at the Shrine [of Remembrance] and then in the other car we'd go to the RSL at South Melbourne, pick up some of the old blokes, and go straight up to the Court buildings in Melbourne, Williams Street, around the corner, and park it in there, and so after the march we would come back, and get the car, and drive out to the reunion. Now we got it organised better because the sticker then

12:30 went to my son Chris and he'd stick it on his window. He'd take us all up and he had this sticker on "VIP", and one of the policemen threw him a salute, and he reckoned that was fantastic. He stuck it every time. He'd take us up straight through the lot, right to the back of the Shrine and park it in there, and we'd get out, and he'd leave it there, and he had this sticker, and Brigadier Rossie did this

13:00 every year. Mick and I would go in there a few days before and give him a bottle of wine, like he and his mates, a bit of light, and he was a terrific bloke.

Sorry to interrupt but what was it about your experiences during the war do you think that made you so close?

Well you're all in it together. You slept next to each other. You talked and you heard about... and letters from their sweethearts, and their mothers, and

13:30 all these sorts of things. It made you closer and you knew that... you didn't know what next was going to happen, so you really were close, like brothers, the whole lot of them, even more so because you loved some of your mates better than your brother. My brother could be a real bugger at times. No, I think it's mateship, the same thing at the reunions. They'd sit down and we'd have all the necessary

14:00 things, and so forth, and to see the ex-POWs coming back, it was terrific because we lost quite a few of them. They came from everywhere. Well I used to come down from Queensland and... terrific. Rossie would say, "Well here's Don Mead leading the pomp," what is it, "...the something Petrol Park." And he'd have a bit of a yarn about it. Oh no,

14:30 it was always wonderful, even when we started. Before we started the reunions we used to go on a Sunday and have a... about half a dozen of us. We'd lay a wreath on a... we've got a pine tree with our unit on it. We'd put that on there and then we'd have a few grogs at a hotel, and then go

15:00 home but then we organised it properly, and never looked back. It was really good, good fun to see. Then of course when I was president, their wives were allowed to come to the reunion too because you'd see the wives down there, and they'd be sitting out in the car, and I thought, "This is stupid." So I organised that.

You said that people would read letters from their sweethearts and that sort of thing. How many of your mates over there in the Middle East actually had left sweethearts behind

15:30 **or wives?**

Oh that's a good one isn't it? I think that... see most of my mates were all single, although my spare driver, he had a lovely wife. They'd tell you what was happening back home and all that, and it wouldn't seem at the time important but when you think about it, you

16:00 wanted to have someone to talk to, and being close together, and driving, and going through all the stuff, well he was like a brother to me, and after the war you know, we... at the reunions, and all this. I got Jock TPI [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated pension] and I loved his wife. She was beautiful. I've got photographs of her and we still send cards. Mick and I will go down and see her, and she'd have everything ready for us

16:30 you know, all these sort of things.

So you talked about lots of things with one another obviously. You were really close. Did people express any fear?

No, no, not once. No way. Not even when you hear them as POWs. They accepted it. No they're a different cut. The Australian soldier is as I say, the greatest

17:00 soldier in the world. They accept all those sort of things. If they endure something they laugh and joke, make a joke out of it, and "Ah come on. You're getting too serious moody." And all this. That's what happened and I don't know.

Did you ever see any signs of anyone being afraid?

No never, never. Of course as I say, the situation is different because

17:30 we weren't infantry. That's a different kettle of fish because they are the men that should all have had VCs and what the 39th Battalion did. They were the militia mob in the Kokoda Trail and incidentally, we struck up a friendship with them because they then moved. We as Corps troops lead the Anzac Day march and they went

18:00 in front of us in an old army truck, and I used to ride in the back of that. they were terrific you see but they were fantastic those blokes.

What about the infantry men in the Middle East, in Tobruk and so forth, did you develop any close relationships with any of those blokes?

No I never got the opportunity. We weren't that close. We could never go that close. "A" you would be allowed to. You couldn't get through

18:30 but we only got the necessities of war to them and from there they handed it out. That's all I saw of it. I never saw that action. I saw one action and as I say, that was on... that went to Japan. That was the... when they broke through... the Germans broke through the barbed wire at Kaila 89 but I can honestly say our worst enemies were the Messerschmitts in the air,

19:00 no other problems.

I understand that. I just wondered when the infantry came back from the frontline whether you actually ever were able to speak with any of those guys from the 6th Division who had been in the frontline?

No. No we were nowhere near them then, no.

You never really had a chance to talk with them?

No, no, no, no, no, no.

Did you ever see any of the wounded Australians?

When I was at Fort Capuzzo

19:30 when I took that had appendicitis and that was an English medical... down underneath. There was quite a few of them there then but I can't recall... oh well yes. In Moresby there was an instance that happened. We had these trucks, all steel and we

20:00 had to take a whole mob, a whole battalion of infantry out to the airport, and they were going in to do a parachute drop in the Ramu Valley I think it was. They were all standing up with all their pack on and everything in the truck waiting to get on to the aircraft, and this Liberator bomber came over, and exploded on the top of them, just exploded. I don't know what happened. The petrol spanner came loose or... they couldn't get their gear off but

20:30 our boys in the cabin were all right. That was the time I went in... I said I had appendicitis. I didn't. I passed a kidney stone and I was in the bed next to them, and I saw them. Oh God. Even on Morotai, the way we used to handle petrol to boil our... to clean our clothes and this young bloke, he was a Queenslander. He was one of our reinforcements, a hell of a nice bloke. He was in my tent.

21:00 He threw a can of petrol on the fire and it blew back on him, and it got him fired. He only had shorts on and they were all burnt but I rugby tackled him, and I was laying down on him, and he screamed, and I shoved him down, and rubbed him over but his skin was... and he went into hospital, the American Hospital, and they put him in a bath of oil.

21:30 When they put the bandage around him he complained about these itches and bites. They were maggots eating the proud flesh off him and he survived all right. I gave him...he was A [blood group] too. I gave him some of my blood but these little things... that to me, it's not a very pleasant sight you know, to see anyone... one bloke was shot and his fingers were cut off, and they were shot off. To go through a ward like that,

22:00 man. You don't want to go and see it. You can smell it before you get there anyway but it's no picnic.

So Don, how important do you think your role was in the operations in the Middle East?

Well, I think that building up to it in experience in ASC,

22:30 Army Service Corps, you can't do without the Army Service Corps. They just wouldn't exist. You've got to get the necessities of war to them and they're the boys in the frontline that take all the cop... all the wounds, and the deaths but get the stuff to them come hell or high water. You've got to get it to them. That's it. Improvisation is a big thing too when you're

23:00 in a vehicle and you get problems there, so you try and improvise.

What sorts of problems did you have?

A lot of problems like dust in the petrol and electrical problems. Well, I was an electrician, so I could do all those sort of things see but when you break down or you do a stub action and your wheel falls off, you've got now telephone to say, "Come and get me." You hoped to Christ that

23:30 someone that comes past would get the message to the boys and the breakdown wagon would come, and take you back in. See but the main thing is to do what you bloody well can and make sure that the stuff gets to the boys, to where it's needed. That's the main thing and I think that's the situation with

any army. Without the army service it just wouldn't exist.

So can you do me a favour? I don't

24:00 **know if you can do this but do you think you could describe to us what a typical, if there was a typical, a typical day was for you in the Middle East, from the sort of beginning of the day through the day? Walk us through your day if you like? So how did the day begin and what sort of preparations did you have to make, and what was it exactly that you**

24:30 **had to do to get the stuff to those guys in the frontline?**

Apart from getting it off, straight off from the ships on to the trucks and then take it up to certain depots. They relied on it. There was no railway or anything like that. It was only vehicles and Army Service Corps. A lot of it was medical stuff and...

25:00 **On a normal sort of typical day how would your day being? What was the first thing you had to do?**

Get your orders, know where you were going, "You'll be with So and so. You've got to contact So and so when you get there, and they will tell you what you've got to do." Now we would not probably see headquarters camp for days and we'd get our different orders. "Now you've got to take..."

25:30 A lot of it, we had English stuff too and we would have to deliver all that, and it's a matter of getting to these places. "Can you do this for us on your way? Can you do that?" "Yeah sure." But it's not like today. You've written it and you've got to deliver it, and get paid. It's just if you're on the spot and you help somebody out. That's what it is. It's disregarded if it's the Poms or we've got to go somewhere else.

26:00 "Oh yeah, we're going near that. We'll drop it off for you," and all this sort of thing. So that's basically what it was about. Warfare in the desert is a lot different than normal, normal warfare, a lot different.

In what sense?

Well the filth, the heat, the flies, running out of water, all these sort of things. It happened and it is a frightening thing to think that

26:30 sometimes if you get out, and you do have a serious breakdown, and you're left out there in the desert but I think that one of the reasons where we made our own... put our tins into tracks, and so forth, see you'd lose that in a sand storm, not if you put that in a tin, and you had a rock there. Well you know that's so many kilometres from such and such a place. Now look for this and look for that, and so you had them

27:00 tabbed, so that you couldn't get lost. So your other mates too that were coming through... that's what happened. They'd say, "You'd better come with us or something and we'll get the breakdown vehicle," or when they got back. Well you could be sitting there for eight hours or more waiting for the breakdown vehicle to come out.

Did you have any hairy moments where you had a breakdown and you were worried about running out of water?

Not really, because in our vehicles we had water cans one side and petrol on the other.

27:30 So we had drinking water, had that all the time for emergencies and water bottles, and all that. We didn't worry about that. We could always stop and make a cup of tea or something like that but we were fortunate, I s'pose. I think it was harder for the boys on the frontline to get the stuff to them, especially when they had a bit of a hot war on their hands and to get the stuff to them. See they never had the air force or the helicopters in those days,

28:00 that could drop the stuff in. Although in New Guinea there was more Fuzzy Wuzzies [New Guineans who aided Australian troops on the Kokoda Track] killed by Arnott's biscuits than ever did with a Japanese bullet because when they were flying over to drop the stuff, they didn't have enough parachutes and the Arnott's biscuits tin would go bang, and it would go out like a hand grenade, and they were... you couldn't chew them. You had to soak them in water to eat them.

28:30 I tell ya and the bully beef the same. It would drop and it would go boom.

Did you see that happen?

No I didn't but I heard a lot about it and that was true. I hope Arnott's heard about that years ago. That was a shocking thing. That was the trouble. We were the worst fed army in the world, no doubt about that. Bully beef and biscuits. Open up a tin of

29:00 bully beef in the desert and your poured it out. It was corned beef. We'd just pour it out. It was shocking and the cooks tried their most best to try and do something with it. See we didn't get any fresh food. That's this, foot rot. Lack of vitamins. Now we have vitamin tablets. They weren't invented in those days you see but no that... I think the Australian government could have supplied us with better food.

29:30 It was pretty difficult in the desert. You know, they sent us all the way over from Australia and spent... if

they had helicopters and that, yeah sure. That would have happened all right but they never had that in New Guinea either. They never had helicopters. Half the time they were fighting to try and find where to drop the stuff, you know whether the Japs were going to get it or the infantry but at least that... they had no worries about water in

30:00 New Guinea. It was only food.

So being away from a camp base at several days at a time in the Middle East, did you have any lonely moments?

No, we had a job to do. We knew that sometimes it got a bit tough but oh no, we did all right. We weren't in the desert... jeepers, three or four months I suppose, might be more than that. Then we were pulled out and went to Greece.

30:30 Then we went up the next time of course. See the first time was easy because the 6th Divvy had routed the Italians and that was a... there was nothing really to do until Rommel came on the scene, and that's when they shot us off to Greece. Then we came back against Rommel. That was a hot war.

Can you tell me a little bit more about Greece? What did you know about what you were going

31:00 **to be doing or what the Australian Army was going to do there before you went there?**

Well the same thing. To get the provisions up to the frontline and it was very mountainous. It wasn't just in trenches or anything like that. See it was a different warfare all together and the Germans had it. They'd come down from Yugoslavia and they had all the equipment, all the tanks, and so forth. We had nothing, no aircraft, nothing,

31:30 not a thing. So it was a matter of getting the stuff to the boys and then it was just too desperate. We had to just give it in and it was every man for himself. That's what the orders were, get out and get out as quick as you can, and that's when we drove down, and set light to the truck, and jumped on this corvette. We were lucky to get onto that. But we ended up at Alexandria and we were lucky we didn't go to Crete or I probably wouldn't be talking to you now. So

32:00 we were lucky.

Some people have said that they didn't want to withdraw in Greece, that they actually felt that they could fight them.

I doubt it. No they had too much equipment, the Germans. They had air superiority. We had nothing. Look at the thousands they dropped at Crete, you know parachutes? Of course they shot a lot of them down. Hitler will never try that again. He lost too many aircraft and too many men but they still

32:30 took over.

So at the time that you were in Greece did you question the wisdom of the decision to go there?

No, not at the time because the Poms were in it with us. I think there might have been a few New Zealanders. I'm not sure about that but no, we... when you see Greece and Athens, and all this, you wouldn't think there was a war on but

33:00 you see it happened north in the mountains. They had hoards of equipment coming down through.... we never had any aircraft to bomb them. If one got up, it would be shot down. See this is the problem that was... we should never, ever have gone into Greece. It was only a political thing to get the Greeks on our side and so forth. We didn't need to do that anyway. But oh no, it was a stupid thing, really stupid.

So you made your way

33:30 **to Alexandria. Can you tell me about that journey?**

What?

From Greece to Alexandria?

We were on a corvette. It only took about eight or nine hours to get across. On the way we were passing a lot of our boys coming up. They never got the message and all of our vehicles and that. They were coming in. They soon got it, and of course they came back but we got back to Alexandria, and see a lot of our unit was still there, like Qina Maru, and they were

34:00 all ready to go from Alexandria but no. We were then given these Canadian All Steel trucks, four-wheel drives and so that was a lot better than the old Maple Leaf, although they were hot because the engine was in alongside you, you know?

Did you spend much time in Alexandria?

No, coming and going through, that's all.

Can you describe what you saw there for us?

I think when we came through

34:30 from Palestine we were at Qina Maru. That's a few miles down the Suez from Alexandria but we went on leave or we took leave one night. We went in on the train and we struck some Poms, and they were funny. They were singing and so forth but we did a visit during the day. We did a... that's right. We did a massage job right.

35:00 It was done by a woman. She'd stand on you and all this, and all the muck that came out of our bodies, the stinking sand and all that. It was fantastic. It was really good and then we had a Garry ride, you know a horse drawn Garry and so forth. We saw a naughty sex show.

Tell us about that.

Well it was Mick's 21st birthday,

35:30 my mate. So we celebrated. So let's go. We got in... the wogs wouldn't let any more than two in it because we're too rough. So when we got round the corner we all charged and got into the Garry. There was four of us and so he took us to a... oh no, we had an Arab with us that's right. "You come and see," you know? "Donkey and girl" and so forth. "Where do we go Joe?" He takes us out to this sleazy place down near the wharf.

36:00 I wouldn't know where it was and upstairs, and we're all sitting down, and this wog came in, and he was playing, hitting the drum, and doing this, that and the other, and he was in the corner. This girl came in and was doing the thingo you know? She took everything off, never had... in the nude. One of the boys was smoking a cigarette. She took it out and put it... and went back to put it in his mouth. I tell you. Then the exhibition sex,

36:30 exhibition. A wog came in and had sex with a girl, and we're all standing around you know? Look you've got no idea. That wasn't... it was all right but jeepers, creepers.

Had you seen anything like that before?

No. No, no way, no. There's a lot of that went on you know but anyway Mick will always remember his 21st

37:00 birthday. Oh dear me.

What about your own birthday, your 21st? Where were you for that?

I had a black eye my 21st. We came back to Goodna and we went to a dance up at Ipswich, and there was Americans there, and a mate and I, we were walking down the side. It was all dancing and

37:30 I bumped into this... I didn't. The chap in front of me bumped into this girl and the Yank blamed me for it. I said, "Oh fair go." The next minute I got whacked in my eye. Someone came and king hit me from the dancing around. I never had a chance to swing a punch. I ended up... and my other mate got hit in the eye too, in his left eye, and my right eye, and we ended up the next day standing on parade together. My eye was closed and his eye

38:00 closed yeah. It was just one of those things. The bloke thought I'd pushed his girl and I didn't. That's one thing that I lose. I don't usually lose a fight but I lost that one. I couldn't see.

That was on your birthday?

Yes. 21st birthday.

Did you celebrate any birthdays while you were in the Middle East or Greece?

No, didn't worry about them. I

38:30 don't worry about them now either. Oh no, we didn't really worry.

So that show you went to see with Mick, was that in the sort of red light district of Alexandria?

Yes well, you never know where they were. You know two-storey homes or buildings and that was down near the wharf, and that all went... that's the same as taxi drivers in Melbourne, will take you if you want that sort of thing. They all

39:00 know that.

Did you and your mates actually go to brothels in Alexandria at all?

No. I can honestly say no. The only time was when we just went in and talked to them, as I was telling you, the Greek girls. That would put you off the other thing but we all laughed, reckoned to ourselves. "Fair enough."

I meant to ask you earlier about giving those girls condensed milk. How did they react to getting...?

- 39:30 Oh they thought it was wonderful, served you tea and some of the cake and that. Mum used to send me parcels and all sewn up, and we got them, and we didn't really need it because we would go into Beirut, and have a steak or a bit of lamb, or some frogs if you wanted frog's legs. We could have a decent meal
- 40:00 and so there was no need. I just kept it in the truck and so forth, in a special thingo, biscuits. They were all sealed. A lot of biscuits and Milk Arrowroots but no, I felt so sorry for them because they just had been forced into prostitution, and they were very intelligent women. Actually they went to the American University. No one ever knew that there was an American University in Beirut
- 40:30 but that's what the Yanks did. You don't get any marks for doing something for humanity. Everyone is against them all the time, crazy. I don't know, most of them were ugly anyway. It puts you off.

Tape 6

- 00:32 **Can you tell us what happened after you left Greece and went back to the Mediterranean? What was the point...?**

Back up to the desert.

Yes what happened in that?

You can imagine it was all confusion because we got out of there in a hurry and we had to reorganise, and we had to get more reinforcements, and vehicles had been lost. All our vehicles, we set fire to them.

- 01:00 Yes reorganising, getting together and then getting our orders to wait and see what was happening because we didn't know or hadn't had any experience against the Germans, only in Greece, and that was a long way off you know?
- 01:30 So we soon knew because then the air force, the bombers came in and then we got orders to move up, and we did exactly the same thing only a lot quicker, and we weren't so lackadaisical, like against the Italians, because that was a funny old war really. But now we're here, we're fair dinkum
- 02:00 and so we were right on the beam. We had new vehicles, these CASs, Canadian All Steels and we had to sort of familiarise ourselves with them, which we did. It didn't take long. So from then on there was nothing great...I think I told you about when they broke in Kaila 89. That was the first big tank battle with the Germans. They broke through the...
- 02:30 they shot up all the landmines that the Brits had and they came through, and then the tanks dropped the things, and "boom. boom. boom." That's the closest I got. I took a lot of photographs that all went to Japan right.
- When you say that's the closest you got what do you mean?**
- About a mile away, about a mile. We were right back behind...
- What could you see?**
- Well we could see them coming through and
- 03:00 we knew what was going to happen, and it did, and that was the biggest defeat that they... that started the rolling back of...of course by that time they'd taken Tobruk. That had all gone to Rommel because as I say, he was a fantastic... I wish we had him on our side in the war but he got some... he had some disease that affected him
- 03:30 and he had to go back to Germany. They got some other bloke but by and large that was what it was about. But you see, then the Yanks had come into the war. They'd come in from the other side. They got into Morocco and they were moving through, and the British Navy were sinking most of Rommel's supplies because they took over the Mediterranean, no German ships. The Italian Navy had failed. They got sunk most of
- 04:00 them and that was it. They were practically out of the war but then later on of course after we came back to Australia, they invaded Sicily and they walked straight through, and invaded Italy. As you know, the results...
- Just before you were talking about coming out of Greece. You said you all had to get together. How did you all know where to go?**
- It was only a section of us. There weren't very many and we were
- 04:30 all mainly together. It was only a small contingent because we were the start of the unit to come through. We were the spearhead like you know? But we got out of there in a hurry because it was just impossible. The air force was too... the German Air Force was too much and it was just a... as that lieutenant in the letter said, "I hope that they got out safely." Some of us did but some

- 05:00 didn't. Some got caught but I think we got six POWs out of that. Their vehicle might have got shot down or they were shot or something and we lost six boys. They weren't killed. They were taken POW. See their vehicle could have broken down and they got overwhelmed but no, it was a short engagement for us because we were pulled out of that, because the Vichy French,
- 05:30 and the Germans started to come in, and invade Palestine, and that's why half our unit, well not half. The first sub-part, that's three sections and Head Quarters, were left there just in case, and I think they had some of the 7th Divvy Infantry. They had to stay there as a buffer zone right? We could have called on them but we didn't have to and so that's when we went through into that engagement,
- 06:00 into Lebanon and Syria, and that didn't last very long.

What happened in Lebanon?

Well Lebanon as you know, is mainly a French Mandate, not Syria so much but it's a country all by itself. We came face to face with the Foreign Legion and you know all about the

- 06:30 Foreign Legion? Well it had been going for years and anyone can join it. They've got all nationalities and are supposed to be a great... there's been films about this Foreign Legion. The British Navy shortened that because they were all hidden in
- 07:00 caves along the shore. Right along Lebanon up to Beirut was all big mountains and that situation... one thing that a lot of our Don Rs, despatch riders, got on their motorbikes... they never come across... because in the desert. What they used to do is bring piano wire across tree to tree and
- 07:30 leave it low, and when the despatch rider came they'd pull it tight, and "Creecht", off went his head. There was a lot of that happened, so they couldn't stop that sort of thing until they overwhelmed them. What happened, they were all in these caves and half of them when they did come out were drunk anyway. They had to be half drunk to fight. That's the great Foreign Legion for you. They went through them like Epsom Salts, like the Italians. But the Brits in their
- 08:00 navy bombed the hell out of them. You can imagine all these big guns hitting the caves and blocking them off, and they had to come out, and they were surrendering, and they walked through that. That was too much for them. They didn't last more than two weeks but it was a very hot war and at Merjayun I think, the 2/2nd Pioneers got cut to pieces there, but they won, but they suffered a lot of casualties.

What sort of carnage did you see there?

Well that all happened before we got there. That happened while we were still in the desert and we were called through at that time to reinforce them but they'd made headway, and the 7th Divvy boys, and some of the 6th, they just went right through them, ended up on the Turkish border. They called it quits then, an armistice and that's when they were given the chance of being

- 09:00 Free French or going home, and so that's what happened, and we just stayed there for a while to see things quietened down, and then of course the Japanese came into the war, Pearl Harbour. Bingo, we were the first out.

Did you have any direct contact with the Legionnaires?

No, only one bloke that walked into our camp and that's after the war, and he walked in, in his uniform etcetera, and he was a Victorian.

- 09:30 We had, when we were kids, the great Foreign Legion, all the films and the tales told about them you know, in the desert. Nothing like that, no. It was a funny sort of a war. I think it was more political than anything but we had to keep the Middle East. We had to hold the oil for a start.
- 10:00 There was a pipeline from Baghdad right through to Beirut, a great big pipeline of oil. I don't know that there's much more to say about that. It was a time of quiet and going on leave, go into Beirut, go to the picture shows, and we put it all on [Prime Minister] Bob Menzies, walked in for nothing you know? Well we had five bob a day come on. Fifty cents.
- 10:30 So they couldn't stop us but it was in English underneath, written underneath. So that's what we did, have a feed or something and that was all. There wasn't much there. They had an Australian canteen and I went walking in there one day, and a lady dressed like... I forget what they call the thing, in English said, "Excuse me soldier but could you buy me a packet of cigarettes at the canteen?"
- 11:00 I got a shock because I thought she was a wog. She said, no she's married, so I went and got her some cigarettes, and she didn't want anyone to notice. So we walked along and I handed them, and all this sort of business.

What sort of films were around at that time?

Oh now you've got me there love. I wouldn't know. I wouldn't know. I wouldn't know. But American, all American films, a few Poms

- 11:30 I suppose. We didn't go that often but we were... I got yellow jaundice. What do they call that now? It's

when your eyes go yellow and I ended up in a British hospital eating dry toast, and black tea. But I threw that off anyway.

What was the hospital like?

That was all right. That was down in Palestine. That was

12:00 OK, no problems but I had to take a... a lieutenant of ours, Ferguson. He came up through the ranks, terrific bloke and his brother took... he got some virus, and I had to take him down there but he died, and passed away on the way. It was too late. That was another bitter blow. Otherwise everything

12:30 was OK. We didn't do a great deal, only bringing grog up all the time. As I say, we left all this there for the Yanks. Then out we came and you heard the history of getting back, and so forth.

Can you talk a bit more about the German POWs that you transported? Where did you pick

13:00 **them up from and take them to?**

They were taken... when we... I've got to think now. When we took back Tobruk from the Germans right, this is where we got some POWs. See we had to get them out because they never had time to put barbed round it. They had a Tommy gun and a whole bunch of them, and so forth, mostly military police,

13:30 and Sikhs. They used to knock them around a bit, the Sikhs with the... Indians. We had to get them back to Alexandria as quickly as possible because they were pretty grumpy types and very dangerous. They could have knocked us off and pinched the truck you see? I don't know where they'd go. I wouldn't have a clue but just that they

14:00 were... the younger blokes weren't so bad I don't think. We never had very many... much to do with them because we were pulled out and sent into Syria. So that part was... we did enjoy that part of the business.

Why did you enjoy it?

Well there was no war. There was nothing, no aircraft coming over.

14:30 Talking about aircraft I'll go back a little bit. The worst thing that ever happened was when the Italians came over to bomb they went up that high that the anti-aircraft couldn't reach them. They'd drop their bombs and half of them went into the sea but one didn't. One fell in Sister Street and bombed a brothel. That was the first...

15:00 that was the worst thing that could have happened to the 6th Divvy and we blame that bomb aimer, missed the mark.

Why was that the worst thing?

Well the brothel.

Were the women killed?

Some of them did yes, and some of them in action

15:30 but that's the funny side of it. It was true. It was true.

Where was the brothel?

That was in part of Alexandria and out of Alexandria. So that was a downfall.

Were you around when it happened?

No, no. We were up further when it happened.

How

16:00 **did you hear about it?**

Through the grapevine, "The buggers had bombed the brothel. Sister Street." "No." "God." That was just one of the things of war you know? It was an accident.

You said when you went back there you had new transport vehicles. Can you describe that vehicle?

16:30 I've got photographs of it there but you're not worried about that?

Not yet. We'll have a look at those later.

Well they were a bigger truck, more horsepower and all steel. The tray and sides were all steel, and the canopy... they had a canopy over them. They were four-wheel drives. They could pull you out of a bog a lot better and windcreens

17:00 went in that way, so that the aircraft couldn't get the reflection of the sun. So that was another good

thing but the dust was still there. That was a dead giveaway. You couldn't do without that and even if you were driving in a convoy you'd be swallowing dust anyway. I can't remember anything that... I personally

17:30 didn't... I came in contact with the POWs but we weren't up in the frontline. In the second attempt they had all these big guns. They had the tanks and they were moving very quickly, and sometimes it was hard to keep up with them to get them ammunition, and food, and water. Although the Poms came into it then see? Montgomery took over and he told

18:00 him, "This is what I want." And he got it and that's why he drove them all back, and so it was all quick. They didn't need the Australians really to help but we did participate in some small way, bringing stuff up and getting it up to a depot, and from then on to the front. This is what happened to the Germans. They went too fast, too far and they ran out of their ammunition, petrol, mainly

18:30 petrol, and that's what stopped them.

Did you ever get to a location and they'd moved?

Not really. See they didn't stay very long. They were highly mobile. As I say, Rommel was up there with his men and when he gave orders they got it direct but with the Brits they had to go back to Cairo, and back again. Crazy.

19:00 The Australians never worried about that but we were under the British 1st Army and that's why if you see the medals, the second one is the Africa Star, and some have... I have a "1" on it because I was in the 1st Army. The others have "8" on it. That was the 9th Divvy. They were under the 8th Army. No there was no permanent...

19:30 nothing was very permanent. As I say, we were here, there, Charing Cross, Piccadilly Circus and all this sort of thing you know? That's what the war was about. It was highly mobile on the German part.

When you were on the road would you camp out at night?

Yes we'd sleep out, sleep on the petrol or whatever is it.

How would you choose the spot to stay and how would you know you were safe?

Well, we knew

20:00 where we had to go. It wasn't very much we did this. Mainly with the water tanks I suppose that did happen a lot because there was no... I had these two big tanks and I had to get rid of the water, and then come back, and get another load. That would be a two-day sprint I suppose but see we had bully beef and biscuits. That's all we had. We never had anything else and

20:30 that was a problem. We were the worst fed army in the world, the Australians and it was disgraceful. They're going to pay for it because it comes out later on in life. That's the problem and you couldn't clean your teeth, and you'd only drink the water. Have a shave? No way. You just let a beard grow and your hair grow, and that's all you could do. You looked like ruffians but it was good because the...

21:00 some of us had helmets we'd pinched off the Palestinians or the Jews and so that did protect us a lot. I don't think we got skin cancers. But you never know.

So there were no showers?

Oh no. Water was very scarce. It was crummy. It was brown and oh shocking taste. We had

21:30 these tablet you could put in it but we never did. Like in the islands we were supposed to do that and take Atebrin. We turned yellow. That's to stop malaria but we were all yellow. I never got malaria, fair enough. So that's fair enough. To us it was more for the 9th Divvy. They were left over there. A lot of them were reinforcements. A lot of them were in hospital

22:00 and so forth. They were left, all the 7th Divvy and the Corps Troops came out, came back, back to Australia, not in Java as I say. Weary Dunlop was the name of... you've heard of [Sir Edward] Weary Dunlop [famous Australian POW and doctor]? Well he was on the Orcades and he was with a lot of our boys on the [Burma-Thailand] railway. The war changed dramatically in the Southwest Pacific area. It

22:30 was a different war all together. We had to change over to jeeps and trailers. We still had vehicles but we had to use those to go in forward. It was a different, miles different war.

Before we go to the Pacific, you were talking before about how you constructed something to stop the dust from coming out the back of the truck? You were saying that before. There was something that

23:00 **you made?**

No. We had a machine gunner.

Oh that's right, yes.

We had an Italian... I forget the name of it now.

Yes that's right. Did you ever have to invent gadgets in the transport department to make something easier?

Not when I was driving as a driver. In the workshops

- 23:30 this was the main thing. I was an electrician right, auto electrician, had to put the lights in. This was back in Port Moresby but I didn't have a great deal. We'd stop and if we had a camp, up would go the big frames for the boys to work on the trucks. We even had blacksmiths. My brother,
- 24:00 I got him into the workshop. He was a panel beater and I was an electrician, and I used to have batteries, 110 volt Vichy French thing that we picked up in Syria, and invented all things like that to be able to charge batteries, and so forth, and to kill rats. You know how we got them? They were in
- 24:30 New Guinea - oh shocking. They'd bring up scrub typhus. If you got scrub typhus you're gone and what I did, I buried a drum down in the ground, and half filled it with water, and got a jam tin, put a hole and a rod through it, and sat it... say that's
- 25:00 the drum. I put the rod through and the jam tin was there. It would turn around right? It would jam on the top of it and the rat would stand there, and put his feet over like that, and down he'd go, and drown. Then of course I used to electrocute them. They'd get in there and I'd turn the spark plug tester on, and you'd see sparks jumping out their nose. Give them three jerks and their heart would go on them, and you'd bury them but they
- 25:30 were a menace. They were a menace. And our Jungle Juice days. We made Jungle Juice. The little painter bloke, Darkie Hurst. He was next to my electrical engineering shop and he had a 44-gallon drum. He used to get all the dried stuff from the cook. The cook was in it and so was the officer in command, the captain. He was a First World War digger and he was a real drunk I tell you.
- 26:00 He had 44-gallon drums and he had a truck canopy over it with a canvas on it, and that was his paint. He used to spray on the camouflage. That was what he was for. Anyway, every now and again you'd see the OC come up, and they'd talk, "Let's give it a bit of a try." They'd scrape all the maggots off the top and taste it, "Oh it's not going bad." It was bubbling you know?
- 26:30 When that settled down, that was it and they'd have this Jungle Juice. I said to them, "Look why don't we distil it?" He never thought about that. So I had all this copper pipe. So we distilled it and it tasted like gin. They said, "Now look, we can do a bit better than this." It was all right. It was pretty good after it was distilled; you know the drop, drop, drops? "We'll colour it with tea and sell it to the Yanks for ten
- 27:00 pounds a bottle." And they did yes. The Yanks thought it was great. That was a real good business. The place smelt like a brewery though.

What's Jungle Juice exactly?

You've got to get the potato peelings to get the... what is it potatoes are for? You know, like starchy...

- 27:30 I forget now, like yeast, yeast, yeast, right? Any like dry... we got a bit of dried fruit, sultanas, anything would go into it. After the cooks had peeled the potatoes that went in and sugar, and that's how they got the Jungle Juice. Sometimes they could get a coconut, put one eye out and put a bit
- 28:00 of water, and some sugar in that, and a few sultanas, and block it up, and that was pretty powerful, very powerful. By and large we refined it and it was a good business.

How did you distil it?

What you did, you steamed it and the steam came into a pipe. The pipes curled and dripped into a bottle. That's all it was. It was quite simple. It was quite simple but I

- 28:30 had a 220 volt generator going because it was energising the different garages, where there were tools you see? I kept that going and I had a heater underneath it, and that was good but it was just another little thing that you did. We had a Liberator bomber crash at the back of our workshop.
- 29:00 We were on a hill out of Port Moresby, about eight miles out and it crashed on the other side, and after the Yanks had cleaned it all out, and they left it there. I went around. We had a look at it and the radio was in it. Nothing had been... they never took a thing. So I went back with a hacksaw and a screwdriver, and got it back into the shop. It was beaut because when we moved... I couldn't do much
- 29:30 with it. It was 24 volts but I rigged something up so I could get down to 24 volts. I put 465 batteries in it and I've got 24 volts DC. I brought it and after we got back to near Port Moresby, and we were in a bigger place then, and one of the reinforcements was a radio bloke, had a radio shop, and he fixed it up. So we used to listen in to the fighter pilots in the Coral Sea
- 30:00 Battle. We got all that. You know it was terrific. So these little things that, although we weren't directly involved, we were getting... the trucks were taking supplies up and they were put onto donkeys then to go into the Owen Stanley Ranges, and all this sort of thing.

What did you hear the fighter pilots saying?

You could hear...

- 30:30 the Yanks used to swear like billyo, "Mother fucker." All this and it was terrific. You could hear them and others would call in you know, and you could feel like you were part of it in the aircraft. Different ones... you could switch over to different... what do you call it?

Frequencies?

Frequencies yes. And you could get them off the ship but the Coral Sea, here again the

- 31:00 Yanks saved us. Churchill said he'd leave and they couldn't do anything, and we'll go in, and let the Japs invade Australia, and we'll come, and push them out. What good...? The Yanks came and they saved us in the Coral Sea battle, and God knows how many they sunk and murdered. They killed the lot, thousands of them. You can imagine. You wouldn't be talking to me now. You wouldn't be born. Your parents would have been shot. So that came very
- 31:30 close. That was part of that little session that... oh no, I think I looked after the boys fair enough. I made a timer for the electricity to switch off and all that.

How did you do that?

I had a clock and I fixed it up, took the wire from the distributor... it was run by a four cylinder

- 32:00 jeep motor I think, a willies jeep motor. I got it out of the tip, the American tip. Anything like that... they'd just drive their staff cars out, staff cars and Indian motorbikes. They just dumped them. So I fixed that up. There was a lot of things you could do with a voltage regulator. You could do this, that and the other, and any amount of the stuff. You've got no idea. Equipment.
- 32:30 Tubby Rusden, now Tubby was a big bloke and his father ran a... was a... what do you call them at the racecourse where you put your money on a...?

A bookie?

A bookie. It was in Tubby's blood but he used to run a two-up school over the hill and I ran the power into it. He used to have all the merchant navy. It got known... I'm not joking.

- 33:00 It was Tubby and myself, and another bloke here, and another bloke there. I'll tell you about him later. Tubby would come home and he'd buy wine for ten dollars... ten pounds a bottle in those days, and he'd come home drunk, and he'd get down... he couldn't come up the hill. We'd have to roll him up, roll him up and put him in, take all his money off him, and we had it in a... all the nurses had these lovely
- 33:30 things like this, only bigger. I had a lock on it, take his moneybag off him, and throw it in there. He'd go off to sleep. When he came to, "Donny. Donny. I'm home, Donny." I'd go and switch the light off the darn thing but he made a lot of money. We went down... Snowy Woodhouse and I got 10 percent leave to go home from Port Moresby, and we both went home with two moneybags round our stomachs. You've
- 34:00 got no idea. So that was part of the war that we were down further but the war was going up in the Owen Stanleys.

What was the two-up game like?

Two Up is... you know two pennies? I've got the original pennies there, oh crikeys, Queen Victoria. You either bet on tails or

- 34:30 heads, or ones and he used to run it. He didn't bet but they would give him... if they got a run they'd give him five or six pounds, or whatever it was and he'd come home with a roll of notes.

What was the atmosphere like at one of those?

Good. Terrific. You can imagine the merchant seamen, God. He had a good name. He was... and Tubby, I'll never forget him.

- 35:00 When we went on our 10 percent leave... I've got photos of us walking down the street in Melbourne in our civvies but when we came back we went to the Cherry [Garden] Street Hotel in Richmond. Tubby knew the chap that owned it and he filled up a big bag of wine and whiskey, and by the time we came back, we opened this great bag, all this grog. Of course by the time we got back half of it was gone.
- 35:30 This is some of the good things that happened you know? I've just remembered that I was talking about impro... I still can't remember this, improvisation. Now when we were in Labuan we got two bottles of beer a week.
- 36:00 Great. Big deal. From the people of Australia. So we looked forward to those two bottles but the problem was the boys couldn't cool them. So improvisation. I looked over and I know how I was going to go. I knew what I could do but this bloke had his bottle in an old sock, and he had it hung under the fly of the tent, and he had a tin with petrol dropping on it. Of course with the wind it cooled

- 36:30 the beer down see? So what I used to do was stick half a dozen in a petrol drum and put the compressor air in it. Of course I used up a few gallons of petrol but we chilled our beer. That was one way of doing it, improvisation you see? The Australians are pretty cluey boys. I think it all comes from... we're lazy. We are a lazy, easy-going country. We don't want it spoilt either
- 37:00 unless we do the right thing with the incoming refugees but I think they're exactly the same today. I don't think it will ever change, ever. It's the same with your mates, you don't... you couldn't possibly leave your mate. Even though your life is in danger you'll go and get him out. That's always been and always will be, your mates. If you read about the
- 37:30 Owen Stanley Ranges, I was telling you about the 39th Battalion and the 2/14th that came back from the Middle East and helped them, all this sort of thing. It happened in the desert. It happened in all infantry and commandos, they are great blokes. You know, they fear nothing. That's how they're trained. But war is war. It's shocking.

Did you manage to set up a distillery anywhere else?

- 38:00 No, no. I didn't have to really because I think you heard when I was on Labuan and that Liberty ship came in, and hit a mine, and that section got flood, well we lived like... we got drunk of course. No, that was good but by throwing them out we lost half of them, but there was some that survived.
- 38:30 The sergeants and the COs, and the officers were running around all over the place trying to find the grog. We had it stuck in the swamp, on the edge of a swamp. Down in there it went. They couldn't find it. It was impossible. Anyway, it wasn't that bad. You'd wake up in the morning a bit groggy and silly but it didn't matter.

You said that there was a few blokes in that group back at in Papua New Guinea and you said there was this guy but I'll tell you about him later. Do you

- 39:00 **remember? Who was that?**

Now I've forgotten.

He was one of the guys in that group. There was the bookie and there was you guys, and there was this guy?

Oh yes. We had a section over at Buna, over on the northern part of Papua New Guinea. That's when they sort of moved the Japanese out and he invented an automatic rifle, and he came back to us, and

- 39:30 got the use of... we had a lathe in one... we had big trailers, four-wheel trailers with lathes and all the stuff in them, and spare parts, and everything. He was given permission to develop it and we used to help him. So that was Farmer Broom. He was a farmer and anyway he got this rifle, and it was an automatic but every time
- 40:00 that the reporters come up to have a demonstration, the darn thing would fail. So anyway, he didn't do much about it because the Yanks had them anyway, but Farmer got tinea around his scrotum and he used to... oh itching, itching, itching. So Tubby got a bottle of methylated spirits and went, "Sploosh." "Yooooow."
- 40:30 He nearly went through the roof of the tent. You can imagine it. They cured him all right. It burnt the whole lot out. So that's some of the funny sides of it, living together you know? If anyone got crook or got injured, they'd always be there, going to hospital, giving blood if they need it and all this sort of thing but that's army. That's army life. It's not the same in the air force and navy. They're
- 41:00 different all together because they don't do the hard work. They just do what we did, transport it and so forth, and drop bombs but you must have it, must have it. Of course these days Australia is the, the army is the protector of the flag and that's our responsibility but it hasn't gone to the seniors. They call it senior. In England they have seniors. Here it's not
- 41:30 I would say the air force is senior. You've got to have the army but the air force... that's what I think. However we still must keep our armed services up, spend money and protect what we've got.

Tape 7

- 00:32 **OK, so what were you going to tell us about the chickens? You were talking about the distillery and you used the same system to cook...?**

Oh yes. Well actually, you probably wouldn't know the old blowtorches, would you? Well they're kerosene and they have a pump in them right, and they have a copper tubing twisting round like that, and back in again, and a cover over it, and

- 01:00 you warm up that tubing with methylated spirits first. When that gets hot you pump the kerosene through and it vaporizes, and shoots a flame out. That's the same with petrol, only it doesn't have a

pump. You have your copper piping down and you make a circle like that, bend it around and round, and round, and you seal the end, and

01:30 down where it starts, you have a little 16th hole in it right? Now you heat that first. You can heat that up and while it gets hot the petrol comes down, and goes "whoosh." It sucks in there "whoosh, whoosh" and this is a chuffer you know? These big flames are going up and you can make them flatter of course. That used to heat the half of a 44 gallon drum, cut down that way and they'd be on stands, and you'd have them in there, and they'd boil, the water in no time,

02:00 and you could do your washing in a drum, and do the same thing. That was a chuffer.

That was in New Guinea?

Yes, that was in... no, no, no Labuan.

Oh Labuan, Borneo.

We didn't think of that at the time. We hadn't improvised. We used to take nurses for

02:30 picnics. I had a jeep and we used to take them to the beach, and have swims, and they supplied all the food. Of course they were all lieutenants you know and I was only a ragged-arse corporal. No they were lovely girls and I put in a timber floor for them. I felt sorry for them because they only had dirt floors. You'd thought they'd have looked after them better but of course once I did one, "When are you going to come and do ours?" I'd walk in there and they had nothing on. "Oooh."

03:00 You couldn't knock on the door because it was in that way and you had to go round this... but they were wonderful girls, really wonderful. We enjoyed that part, lots of laughs and so forth, go swimming and it was beautiful. That was some of the easier things after everything finished.

Were you particularly close to any of the girls?

What lovingly? No. I respected them because

03:30 they were lieutenants you know? They were commissioned. Oh no. We were just sitting down there like you and I, and that's the part I liked about it. Some of them were probably older than me but it didn't make any difference. The matron was a wonderful person and had a few laughs, and of course we'd get a free beer from them. They had a bar you know? But no, that's

04:00 what it was all about. That helped me in Legacy.

You said earlier that it was an entirely different war from the Middle East compared with then Europe and then when you came to the Pacific, how did those situations differ? What were the main differences between them?

First of all it was the green jungle

04:30 uniforms we had. The atmosphere was the tropics, was the tropics, was the tropics. Then of course the Atebrin, the yellow tablets and it was a different war all together against the Japanese because it was an island thing, and you never saw them but they'd fly over. Air-wise it was amazing. We used to go... the Americans had a boxing ring about eight miles out from Port Moresby, up in the hills.

05:00 It was an amphitheatre, a natural one and we all sat around this, and the lights were on, and there was a commando fighting a marine, American. Now the commando had just about flattened the other bloke and the air raid siren went. All the lights went out and this Japanese bomber came over, dropped a few bombs on Moresby, and went.

05:30 When the lights came on of course they started again and the marine knocked out the commando. And you know what, the radio that I was telling you about, it came over... the Yanks had their own paper and they had their own radio station in Moresby, and it came over that this marine was saved by a Japanese air raid, and he was. He won the... and that's how the Fifth Column

06:00 must have been in action. How did the Japs know about it you see? You never know and that was a funny turn. It's interesting.

What about other conditions in the Pacific compared with the Middle East and Europe? What was your first impression when you arrived there of the situation in terms of the war against the Japanese?

Well, we hadn't faced the Japs naturally

06:30 and we never did. We didn't but I never saw a Japanese until Labuan. Not there, because we were mainly in Port Moresby and that's when the fighting was right in the Owen Stanleys. They drove them out and they gradually, with the Americans, gradually got up into Finschhafen, and all up into

07:00 Dutch New Guinea. Then it was mainly all over and the Coral Sea battle, and so we were pulled back, and came back into the tablelands in Queensland, and we were subject to higher and colder, to see if malaria would come out of us. Then our system changed and then we went into... we were shipped out

07:30 to Hollandia [in Dutch New Guinea, now Jayapura, Indonesia], and there we were under the American... they wanted us as a unit because I've got to mention, we made a name for ourselves. So we were under their command and we had our vehicles on the L [LCT] landing craft transport, those great big things. Of course that was the invasion of Morotai

08:00 from there.

Can you describe that invasion for us and what you saw of that?

We came in more or less by the end of it because when the Yanks go in, they go in with all... you know, no holds barred. They had the navy and air force, and they flatten places before they go in. They flattened but sometimes they'd flatten it too much and they're killing most of the Australians coming in the back. The commandos come in and they overdo it

08:30 sometimes but that's their system. See MacArthur didn't want anybody else but him. He wanted... but we were probably chosen and that was fair enough. I was telling you about the band with Scat Johnson and all that. That was in Hollandia. Then we did Morotai. Well that was fairly easy because we

09:00 were only there for a little while. That was taken over very quickly and then of course we were going to invade... oh the other side, over... I forget the name... another island. They had big distilleries and everything, and we were supposed to invade that. It was called off because they took over and beat the Japs out of that. Then we went on to Labuan with the Yanks.

So with the invasion on Morotai because we've heard that was a pretty

09:30 **big convoy of ships involved in that, what did you actually see of what happened there?**

All I know is that going over we had good food and we were towing the landing craft infantry blokes onboard that, towing them all the way. It was a small island, flattened. The town of Victoria was a nice little town and they flattened that. There was no need to but they didn't know

10:00 what was there, but they were Korean marines, but they were nothing much. As I say, the Australian commandos came in and they shot them into this... where they couldn't get out. There wasn't much fighting there.

Did you actually see the operation that flattened Morotai?

Oh no. That happened before we came on the scene, by the aircraft.

10:30 They did all that.

So by the time you arrived all that was over?

Yes.

But what about the convoy of ships that arrived in Morotai? Were you involved in that?

There wasn't that many ships that I remember, no. There were only these landing craft transport and all that sort of thing. That's all it was. Although, they couldn't get in close enough. I recall that we had... to go off these ships you had to hold

11:00 the bayonet scabbard of the mate in front of you and we had a little Jewish chap, Ernie Josephs, and he was about this high. Big Jock, Jock Johnson, he was a Scotsman. He was a corporal and he had his bayonet scabbard you know, and Ernie went down a bomb hole, and disappeared, and we had all our equipment on. "Leave him there." He pulled Ernie up and he's.

11:30 Poor Ern, he was a hell of a nice bloke. He was friends of mine after the war and you know what, every time we had a movement to go by sea he got seasick, before he went anywhere near it, days before. He'd get seasick. I felt so sorry for him. He suffered the whole time, could hardly eat and that. Poor Ernie. Look it was absolutely... funny isn't it?

12:00 Psychologically he'd psyched himself up that he was going to be sick and he was. Anyway, he pulled him up and that was it. That was funny.

What about yourself? Did you ever get seasick?

No. I did quite a bit of sailing. I was in the 1st Australian Queen's Own Sea Scouts at the Albert Park Lake I'll have you know, the Queen's own. I was a bugler. Had a lot of

12:30 experience sailing on Albert Park lake but that was about all. After the war yes, I did a lot of sailing. I sailed on the Winston Churchill. I was in the spinnaker crew for that. My mate, he was one of my best men. He was an electrical engineer. He was an apprentice when I came back and he still teaches navigation at Williamstown. Well that's the Royal Yacht Club.

13:00 Of course old Sir Arthur Warner owned... he's dead now but the son, Graham, a very nice bloke and we all sailed together, and we built a fibreglass yacht in Les's backyard, and called it Lincoln Hope because we sailed from Williamstown to Port Lincoln. But it was a shocker. They had to give

13:30 it away in the end because it was up against the south westerners but that was a experience you know.

Just going back to those landings in New Guinea and Borneo, when you were making those landings coming off the landing craft, were you concerned about meeting opposition?

Not really. Let's put it this way. We weren't ever engaged in the first lot. That was more air force than anything

14:00 and infantry, well mainly commandos. They'd go in and establish the whole place right? Then you'd get the others coming in. We'd come in the next wave you see and that's the system; flattened by the air force. Then they'd come in these Caterpillars, what they called Caterpillars. They were a sort of a tank with... you know the tank things but that was their propulsion.

14:30 They had a canon, a 20 millimetre cannon on it and they'd come in first, and they'd have infantry blokes inside that. They'd make the landing and push them back or do whatever they had to do. Then the rest came in and they pushed them back and back, and back.

Can you tell me about the preparations that you and your unit had to make for the vehicles and so forth, before those landings?

15:00 Apart from putting all the workshop stuff and all this on our vehicles, and tying it down, and doing all that. That's about all. We were non-combatants really.

No, I know. I'm asking about the actual vehicles. What preparations did you have to make to take those vehicles onto the islands?

You had to grease your distributor

15:30 and your spark plugs. You had to put marine grease all over that. Your generator yes, you could make that all greasy so nothing got in that. The starter motor no, you couldn't do anything... oh you could do it but a lot of it did get in because you couldn't get under and you'd go through a hole, and it will ring here, and turns your engine around. So that was one of the problems but it didn't hurt them because it was only

16:00 12 volts. If it had been 230 volts there would have been trouble but no, that's all we did. A lot of them drove over and just went down, and stayed there. That's like when the RAAF and they were supposed to do it, and they had all sorts of trouble. Oh. They had to leave the trucks there, pull out and come in at another place. They were idiots, complete idiots but this is what happened there.

Why do you say that about them?

Well they had no experience, had no experience with

16:30 transport or anything like that. See we were more specialist, specialised in that but they didn't have a clue.

What did they actually do wrong?

They came in to... like the CI [actually CB: Sea Bees, US Naval Construction Force]... what do they call the Americans? They've got a name... Construction Battalion, to do all the big work on the airport, on the tarmac. They came in with big machinery and bulldozers. We didn't have all

17:00 that but they'd come in and do all that, and then they laid that steel track down. That's what the RAAF's supposed to have done but they didn't. See MacArthur didn't need them. He told the... what's his name? I forget the big chief of the RAAF. He didn't want them. There was nothing for them to do and there wasn't either because... good in that, fair enough. We didn't have any casualties.

17:30 They didn't do it all. That's fair enough, which he did. So we didn't really meet much or see much action in that direction. It was all different you know? It was all different, with the Americans and we were glad we were with the Americans because they did all the hard work, and we just did what we were told.

So what would you say was the

18:00 **greatest challenge of your time in the Pacific?**

Greatest challenge? I don't really know. I didn't do that much, didn't see that much, apart from that time they broke away and there was a bit of a slaughter on there.

Are you talking about the Koreans there?

Yes.

Can you tell us a little bit more about that,

18:30 **about the lead up to that?**

All I know of that was that they had them bottled up.

When you say “they”?

There was an independent company of Australians. They had them bottled up and they couldn't get out because there was something in the back. They couldn't get out there and there was only about 80 or 90 of them.

Where exactly was this?

Just back off the beach and

- 19:00 the Yanks were all there, and our 106 General Transport Company, they had ducks, American ducks, and they were on the beach. They're the ones that used to go out to the ships and get loaded, and bring them back, and put them on our vehicles right?

Which beach are we talking about?

This is the beach at Labuan.

Labuan.

Yes. They had these bottled up. They must have been there for weeks and weeks, and they didn't worry about them, and they couldn't get out,

- 19:30 and that's when they got into cannibalising. They were cannibalising each other, eating each other and all this but they'd tunnelled under, and got out. They must have come right past our unit because the road was there. It was built up through the swamp and they walked down, and got stuck into the Yanks when they were asleep, and murdered dozens of them. There was screaming and guns going off, and you could hear the big 20 millimetre canons off these

- 20:00 Caterpillars, and the silly idiots, the Koreans were running around with these big 44 gallon drums of petrol, and of course up went the flames, and they were standing out there, and they just wiped them, wiped them right out. Our boys at the 106, they were in it. They did a lot of fighting. It's only that side of the road and when we eventually got there when it was all over, we could see it but then when it was all over we went back during the day, the next day,

- 20:30 and there's all these corpses lying around. Oh. I'll show you. I've got photographs there of all the Koreans. They loaded a Korean into the back of a jeep. His head was sticking out there and his legs were sticking out that side. He must have been nearly seven feet tall. They were big blokes the Koreans and there was bodies lying everywhere, bits and pieces. The Yanks really got stuck into them

- 21:00 with the 20 millimetre shells but that was a really hot little thing that lasted about a couple of hours I suppose.

When you say you could see what was happening, what could you actually see from where you were located?

Well the swamp would be from here to practically down the end of the court. That's how far away it was. We could see the light. We could see and hear everything, and screaming, and carrying

- 21:30 on, and what was the point? We couldn't do anything about it. What could we do? We go down and we get shot. They wouldn't even know where we were, the Yanks but this is what happens.

I don't mean to interrupt you but can you tell me what was the first thing you heard and saw of this whole scene?

The whole thing that woke me up and I had a tent that looked straight over the swamp, was the shooting and the screaming, shooting, and the

- 22:00 screaming.

Who was shooting and who was screaming?

Well the Yanks were screaming because the Koreans were cutting them with their swords and they had guns. They still had their guns and that. They shot them and murdered them, and all in their tents. Then of course when they woke up the Yanks jumped into their Caterpillars, which were sitting there and they turned the 20 millimetre machine guns on them. The boys at 106 as I said, this Snowy, funny man, he

- 22:30 got such a fright he jumped up there and he was able to put his pair of boots on in mid-air. That's how quick it was but they were firing from one side of the road to the other. You know those big trenches, they get torrential rain and they fill up? They were shooting each other like this but it was over... I can't tell you how many. There was about three truckloads of bodies that went out of there and half bits and pieces,

- 23:00 and God knows what. You've got to bury them because in the tropics they start to smell a bit but that was a hot little incident. I was glad that we weren't in it. That's the point but there was nothing we could do. Being a transport unit we were on the other side of the swamp and God knows how they came down the road because our guards must have been asleep. There was a lot of... the CO wanted to know what was going on. They should have known because they couldn't walk through the swamp. They went

down the road

23:30 past our camp. They didn't get stuck into us. They were trying to get down to the motorboats and also they had these twin Cadillac engines in there and they could do about 40 knots. They were big things. They were continuously... you could hear them going round the islands all the time. They picked the wrong place, the Koreans. They should have surrendered.

So from where you were,

24:00 **were you concerned for your own safety?**

Well, I don't think so. We didn't know what was going on and we could just stand there and look but there was no sign of an invasion, and we knew...we didn't even know... we knew the Koreans were bottled up by this independent company, but we didn't know anything else, what was happening down there. Of course our 106, our Head Quarters was down there

24:30 with the ducks. So there was no invasion because these big powerboats would have picked them up. See this is what happened but you didn't know until they found out they'd tunnelled under the next day.

What did you see of the tunnelling?

I didn't see that love. I've got a photograph of what it was but I didn't get the tunnelling. We didn't worry about it. They'd got out and that was it, and

25:00 so they were all dead, cleaned up, and I don't think the Yanks had any... apart from the ones who were in bed. They were all murdered and screamed, and got out. I don't know.

Do you know how many Americans were killed?

No I wouldn't have a clue. I don't think very many of them were. I know Nobby Bourke in the workshops of 106 got one. There's a photograph of him standing there with his gun and this Korean must have lifted his head up to have a look, and Nobby shot him underneath there [points to throat], and

25:30 I've got a photograph of that one. It wasn't a pleasant sight.

Was there at any time an opportunity for the Americans to not be firing those machine guns or was that just the situation?

I think the screaming and that woke them up. The boys in the Caterpillar, they really got stuck into them but they had

26:00 automatic weapons also. This is what started it. There was about... I suppose about eight tents of the Yanks. They probably murdered about 10 or 20 of them I'd imagine. It wouldn't be any more than that but that's what started the whole thing and then of course up went the 44-gallons drums, and the boys could see the Koreans. They were stupid. They should have got out of the way but

26:30 they were all shot down with automatic weapons in an area I suppose not much bigger than this whole complex. It might be a little bit bigger but it was a nasty little thing. The silly idiots, they could have surrendered. That's the way they had been trained. It's ridiculous isn't it? They had no hope of ever getting out but they just committed hari kari and that was it.

27:00 **So the next day who was responsible for burying those bodies?**

Well, we had our vehicles and one of our blokes up there spraying them with phenyl. I don't know who it was and counting them, another bloke counting the bodies, and so forth but the Yanks had bulldozers. They just bulldozed a hunk of dirt out and just tipped them all in, and covered them over. That's all. What else could you do?

Did you personally have a role

27:30 **in the cleaning up of the situation?**

No, I didn't no. Some of our boys in vehicles did most of that but no, I wasn't... it's hard to say I suppose. What's the point? You see death and that's it. You get the true story afterwards what... how did they tunnel out and the independent company, how'd they get through their lines, and so forth.

What did you hear afterwards about how they had tunnelled

28:00 **out and what sort of materials they had used?**

I wouldn't have a clue, love. I wouldn't have a clue.

So you didn't hear any details about how they had managed to escape?

No I didn't very much. I suppose there was a big inquiry about it but that would be "hush hush". That'd be "hush hush." You wouldn't get the army to... get it out of the American Army or anything like that, or the Australian that was supposed to be guarding it. Now I don't know

28:30 whether they still had them there or the Yanks took over to look after it. I'm not sure but I know that the

independent company drove them back into this area and I didn't worry much about it. You know that's what happened and so it was a nice quiet time after that. Then the POWs came in and we met each other, and so forth.

29:00 **When you say the independent company were...?**

The commandos.

The commandos?

They're called independent companies, yes.

They were the Australian commandos?

Yes, yes. They're great fighting men.

How did the Australians and Americans get on in the actual army office? How did you and your mates actually get on with the Americans?

29:30 We found them pretty good blokes. I suppose there was a few naturally a bit of jealousy and so forth but the Yanks were... they were spoon fed. They couldn't improvise. They had too many men, more equipment and had their washing machines, and all this crap, and they were spoilt.

30:00 they had no values. I tell you about Port Moresby, they had a big area where they just drove their trucks and vehicles in of the least little thing was wrong, and they'd sump the darn thing, and staff cars, and Indian motorbikes. We'd fix them up in the workshop. Fix them up. I'd do the electrics on them and away we'd go. But that's the American way of doing things and thank God they did, but they lost hundreds and thousands of their young Americans doing it,

30:30 but that's how they fight a war. They plomp everything into it and away they go but they... by and large you can't say that they were cowards. No way. No way. They were really good at... in the case of emergencies they stood up, no worries. They were good allies. We got on well with them but some of the blokes didn't like the Yanks and the Yanks turned

31:00 on them, and that was it. So I never had any problem. I got a black eye of course but it wasn't my fault. I didn't dodge. I couldn't. He hit me from behind. That's nothing. It could have been an Australian. I don't know. But it's hard to say. Of course the... what do you call it? The pamphlets were dropped you know? "You're over here and

31:30 there's a Yank screwing your wife," and all this sort of business. This went on and on, and on, and on, and Germany did the same. The Germans did the same.

Who was responsible for dropping those pamphlets?

The Japanese. They printed them too. They did all that and they did it. The Germans did it and they did it a lot in Europe, all those pamphlets and that's

32:00 all propaganda, war. I think that out of it all it made me a different person. I'm talking for all my mates, that you come back and you've got a different perspective on life, and helping people. So that's when I joined RSL naturally and when I came back from the Middle East,

32:30 and when I settled down in the soldier settlement I had the responsibility of Legacy as the president, not that I did much. All I did was make money for them but when I came down to Melbourne I joined Legacy later on at Beaumaris RSL. The main legacy that I was involved in was when I came up

33:00 here. I was a bit too busy in Melbourne with my own business and subcontracting, security and all this sort of business. So when I retired I joined Legacy. I've been in Legacy actually for 35 years. Here I had 45 widows to look after and we were on Currumbin Waters, and they built Gunning Gardens just across the water, and if I could have walked

33:30 on water I'd have been there in five minutes but I had to drive around. I thought to myself, " Now this is good. I've got 45 widows and every widow that goes in there, I lose one out there." So that's what it was and I eventually got them all into the one place so that I could control them you know? I tell you what it was wonderful. I never had one widow that ever gave me any problems. They were all good... I'd tell them a little yarn every now and again,

34:00 and they looked forward to it, and I'd take them flowers.

Can you tell me what the role of Legacy is, what its purpose is?

Its wording is 'Helping widows and children of ex-servicemen'. I haven't got the 'helping' right I think. Something doesn't seem right. I shouldn't have because I put them all on about 100 trays.

34:30 We've got to basically look after them. We've got to be the father. I've had Aborigines from the Vietnam War and their kids. So we put them through university and we look after them. We've got to keep an eye on them, no drugs or anything like that and it's a very busy moment but they're not all

35:00 like that because that was in Vietnam. In the Second World War of course they're all grown up and so

forth. A lot of the widows were great to me. They were really good. I had a lot of fun with them. Faye and I still go down Remembrance Day, and we go and put a big bunch of flowers in there at... and so they look forward to that. I go around

35:30 and see my old mates, and some like to have a grog, and it was good, good fun but they were lovely. But now I've retired on the active part but I still make money for them and they call me "Jellybean Don". Do you know why? I got onto this. I started off selling badges on Legacy Day and I had the main street in Tweed Heads. I'd go into the banks and get permission, and I'd give the

36:00 girls the tray, and they'd take it around to all the tellers, and they'd buy a badge, and go into the pub, and all the business people, and people walking along the street, and so forth. Coming home one year, this is 16 years ago, I thought, "I'll call into the airport." I did and they were advertising this four-winged British passenger plane. It was the quietest plane in the world in those days and it was on the tarmac, and they had all these lovely girls like you dressed

36:30 up to the hilt, and the young blokes bunging on all the signs. There must have been 100 of them in the VIPs lounge. We're not allowed to go in there. I thought. "This will do Don." And 250 dollars I knocked off in an hour. If one bloke bought a five or a ten dollar, the other had to do the same thing. But then that's when I started it. Now it's the most important money maker and I get priority one. Actually that couple that came in a while ago,

37:00 well they'd heard about this Jellybean Don. It was me, so I've got them. I've got them next time. They want to be in it and they want to sell badges, and we get four wonderful kids from the Currumbin Cadets in their uniform, army of course. Two of them are twins, two twin girls and the two young blokes. I don't know whether this year they've left school and gone on to Uni. I don't

37:30 know but they come down on a Saturday and they have a sergeant major, a chap looking after... and so forth. I've got photographs of them, wonderful kids. They would sell a pork chop to a Jew. I tell you what they were fantastic. And the girls... all I do is sit there and keep putting the badges in the trays. Now and again when the... see you're not allowed to touch... when they arrive and they want to get in, and get rid of

38:00 their suitcases, and that but you grab them as they come out right. You get Mum and Dad, and the kids, and they'll walk right past you, so that's why I got the jellybeans see. The kids come over and "Oh yummy. Yummy." And the mothers pick out the black ones you know.

Sounds like a good system.

And I give the little kids a badge for free, a dollar badge. We've run out of the green ones because they used to be fifty cents for the kids at school,

38:30 sold all those. They don't make the blue ones any more, so I'm going to give them two dollars ones. Do you know why? It's a psychological thing. "Come on. You've got to have a badge" because we are looking after children too. I love kids, as long as they're someone else's kids but then I put a badge on them. Oh terrific you know? They'd walk away and Mum and Dad would come back and buy a five dollar badge. Do you see what I mean, the psychology in it? It's good isn't it? Now another

39:00 one is... and I've been caught up with this. You know when you get out of the taxi and you put three dollars in it to get a thing to go from here to the door? Well when they're finished I go and grab them. Now I have about three or four and then when I see the little Nips come out I show them how to get 20 cents out of it, you know and they're made. That's one thing but when I see the people arrive in a taxi and they go to buy three dollars, I say, "You can have this for nothing." "Can I?

39:30 Great." "Yeah but you'll buy a three dollar badge off me?"

That's a very good system.

See that's good psychology. I never lose. So we make quite a bit of money you know per day.

So Don, how important is Anzac Day for you?

Very important up here. I go into Burleigh Heads and treated as a VIP but no, it's something that... I can't march of course now,

40:00 but I couldn't march in the end. I used to have a jeep. They supplied a jeep for me but it is important, very important. I can remember the French chaps that blew the bugles at the Arc of Triumph [Arc de Triomphe]. They came out to Australia and they were up here when we first came up. That was great. They played the bugle for us. It's good. They have music and

40:30 a choir, and it's a good turn out really but I miss the reunions because they're all... most of them are dead now and I'm living on borrowed time.

I think you've got a while to go yet Don.

Tape 8

00:33 **What did you do in Milne Bay?**

Well we did nothing. We went from Brisbane to Milne Bay, just a section of us and we disembarked. We were there for a week and they picked us up, and brought us to Port Moresby. Nothing.

What was happening in Milne Bay at the time?

That's where the Japs were. They were going to land. Well they did but they had a squadron of RAAF fighter planes in there

01:00 and there was some pretty hot fighting after we left, and that's when they came around into the Coral Sea battle. They wanted to nail that first, so they could land there and come up to Moresby over the land, and they stopped them. We didn't see much of it. It was only just tents and coconut palms, and goodness knows what, and very, very humid.

01:30 We just didn't know what the heck was going on but that's when we were taken out and went in with the Americans, a bit of confusion there.

Yes explain the confusion? What was happening?

I don't know when we were switched over from the AIF over to the Americans you see but it worked out all right. We didn't stay there fortunately. We were better off going

02:00 back to Moresby.

You were saying earlier that some militia guys came into the...?

Oh yes the 39th Battalion. They were sent up to Moresby and into the Kokoda, and that's when the Japs got through, and they stopped them. They did a fantastic job.

But they didn't come into your group?

No, no. We were away from all that but see that was

02:30 when they were bringing the 6th Divvy Infantry back and they were the brigade, 18 Brigade or something but they were 7th Divvy, and then the 6th Divvy started to come. Then they dropped by parachute in the Ramu Valley and that's when I was tell you about when all the petrol exploded over the boys. They were going on their way up to the Ramu Valley,

03:00 the same thing and this is what happened. By and large they lost a lot of men but it was shocking conditions. They couldn't get food to them and dropped them. As I said, the Fuzzy Wuzzies were fantastic, how they got the wounded out and carried them out, and then they dropped these bloody bull beef... no parachutes, and the biscuits were that hard. They were like hand grenades going off. They injured a

03:30 hell of a lot, a lot of these boys you know? They just dropped them. They couldn't do anything else. It was fighting in a very close quarter, from here to the other side there. You were very close most of the time and the Japs of course were artists in camouflage but our boys soon learnt about that. Then they turned out to be the best jungle fighters. That's why the Yanks

04:00 want them on their side. When there's anything like that they call in the Australians because now they've got Canungra. Isn't it Canungra up here? That came in during the war teaching jungle fighting and all that sort of business. We did all that, unarmed fighting and this commando stuff.

Where did you do all that?

All that up in Port Moresby.

Can you explain a bit of what you did there?

Well we were just taught unarmed combat,

04:30 how to approach a bloke if he was coming with a bayonet and all this kind of thing, and tip him over, and stick him, and all this sort of thing. You learnt all this and it was pretty good, physically hard but good. We were taught to fire Owen guns and different guns, and do this, and throw grenades, and pop down, and camouflage, and yet we weren't an infantry mob. We all knew... we all

05:00 had to go through it, but it was good.

So even though you weren't in combat you were learning these skills?

Oh yes. Yes we all had to do that in Moresby because that was jungle fighting and we hadn't any experience, coming from the Middle East. We never did it or worried about it but they taught you all things. How to survive in the jungle and even the different plants that could... that's how the

- 05:30 Japanese were so good. They lived off the land and they had a bit of rice, and that's it, and they had bicycles. They came there with their bikes. But the Brits forgot to tell them about Singapore, you know when the guns were pointing the wrong way, so the Japs come down on their bicycles. Highly mobile, see? If that Pommy idiot hadn't of surrendered our boys
- 06:00 in the 8th Divvy would have won that bloody war, you know. They were doing well and this idiot, he turned around, and he was frightened that a lot of civilians would be murdered with their bombing, and all this crap. Rubbish. That's some of the sad things that happened, especially the Poms. There's such a big gap between the commissioned and the ORs, ordinary ranks [actually 'other ranks'], in the Pommy army. There's still this snobbishness and it's stupid, really stupid.
- 06:30 **You said before that the transport changed quite a bit from the Middle East to the Pacific. What sort of transport did you come across that you had to use?**
- You mean marine...?
- No, just that you said you went from trucks to jeeps?**
- Oh yes. Well see you couldn't take three-ton trucks up. You had to have four-wheel drive and light... the jeep was one of the greatest... the two greatest inventions were the jeep and the DC3,
- 07:00 the airplane. They won the war and the Liberty ship. There were three of them that won the war. The jeep, you couldn't bog it and if you did you could lift it out but oh no, some of the tracks and that were impossible to... you couldn't get a truck up there, no way. They could drop them... oh no they drop them by helicopter now. We didn't have that. They did in Korea and Vietnam. They just dropped them.
- 07:30 Big aircraft arrived and they just opened the front, and they'd drive out, and all that sort of thing. We were all learning to be defensive against a very cunning and a very, very, very trained enemy that had no fear, and no fear whatsoever of dying. That's what you've got to put up with.
- What was the difference that you saw in the way the German Army fought and the Japanese?**
- 08:00 The Japanese would have wiped the Nazis right out because they... although they did a lot of pouring in their troops and that. They had the armour but it's a different war in the jungle. They've never fought in the jungle in Asia. They don't know what it's like or in Europe. They don't know what it's like. But the Japs trained. See they knocked off China, invaded China, murdered a lot of women and children, and they've known war for a heck of a
- 08:30 long time. They were preparing for all this and they were a great nation for building ships, and armoury, and all that sort of thing but they're a democracy now. It's sad isn't it? It's just religion, absolutely religion that does all this. You can't tell me that... who is it... who is the God of the Muslims?
- 09:00 Allah. Death to the infidel. Now that's not religion is it? You don't go round killing people because they're not the same religion as you. It's the same when I was a kid. We were brought up in the High Church of England and we were told to hate the Micks, the Catholics. Now that's ridiculous. My mother was very one-eyed you know, but she quietened down a lot when I came back after the war.
- 09:30 I know she was a wonderful person but this is the sort of thing that's not good enough, the different religions and you were born... you can't help the way you're born. So why not just love each other? We're all Christians but this is what it is, death to the Christians. That's it. So I'm glad I haven't got many more years on the planet because I'm going to leave it all to you young kids to
- 10:00 try and solve it. I've had my game of cricket. That is basically what it is. If you had more love and less religion you wouldn't have all these problems. You get these people like Hitler and he's no worse, what's his name Hussein. If we'd let him go he would have knocked off the Arab State, which he'd invaded and he
- 10:30 would have taken over the lot, and you can see how much money he's taken out from his people, all the properties he owns, and all the money he stole from them. That's not good enough. They had the same... the chap and his wife, he was a commando or something during the war. He became president of the Philippines. Look at all the money that he stole from the people and there some of them are that poor. It's not right. See they don't understand about a democracy.
- 11:00 It's wrong to have a dictator. You have a prime minister but he only does what he's told by the people, but these places never learn. They never learn. It's strange isn't it, how you've got to go into a war, like the Americans and kill people to make them understand, and they'll be better off, and there you are, and people are still, "Oh you shouldn't have gone into Iraq," and all this rubbish. They should have gone in there years ago.
- 11:30 They tried.
- We talked about brothels and that sort of thing in the Middle East. What sort of brothels were there in Asia, in the Pacific?**
- I never came across anything like that, no. Well, we didn't get into any big cities or anything. There was nothing like that, nothing.

12:00 **So with all those men there how did they relieve themselves?**

Well, I suppose they just had to have wet dreams. You couldn't do a darn thing about it. You just had to put up with it. You steeled yourself into a thing like that and you had to occupy your mind. I was fully occupied the whole time because I was an electrician and there was always something going wrong, trucks had to be fixed, and you were tired by the time you got to bed,

12:30 and that was it. You just slept. I suppose the tropics did something to you too. I think the Atebrin must have had something to quieten us down a bit. They said that they used some sort of thing in the First World War but I don't know. There was something they put in the tea or something. I don't know. No, I think that...

Because they were all young men...

Yes, yes.

All in there together...

Well look, there was no poofs in

13:00 our unit because they got the big shift, not one. If there was a fairy there, out. But there's a lot of fairies these days unfortunately and who is to blame for that, and child abuses in the church, and so forth. God.

When the blokes did... because we've heard of other homosexuals in the army, did you ever meet anybody?

No they were in the navy. "Your turn in the

13:30 barrel." You know, they got in a barrel with a hole in it. That's what the saying is. They were a lot of... and that was fair dinkum. They were sleeping together and plenty of food, nothing to do. That's the whole problem. I've got no time for...

Where did you hear that from?

That's been known for years. No I haven't got much time for the navy or the air force. Army man,

14:00 naturally.

Did you hear of guys that were meeting up with some of the locals, the local women?

No, no, no. No, that wouldn't... no way, no way, no. The Japs did this, but not us. They got in and they cut the whatsanames off their foot so they couldn't run away, the [achilles] tendon. They did all that, but they're animals. That's an insult to an animal. I'm a dog lover and an animal lover, and

14:30 no, they were just inhuman. Well the French had their own brothels in the army. They had them in Syria, that's right. They had them and they followed them wherever they went. So I don't know. Well you know, the Frenchmen are poofs anyway. They're idiots. They'd stick a knife in you as soon as look at you but we had a

15:00 big occasion when we were at Rayack. I think I was telling Helen about when we went over the top with the railway line and we were camped in Rayack. That's where the aerodrome was and we had a camp this side, and the railway line went down the main street. That was the shops and a café, and grog, and there was a big hullabaloo there with the French, and the Australians right? There were shots fired and

15:30 goodness knows what, and all the shops there were pushing down their shutters. In the background there's Squirrel of the Pipes, this lieutenant Scottie in his full uniform blowing the bagpipes and coming down, and that was put out of... there was a big fight, because a few of the Frenchies were killed. They got really stuck into them.

16:00 One pulled a knife on an Australian and that was it. They barred them. They kept the French out of it, back to the aerodrome and stayed there. They were Free French and, "Stay there and don't come out or look out." They had the MPs guarding because they started it. They're mongrels, the French. I don't like them. See I had enough of them when I went to Noumea and New Caledonia, and they just ignored you. I haven't got a good report on them yet.

16:30 **When you went to the tropics it's a totally different climate there.**

Oh yes.

You went from really dry heat to really wet heat. How did that change the living conditions and hygiene?

Well the hygiene was very good. It is good, better than the Americans because you can smell their stink a mile away. No, we were very, very strong about that but you were sweating and you lost weight, and so forth, and you were yellow with this Atebrin.

17:00 The food wasn't good. We were still on bully beef and biscuits. Occasionally you'd get an apple or some blooming thing, fresh bread sometimes but we still had basically bully beef. We never got fresh meat or anything like that, sometimes a bit of tinned stuff but it was shocking food, yet the Yanks were buying it

and flying it in from Australia, and they had nice sweet biscuits. We still had

17:30 the army biscuits. So that was the trouble but it didn't change because we had it in the desert anyway. As I said, it was the first time with the Italians that I knew about dehydrating vegetables and it was great to be able to get on some of that food but very little. I think the infantry boys knocked all that off. When you think back you were a lot younger then. You could cope with all

18:00 those sorts of things and the changes, and the wet and humid time, and mosquitoes. Getting underneath the mosquito net and not letting the breeze in is murder, and you daren't not do it, although you're full of Atebrin but I don't know.

What was the base like at Labuan?

Labuan? The base there was cosmopolitan, bits of everything. It

18:30 was a small area and it had the airport on it, a tarmac but here again the natives were there, and there's photographs of the natives there when we used to go out. We'd go for a bit of a walk and take an Owen gun with us in case you know? But they hated the Japs. But the Japs weren't there very long. They weren't there. It was the Koreans and they welcomed

19:00 the Australians because we were friendly, and we used to take things, and play with the kids. Not the Japs. No way. They'd be raping the women, mongrels but we were welcome and so forth, same as Greece. There was Fifth Column there but I wouldn't say it was Greek. It could have been German there. Well it must have been because I'm the recipient of

19:30 the Greek medal and that was presented to me since I've been up here. We didn't know about that and we were entitled to it because we were in Greece, a commemoration medal. Some big general came out from Greece and stuck it on me. Yeah so, it's just like the Queen Wilhelmina Gold Star with the Yanks in Hollandia. That's

20:00 another one. If you girls would like to go up in the lift I'll show you the memorabilia in there? Right, OK well we'll do that when you're finished. Not boasting... I feel that I'm boasting but you want the truth. I never won a medal for bravery. I got an efficiency medal from the Queen and I'm very proud of that one, an efficiency decoration but I was never

20:30 in a circumstance where I needed or I could have killed somebody, or get in to pull my mates out. I was never in that situation and that's probably good because we would never have been able to get the stuff to the troops on the frontline. The infantry man as I say, he's right up there with me and they should be with everybody. When you see the infantry battalions marching on Anzac Day you

21:00 know that they've been through it and they are very brave people, wonderful. So I think that these days they're being recognised a little bit better with their pensions than when we were but I can't understand why the widows don't get more. We've been trying in Legacy for a long time but we assist them in our own way. We make money. We

21:30 get no help from the government whatsoever and they are a great crew of blokes. They put their time and life into Legacy. That's what it's all about.

Just before we go back into Legacy, you were saying before that your job was extremely important taking supplies... well not right to the frontline.

That's right.

How did that change in the Pacific?

22:00 It wasn't so far distant. It was all close you understand. A lot of it could have been without us in some circumstances. Our big vehicles were useless and they'd get bogged, and that was it but the little jeeps, four wheel drive and that,

22:30 and the tyres were... you'd get out of it. You could lift them up and pull them out. That was a good thing and that's where we had the Japanese because they never had... nor did they have a lot of air support but they came a long way without it. You've got to take your hat off to them because they didn't care about their life. If they were wounded they'd just put a hand grenade into their stomach and blow themselves to pieces or shoot the...

23:00 Hari kari. Well that's not living is it? That's not living.

What happened to your friend Jock? Did he go with you to the Pacific?

No. We were separated when we came back from the Middle East and it was all changed. See we were changed into platoons. See that's like the platoons, like the infantry and we were the same. We changed from Corps Petrol Park to

23:30 105 and 106 General Transport Company. We did everything. We did it in the Middle East as Petrol Park but we were attached to the 6th Divvy Ammunition Sub-Park. We were part of them in the 6th Divvy. So being Corps Troop you can be pushed into 7th Divvy, 8th Divvy, 9th Divvy to help them out. If the enemy

had broken through we'd send our infantry,

- 24:00 corps infantry in to help, our artillery and all this sort of thing. That's basically what it's all about. As I was saying to Helen, that's how you start a football team. You have all your best, strongest and best men defending. You don't worry about the forward line. That looks after itself but so long as you stop them. That's how the army is run exactly.

How did you feel being split up from Jock?

- 24:30 Things were different. See I went into the workshop over in the Middle East before we turned and Jock was in 105, and I was in 106. So he went with 105. They only got as far as Morotai and they only spent about two or three months in Port Moresby, and they went back to Australia. They had a better time than we had
- 25:00 but that was all right. Jock and I, we were mates after the war and his wife. He's passed away now and I was fortunate enough to help him get a TPI, for his wife mainly. As I say, she's a lovely person and I still... well I don't go down there but we still write and correspond, and all that, lovely person. See although you do get old sometimes you forget some of your mates and they give you a ring up, and even
- 25:30 Legacy, some of my mates there that are not active, they give a ring to say, "How ya going? Ya still on the planet, ya old bastard?" You know and all this sort of thing. Well that's good. That's great. You make good friends and there are some good blokes in the RSL too but that's different. The RSL has got all kinds in it and we're more you know, "Doing unto others". I say the Ten Commandments mean nothing. One does.
- 26:00 "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" and you'll go through life a much happier person. I sound like bloody Minister Mead but it's a fact. If you be kind and talk nicely to people, and have a bit of a yarn with them, you're saying... if you can't say anything nice about them, don't say anything. That's it. I like everybody here and they return the compliment. We've got one or two a little bit....
- 26:30 One's a Pom and he's starting to realise that he need friends too, and so people are all different.

Where were you when the war ended?

In Labuan yeah. In the island of Labuan and that was it, and we celebrated. We celebrated with a torpedo on the boats, the Yanks and we had

- 27:00 whisky and orange juice. I think it was whisky? Anyway, we were singing American songs and they were singing Australian songs. We were you know... piddled.

Can you sing one of the American songs for us?

I'll think of one in a minute. "Da da da da de da da daa." We were standing up and kicking our legs, and carrying on like idiots, and they were singing,

- 27:30 "Once a jolly swagman." We had to help them along on that but you've got no idea celebrating that and I can remember just walking home from there back to our unit, and I remember getting onto this tree, and lying down, and I said, "That was it." We had a bloke called Tiny. He was a big bloke, only young, a Western Australian and he was a terrific bloke. My mate was Jacky Nicholas and he
- 28:00 was a West Australian. He was a Don R. You know the motorcycle bloke? They were mates and he found us. He came looking for us and he carried us both on his shoulder. Yeah not joking. He was a big man, brought us home, put us to bed, wonderful, see mates.

How did the message come through to you?

He was walking down to... he could hear the sing song and he thought, "I'll go down."

- 28:30 He never drank or anything. He was a real yokel. You know a real country... but a hell of a nice bloke, quite and unassuming, and he carried us both home. God I don't know how he got us both.

How did you hear that the war had ended?

Well it came over the... we all had radio. I had a radio and it came over, and someone blew the whistle, and

- 29:00 there it was, "She's over." Guns were going off and you know the Yanks started it, "Boom. Boom." That was it. Of course we still had some of the grog that time when we hid it. We got that much of it. We went down with them and God we all got pissed.

How many people would have been around that night, at a guess?

Oh hundreds, all the boys and that was it. Unfortunately a lot of the boys

- 29:30 didn't have any grog. Some of them did but we soon dug up a bit. Oh no, we went down to the Yanks. They were celebrating and so they said, "Come in Aussies." I mean we had a ball. You've got no idea. I can remember one Anzac Day march. This is early on. We went back to

- 30:00 a street you probably wouldn't know, remember it and I don't either. It's Bourke Street... no the next one on. It doesn't matter. One of our boys had an engineering shop there next to Myer something, the hotel and it was a big wide street. I'll think of it in a minute... Beckett Street. We all came back to have our reunion in there. We had a barbeque and we had grog, and so forth, in his engineering shop.
- 30:30 Anyway, we were inside and we could hear these pipes, a pipe band coming in the background and all of a sudden around the corner... they were lead by a little bloke this high. Prosser, one of our blokes. He had a busby on. It was the Footscray Black Watch. They were big boys too and he was leading them around. He had his suspenders on, a sporran on
- 31:00 and he had this busby, and brought them around, and they formed a circle right out in the middle of the street. It was half past six of a night and it was dark. Anyway, the cars were all with their headlights on and they were playing things, and two girls got out of a car, and did the dance, and we went and got a couple of pieces of wood, and they performed this, and you've got no idea. The people that were around there and it was all...
- 31:30 we didn't even know they were coming. They all filed in one after the other and dispersed, and I can remember my mate Mick, Mickey Wright my secretary, he had a wonderful memory for songs, and he was singing Scottish songs, and the Scottish were singing Irish songs standing up. It was a wonderful impromptu but I can see Prosser now, a little bloke wheeling them around out of Swanston Street into Beckett.

32:00 Funny, funny man.

What did you think when the war was over?

Well it was, "That's it, got to get back to work and finish my apprenticeship, three years to go." As I say, I did it hard but I did it. I knew that I had to have something to fall back on, engineering and so it made me make things, and do things, and saved I suppose hundreds of thousands

- 32:30 of dollars buying my own homes. I had a building company with... I went into real estate when I sold out and brought the kids down to educate them, and I spent 12 months, and I got out of that. It was too dishonest and then I got into Lucas, Lucas automotive electrical engineers from England. Lucas stuff was the Rolls Royce of... they were in Melbourne
- 33:00 and I went in there in quality control. I had a background on all that and I thought, "Well quality control, this is not... I'm going to learn." So I went down as a fitter on the starter motor line, the solenoid line, the alternator line and the change line, and so forth. I did all those, went down in wages but I learnt a lot about quality control and production.
- 33:30 Then they opened up... they made their own machinery. They were a fantastic company but unfortunately after I left, see the Poms are funny people. They're quality minded but they don't take enough. I think I gave them three good inventions. You never... you just put it in the box and so forth.
- 34:00 Then I was promoted to the staff of Quality Control and I had two technicians under me, and we would go around of a morning, and grab the day before production, say a starter motor, alternator, off there, and put a quality control shop. They weren't allowed to put that into the store and they had to produce so much a day
- 34:30 because if Datsun came in or Ford, and they didn't have the stuff, they'd get fined pretty heavy, and this is what it was.

Back on Labuan what happened after that night when you had the great big party?

Well I was pretty crook the next day. I think everyone was.

How did you then start to fold down the war?

- 35:00 **How did all the operations start to close down?**

The first thing was we were waiting. We just couldn't do anything. When they came out they had the 20 points. The married men got out first, regardless of how many years and then the single blokes, like myself, how much, how many years of seniority there. Then we got out. Then the others that had only been in a time, had to wait. That's basically what it was about,

- 35:30 the whole system.

How long were you on the island before you got back home after the war?

About six months I think. Oh after the war? Oh we were sent straight home, I suppose three weeks but it took a while to get on the ship and go to Morotai, and get someone else, and then get home to Fremantle, Adelaide. That's when I

- 36:00 joined the RSL and so forth. Then go home and then drive the workshop vehicles overland. I'm sorry. I'm getting it all...you mean after the armistice was signed? Yes?

Yes on Labuan?

We just took... going home and we were home. That's what it amounted to.

How long were you on that island in total?

About six months I think. It may not have been six months.

Is that where you met the POWs?

36:30 Yes that's where I met them when they came in, yes, all my mates and Bill Miles with the one leg off, and others with no legs. I told you about that and that was wonderful. That was really great and they fattened them up, and then they put them on the [MV] Manunda... I think was the hospital ship, and they shot them back home.

Were you there when they first came out of the camp?

No.

37:00 No, they were held in Singapore centres. They got the food to them. You know, the Yanks were fantastic about this too. They flew it all in and fattened them up, and we were closest to it, to 2/5th and 2/1st, and 2/5th General Hospitals, and that's when they came in there first. Then as they got better they took them to Morotai and then they took them home.

37:30 **So how long were they on the island with you?**

I suppose they'd be about six or eight weeks, six or eight weeks I think. Then they went on and they weren't in... they were in pretty good condition really because as I said earlier, they weren't like the Poms. They didn't give in and they were in

38:00 with the local people. They'd help them and they'd sell what they had, a watch or something, and all this, and they bartered with them, and the native people there were wonderful. They could have got shot you know? The Japs would have shot them if they got caught and they did help them out, and you've got a lot to thank these people for.

When you first heard they were there you wouldn't have known some of your mates were POWs? Did you know?

Coming in?

When you were in Labuan did you know?

I first saw

38:30 them coming off in stretchers. Now they were the English Pommies. They were at Kuching in Borneo and they came into this hospital too, and they were bone, in stretchers. Then a Catalina Flying Boats, Americans, very small, started to bring a few in and I was telling earlier

39:00 that I was making some timber floors for the nurses, and hold on, there's some of the boys in hospital. I didn't even know that they'd arrived. I got a shock there when I saw my own G section boys. You know fantastic, a great moment.

What did you say when you saw them?

Oh in tears, both of us. That's when you got a genuine hug and a kiss

39:30 but that was great. It's one of the things you never forget.

What did you say to them?

"Where've ya been?" Words to that effect. You get all worked up over these things and they did too because we hadn't seen each other for years, about four years, three and a half years.

40:00 Then of course we had our reunions and so forth. Oh no, it was wonderful.

Did they tell you where they'd been?

Yeah. Well we got all that. I've got all the history. I've got a book there that...

But when you met them did they tell you where they'd been?

They didn't speak too much about it really. See they'd been through trauma and they were trying to get over being released, and

40:30 they didn't anything about that. Only said about the little dog but no they were quiet because they weren't in good health. They were still a bit sick you know? They didn't want to talk about that and you talked to them, and they'd nod off. So you'd come back and see them, and take them some cigarettes or what, or a bottle of beer, and all this sort of thing

41:00 They'd go and then another mob would come in, and then another, and they were all different blokes because there were RAAF blokes, and there was navy blokes too. They all came in there. That was the

main hospital, the two of them and you searched around, and you could find... you'd go to the matron or the head sister, and say, "Anyone from 105 and 106 General Transport Company?" And they'd tell you where they are.

41:30 Then you'd go and see them, and a great moment yes.

Your friend with the guitar, did he end up...?

Ernie got drowned. He was shot off to Japan in an old rust bucket and the American submarine sunk it because they didn't know there was POWs on it, and that commander came out to Australia after the war, and apologised but he couldn't help it. It was an

42:00 enemy ship and....

Tape 9

00:33 **Some people have told us that when the war ended there was in some way a sense of disappointment. Did you feel that at all?**

No I can't say how I could be disappointed in anything. I knew I was going home and it had all finished, and I'd have to settle back to civilian life. That was... I was only young, 24 but

01:00 that was all different. I was glad it was all over and we could go home, and live a normal life. No I don't know how people would think that.

Were you sorry to leave your mates?

I didn't leave because I kept in... well Mick and I were always mates but old Ern, unfortunately he didn't come back. But we still had our meetings. We had an association

01:30 and we had our meetings in a pub in Melbourne. He was one of the boys and he owned a pub, and so that was one year. Then we had a dedication at the Shrine on November the 11th and we had a tree planted there. One of our sergeants did this years ago in the militia days. He put it in then he put Corps Petrol Park on it, 105 and 106 General

02:00 Transport, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. Then we'd go back to the pub and have a few beers, and then go home. Then Anzac Day was the big day and that's when we met a lot of the boys, and we'd go back, and have a lot of fun, talk. When I was president I made sure that the girlfriends or sweethearts and the wives joined them, which was great. It was really great.

When you meet your mates from the war do you actually talk about your wartime experiences?

02:30 No, not really, not really. I think we talk about... well I didn't. I think I was too busy with Mick the secretary and, "Doing what? We'll do this and that, and the other. Now what's going to...?" You had to organise the food and the grog. We had a bar there and it was great. No I don't think so. I think we just talked about normal things, the same as we do at Legacy I suppose. I don't know.

03:00 They didn't talk about the war. You can remember the time that this or that, that comes up but there was no mention about the war, not really.

Have you spoken to your family, your children or grandchildren about your wartime experiences?

Oh yes. Well they knew because of the Anzac Day march. They used to come in and carry the banner at one time, grandsons. "Oh I've got to go. Pa, I'm marching in the front." Half the time I was in the jeep

03:30 and they would hold the banner. That's Russell's three boys or two boys. The youngest one was too young but they carried the banner. No they were good. They enjoyed that.

What sort of things have you told them about the war?

I haven't mentioned... I haven't much to do with them because we came up here in 1985. The kids have been to our place and Russ used to come up, and

04:00 bring the kids and wife, and stay for a few weeks. We had a pretty big place down there. I never spoke about the war unless they asked me and I'd tell them that's... they never worried about it. They knew about the march and there was photographs they took of me and the kids. So they knew that I was in the war, Grandpa.

How big a part of your life was that wartime?

04:30 **How important was it?**

Well when you look back and I think when I was a young man, and an uncle that was in the First World War, and so forth, and I often wondered about that but when you look back, and you think, "Well, I'm

glad I did it. I'm lucky to be alive and I've done something, something that will live with me for the rest of my life." And I'm quite happy about that now. I now can march and some other one will say, "Look at that old bloke."

- 05:00 Well that's what it is. See I was a boy... we were all brought up to scouts and I was sea scouts, and all this sort of thing, and that's a sort of bearing because when we were on the soldier settlement my wife and another girl started the guides in our RSL hut. Faye was a guider and she taught them camping, and all that sort of thing. The boys were all in
- 05:30 scouts and they'd come up from Melbourne, and they'd have a sort of a Jamboree up on the Murray River, and we'd go, and bring the kids, a couple of carloads back to our place, and let them sleep, and then see them milk the cows, and then take them back, and all this sort of thing you see? I never missed an Anzac Day march. See I had a good wife. She milked the cows and the dog brought the cows up or Russ would bring them up

- 06:00 on the tractor, just for a weekend.

Why do you think Anzac Day is so important?

Memories, remembering, well remembrance and the ceremony, and just to see the blokes marching. We had an opportunity to stay and watch for a while

- 06:30 but we always had a bus handy to take them out to our reunion. No, I think it's most important. When you tried to find where you had to assemble, that was a challenge because a lot of the boys lost their way in some form, and they'd have a picket on that, and a picket on there, make sure they come down here. It was all a
- 07:00 big... it was a lot of organising for a start because you had to... Mick and I, we had photographs of every section about this size. We blew them all up. One of the blokes was in The Herald [newspaper] office and he did all these for us, and we had to hold up our... Mick would have all this. We'd get out there pretty
- 07:30 early the day before and we'd put all these things up. All the sections were there. We had a lot of memorabilia all in there and a flag, and our own Australian flag, and that was ready for the boys. That was in the Bowls Club and when we were in the other one too but that was our job the day before. We looked forward to that and the boys, they enjoyed
- 08:00 all that. Then we had the usual three minutes silence and all this business. Then you all sat down with their wives and sweethearts, and some of the kids if they were...I invited them all in. It's a family thing. A lot of them didn't have their wives. When we first started off we didn't.

I'm sorry to interrupt but when you were actually in the war as a young man was that Anzac tradition important to you

- 08:30 **then? Did you think you were part of that then?**

Yes. You never forget that because... me, I think I was the same. I used to go to see the Anzac Day march, always. Mum used to take me in and it was great. It was good to see the old boys yeah. Then I realised what it was like to be in the march.

Before you went to the war you said to

- 09:00 **us that you really joined up for adventure. How different did things turn out, if they did at all, from your actual expectations? How did the reality compare with your expectations of the war before you went?**
- I didn't have any expectations. I just accepted it as another training and doing the right thing, and I was nothing, no big deal. I think I went for... because a lot of blokes
- 09:30 joined it because they were unemployed and so forth. It was just adventure and let's see. "The war won't last long, 18 months". Churchill said it will be over in 12 months but it wasn't. It took five and a half years. See once you're in it, you're in it and that's it. You've got to make the most of it. You can't go cringing around and saying, "Oooh."
- 10:00 We're all in the same boat and there was this comradeship amongst us all. We had quite a few laughs as a matter of fact and I can remember when we were in the tents at Qina Maru. That was when we came back, before we went up the desert. It was in Egypt before we went up for the first time and we had Nobby Bourke. Nobby Bourke, he
- 10:30 came from Ballarat and another bloke from Ballarat. I think they might have been brothers in-law. I'm not sure but this is queer. Nobby got pains. He woke up at about two o'clock and he was moaning and groaning, and all these pains in his stomach. I went to get the sergeant of the RAP [regimental aid post] to get some aspirins for him and he gulped these down, and he couldn't stop it. He received a telegram
- 11:00 two days later that his wife had given birth to a child at two o'clock in the morning. Now you tell me that there's no psychic... or something happening? That's fantastic isn't it? I just remembered that and Nobby got all these pains, had a little girl, a daughter, yes wonderful. See now people say that's stupid

but it's a fact, two o'clock and she gave birth in Ballarat,

11:30 and he's up on the Suez Canal. Strange isn't it?

Did he get home safely to his family?

Nobby? I'm not sure. I'm not sure about Nobby. He was in our section. I'm not sure whether he was taken POW or not. I'm not sure. I couldn't really tell you.

12:00 When we came back he may have gone into 105. I was in 106. He may have gone into... I think he did and I was in 106, and I don't know what happened to him because we never saw him after that. He didn't come to our reunions. He lived in Ballarat and I think they had their own Anzac Day march up there. It's a big city. No, I really don't know about him.

Do you remember how he reacted when he got that telegram?

12:30 Oh, "You wouldn't believe it. You wouldn't believe it." There it was and we were all astounded because he was in pain the poor little bugger you know? Oh crikeys. "Now you know what it's like having a baby right?" "To go through all the pain." That was fantastic wasn't it and that was fair dinkum. Honestly I can see it happening as though it was yesterday.

13:00 Some of the things... see I would never have thought about that until you... when I thought about... talking about what happened. I just forgot about it.

When you were in dangerous situations while you were for example under fire from the Germans or whatever, did you have any lucky charms or anything that you felt kept you safe?

No. No, look after number one. No one's going to look after you. No that's silly. No I

13:30 never... we were never in a position that anyone fired at us from the ground. We copped it from the air.

Well in that situation, that would have been a frightening situation?

My word it was but when you saw it... you didn't even... you hear it. You could see the bullets yeah and it hit the truck in the front, and if you had petrol on you, it would just go "Spfttt" or dieseline is very volatile. Oh no, that

14:00 was always a frightening thing but you couldn't get away from the dust and that's why we had the Breda, the Italian Breda locked on, and "Spitttt". We got one or two chances to let go, don't know whether we hit the aircraft or anything but we were allowed to have that, and that was it, and it was something, rather than be sitting, and be going to sleep in the side of the truck,

14:30 and it was good.

So when you were in that situation being attacked from the air what do you think gave you the strength to get through that?

Trying to get out of the way, swerving out this way or that way. You never had much time or they'd jump you. They could jump you and you don't know. They're that fast and they know. They could see the dust and they're just going "Boom", and it's all over that quickly you don't even... you might get a chance to go

15:00 this way or that way but when you're hit, it hits the bloke in front, you don't know whether he might be going that way, you've got to go... it's all so quickly that you don't realise it until it's all finished. You stop and you see some of your trucks on fire, and your mate's dead, and the blaze, and you just stop, and try and do the best you can, and you just stand there, nothing. You can't do a bloody thing. Some of the boys in trucks didn't explode

15:30 but some of them got wounded and you had to do the best you could. So we all had a Red Cross box and things like that you know in the truck but what could you do?

In that situation were any of your mates in the transport unit actually killed?

Yes, yep, quite a few of them in Greece on the Mad Mile. They

16:00 got shot on this Mad Mile between tunnel to tunnel and you had to go through this, and there must have been Fifth Column there because there'd be a signal, and over'd come the Messerschmitts. They weren't very far away because they patrolled all the time. They were always in the air and they just turned there, and they'd see you, and then you were lucky... you got it into first gear, and then you put it into top, and then you went like hell for leather. It was a Mad Mile. It was a mile and

16:30 you were lucky to get through there. In the night it was all right but in the day time, phew? The trucks were just pushed over and pushed them out into the big storm over... and you had to make that run. You had to do it. It got that way that you had to move in of a night time but it was all over... we were only in there a week. We were only there a week and

17:00 so we got out it was that quick. The Germans had too much.

A pretty dramatic week though.

I'll say it was. Creepers. We were lucky to jump on the corvette I'll tell you what. We were very lucky. I forget the name of it now but it was a Pommy one, a corvette, went back up to Alexandria.

When one of your other vehicles was actually hit were you able to stop and help them at all?

17:30 Well actually it was a one only go because if you were in convoy the whole lot... they'd hit you, the whole lot. It was only one truck at a time. Sometimes you got away with it. They didn't come but they'd shoot you sideways and up they'd go, and away but it was only one truck at a time. If he got through, then you'll go and keep going until you get through. So there were about four or five trucks loaded.

18:00 You were darn lucky to get through, let's put it that way but a lot of it then after that was done of a night time and so they couldn't fly in the night time. They couldn't see. It turned out that way but we only were there for seven days.

Were there any ceremonies held when somebody died?

No, no, no. We got them to an aid post and got them in there, and that's all you

18:30 saw of them. That's all. I don't know what they did with them. They probably did bury them and put a cross on it, and their regimental number, their name but they would go into a hospital. The hospital would be with us or a regimental aid post, or something like that. I forget the one in between. There's another one.

On that Mad Mile with such a potentially horrendous situation

19:00 **did you ever pray?**

No. I'm not religious. No why pray? What's praying going to do? You pray and you get it just the same, so what's the difference? No, I never prayed. I'm not religious really.

Before you took off knowing that you had to get through that what would be going through your mind?

Got to get there

19:30 as bloody quick as you can right and nearly tear the Christ out of the engine getting it into gear and going "Sptttt" You had a load on and coming back empty was a lot quicker but it wasn't so bad coming back because they knew you were empty. It was when you were loaded they knew that they could nail you and you're not taking ammo up see? So they were pretty cluey but there was a lot of Fifth Column

20:00 going on there in the mountains. There was someone there with a radio in with one of the Messerschmitts that used to tear around. There was about two or three of them and that's all they did but then of a night time, that was the only time that you could really do it, but that didn't last long because as I say, we were only there a week.

Sure but still it doesn't take that long to have a close call. How close did you

20:30 **ever come to being hit?**

Well I told you, that one burst. That was enough. It never happened again to me in the desert. It never happened in the islands. It was a different type of war. See there wasn't so much aircraft because we were in jeeps and in jungle, and so they couldn't see you anyway. But no, we didn't have all that problem. We didn't

21:00 really but it was an open slather in the desert because it was so open and the dust. You were just a sitting duck you know? We didn't have any aircraft... Britain's Blenheims, bombers things, two engines or something but we never saw any fighter pilots. There was no Spitfires there and that was it.

How did your brother fare in the war? Did you see much of him?

Very well. He stayed in Palestine the whole time

21:30 we were in Greece and up the desert. He was with headquarters and Number 1 Sub-Park. There were three sections of them and they were there in case the Vichy French came in, and invaded Palestine. So they had to have an infantry there and the whole works in case, to defend it and we got with them. He stayed there the whole time. After the cease [fire] he went

22:00 to Hims in that petrol dump and there was two of them in charge of that and that's where he shot the wog in the back, and "boom, boom".

When that happened and you came out, and realised he had died, what did you think?

Thank Christ, another wog dead. If you shoot anyone like that you're supposed to go before your CO and it costs you

22:30 the price of the bullet. That's... you know. Another thing I forgot to tell you. When we were coming

through the desert into Palestine and we got into there, and we stopped for a while, and I could see this donkey. I've got a photograph. I'm sitting on it and I've got me on top right? This donkey had its sort of straw thing on it and the old wog used to sit on these donkeys. They walked everywhere. Their feet were nearly touching the ground the poor little... you know, an ass?

23:00 So I thought, "Well that's strange." So I went over to it and I got on it, and it didn't move, and there was this stink. I went into this building, an old thing that was half down mud brick and there was this wog. He'd been shot and he was blown up. See he'd probably been shot on the donkey by someone and he dragged himself in there,

23:30 and died, and he must have been three days on, and the donkey stayed there. It didn't move and there it is. We had to report that to the MPs and they did something about. I don't know what happened to the old donkey but there you are. That wasn't very nice. I'm sitting there good with a hat on with this bloody donkey, God. Strange.

After all these amazing experiences during the war was it hard to settle back to civilian life?

24:00 Yes it was. It was a bit hard but I accepted it because I didn't go back until November. I went back to work in the New Year after Christmas. He had to take me back whether he wanted to or not. That was the law but he did. He was a different man all together because he was an old bastard, Bill Lowe. He was. But he took me back and

24:30 thanked me, and "What can I do for you? You take your old job back," and so forth. It was good. I liked it for a while but going back to school I got a bit piddled off, but I did it. I forced myself to do it because it was no good unless you had a trade and you were skilled, and you had your indentures, and that's what I got. I know that we were doing... just briefly, I was doing a contract for

25:00 the Vacuum Company's new Altona refinery and it all had to be in explosion-proof switches because if it sparked you could imagine what would happen. We had these cast iron boxes with the switch gear and I was doing all that, and I had two blokes with me doing it. But what happened; down at the Vacuum Oil Company the chap in charge, the general manager was Ivor

25:30 Warne Smith. He was a Melbourne footballer and a captain in our unit, and he rang me up, and he said, "Don, would you like to come down and join the Vacuum Oil Company? I've got to have someone, an electrical mechanic, and we want someone to wire up our tankers?" He offered me a good rise. So I said to Bill, "That's it." So he couldn't do anything about it

26:00 because I'd serve me apprenticeship. So I went down there, Spotswood. I did the job well and of course the contract fell down. I wasn't there and he rang Lowe's, and Lowe said, "Well you've got the man that was making the darn things." So they sent me back to finish the contract. I was paid by the Vacuum Oil Company working back on the old job and got it finished. So after that

26:30 I married Faye and I'll leave this. I'm going up the country. I can't stand in the factory. I've got to be my own boss.

Right.

So that's what it was. It was all those sort of things but I'm glad that I did finish my apprenticeship.

Can you tell me about meeting up with your brother again after the war? When did you see him?

Bill went up to Albury. He married an Albury girl and he went up there, and he got a job with a panel beating company.

27:00 **When was the first time you saw him again after the war?**

Bill left us in Port Moresby and came home. He got boarded out because of his nerves. He was always... nerves and that. He got boarded out and he was 100%, so he went to work for these panel beating people, bought a home,

27:30 and then he built a big garage in the back, and he used to do a little work on the side panel beating. He was a terrific tradesman. He'd done an apprenticeship with my brother-in-law's father in tin smithing, so with metal and he could bring a complete trash back to normal. He was fantastic.

So what about your parents? When you came back to Australia, do you remember meeting your family again and what that was like?

My sister and

28:00 Bon? Yeah I s'pose I accepted it. Art was still in the air force and Mick was just around the corner, my mate, and it was back to work. It was just the same thing.

How happy was your mother to see you again after the war?

She was all right. She was quite happy. She was doing all right. Mum... it was just accepted and I lived in the bungalow out the back, and Bill was

28:30 up in Albury but life was just back to normal, as if I hadn't been away for five and a half years. I accepted the work and so forth, and some of the blokes that were there before were still there, and that was it.

How strong are the memories you have from the war? Are they the strongest memories you have?

I think I've

29:00 died. I've dug them down and buried them, sometimes but not really. I think I worry more what's happened just recently and I think, "I've got to do this. I've got to ring so and so, and I've got to do this, and I've got to help me mate over there," and all this sort of thing you know? No, no, I don't worry about it, not really.

How do you think the war affected you in later life?

29:30 I don't know. I don't think I was injured any way that would have worried me, so I was pretty fit. I played a lot of sport and I gave cricket away competitively when I was 50 but no I think going on a farm, and working bloody hard, and enjoying it, and having kids,

30:00 and it was a different life. I think doing that and building a new hall, being president of this, and president of that, and always down to State government in Melbourne between milkings, going crook, and getting butters, "I want that bastard on a mile," and so forth. "Not Meady again for Christ's sake. Give him what he wants." But I couldn't do it unless I represented... I was the president of the RSL, president of the footy club,

30:30 president of this and vice president of that. That's how I got things moving.

Do you think the war changed your character in any way?

I don't know. I don't think so. Sometimes I fly off the handle but it's not through the war. Some poor buggers got gassed in the First World War. They were a mess. No I don't think so, love. I think I'm just the same. Life

31:00 has taught me a lot of things, to be pleasant or try and fly off the handle if I want to but I always like to keep a sense of humour, and enjoy life. Sometimes of course I... "What did you do that for?" Faye is always right.

31:30 So how would you describe your overall memories of the war, as a positive experience?

With pleasure, with pleasure. The sad parts have gone, buried, think of them on Anzac Days and so forth but I think that I'm glad I did it, let's put it that way. I think I was successful. I've got ten medals there that will say I've a good job and so

32:00 that's a big thing to remember, and if I hadn't gone I'd be crook on myself anyway. That's what it's about because I was trained in the militia and that's what it's about. You've got to accept your responsibilities and everyone on the planet has got to have some responsibilities or he's not a man or a woman. You've got to be responsible and to me I think

32:30 if I laid down tomorrow, I'll say, "Well I've had a good innings and I've done the best I could, and not really hurt anybody." I've punched a few blokes on the nose occasionally but not in the army.

Don you helped to win that war. Do you think we've won the peace?

It's a hard thing to have peace in the world. As I said, you've to start with religion

33:00 and it's going to take a thousand years to do that, and convince these idiots that it's wrong. You can still keep your religion but stop killing people and join the United Nations. They are as weak as anything. Get strength in that, convince these people that what they're doing is wrong and stay with the United Nations. See America are very strong about democracy and

33:30 freedom of speech, and everything, and they are losing hundreds of thousands of their young people trying to get that, and they're doing the right thing. Never forget that because they have helped us out and we have to join them, and help them out also. They rely and we are number one with them. We want to remain that way. We're only a small country but our government and lifestyle

34:00 is the best in the world. In peace it is but we've got to be careful these days with these fanatics. That's all they are, fanatics and push them out. Get rid of them.

Do you have a final word you want to add at all to all Australians, anything you want to say at all?

Be loyal to your country, no matter about anybody else, just be loyal.

34:30 Do the best thing you can. Don't be selfish. Help others at all times and obey the Scout law. I think that's as far as I could go. I think that's pretty good you know because life is a wonderful thing, especially in Australia, because we're young and we've got beautiful young ladies, and girls coming up,

and look at the kids at school, and my beautiful cadets down there on the airport, on Anzac Day. They

35:00 line up to come down and get picked to come down, and see Jellybean Don. I'm very proud of that. See that's life. Life is the way you make it. If you want to be grumpy then you're going to have a miserable life. Accept the bad with the good and try, and turn things around. If you lose, try not to lose next time but have a go. You've got to have a go.

Sounds like good advice to me.

35:30 **Just a final question, do you have any songs from your wartime experience that you'd like to sing for us?**

"Queen Farida, give us but she. Queen Farida give us but she. She's a la la la la la, the Queen of all the Wogs. Antiquirus, quirust kateer, mungarier, bardim." Queen Farida, give us some money..." and all this. It's all being

36:00 poor and so forth. Some are a bit rude, but you wouldn't know. It's in Arabic isn't it.

That's all right.

I'm just thinking, there's another one somewhere. Wish you'd told me about this I could have remembered and written it down. "Shufti zuba, shufti koosh." You know, let's have your willy and let's have you koosh.

36:30 "Etamaski mafish faloosh"... have no money, "Wahad whiskey, wahad beer, wahad ziggy zig, quoia skatier." You know what that means don't you? Ziggy zig is sex. I've got quoia skatier, good food, no money but ziggy zig quoia skatier, very good.

Fantastic. Thank you very much Don.

INTERVIEW ENDS