Australians at War Film Archive

James Welsh (Jim) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:40 **Mr Welsh, it's just an idea of what your life has been up until this point, so if you could give a brief summary now.**

I was born in 1915, I had a twin brother and the big war was on, World War was on, my father and mother

01:00 were very patriotic, and they called us two boys, one Jellicoe Hilton and I was Joffre Milton, and went to school at Macksville's primary school, super primary school. From there my mother got very sick and she died, and I had to go back and help on the farm. We had a herd of about

01:30 75 cows to milk by hand, and then after my mother died Dad sold the herd and rented the farm to a cousin of mine, I grew up with my two other brothers Joe and Nick, and we were cutting sleepers. From there, after about six months I went to Queensland, to Maleny,

02:00 got a job with a wonderful family there on a dairy farm, and I was there for about two years, playing cricket every weekend, had a great time. When war broke out I enlisted and I was called up in 1940, I went into camp at Enoggera in Queensland and I was only in the camp about six weeks,

02:30 been out on the rifle range once and was trained a bit, but when they wanted a contingent of 250 soldiers to go away on the boat and they only had 200, so they lined up every raw recruit that was there and every sixth soldier had to step forward and I was one of the lucky six, that's how I got away,

03:00 and marched through Brisbane, train to Sydney and went on the boat RMS [Royal Mail Ship] Strathmore, and then we went straight away next day to Melbourne, stopped in Millwell and went to Adelaide and picked up another 200

03:30 soldiers, from there we went straight to Cape Town, probably a day or so there in Cape Town, from there we went to Liverpool in England

We'll talk about the journey over and what you did in the war in greater detail later, but could you just give me a very brief summary of your major wartime experiences?

04:00 **Where you were, and we'll go back and talk about that later.**

We stayed in England and came back to the Middle East in 1941. Went to Palestine, and from there we went back across the [Suez] Canal at Mersa Matruh by boat, into the harbour of Tobruk. Only got off the boat half an hour

04:30 before it was sunk. The next six months I was in and out of the front lines in Tobruk. When we got relieved, I think about October, and back to Alexandria, up to Palestine again, and then when the 6th Divvy [Division] and the 7th Divvy came home, the Japs had taken over

05:00 the Middle East, not the Middle East, the Near East, and we were sent up, our battalion 9th Divvy went up to Syria, it was expected that the Germans might invade Syria and come through to take the Suez Canal, that's what they were afraid of. But we stopped there until '42 when

05:30 trouble broke out in the desert again. Tobruk was taken by the Germans and we raced down to El Alamein to stop them. That's how I became a POW [Prisoner of War].

Could you just briefly tell me where you were a POW, and then we'll go back and talk about that later.

Yes, well, I went to Benghazi [?] in Italy [actually Libya], it was a starvation diet there, we had very, very little food,

06:00 and eventually we got across to Italy through the Corinth Canal and from there in cattle trucks we went to the top end of Italy, about 800 miles. POW camp group it was known as the name of it, but Udine it

was called, and I was there until Italy threw the towel in

06:30 and the Germans around the camp, before they never even opened the gates and we were rounded up and taken into Austria. That's about it, I did 21 days in the gaol in Italy, I don't know if you want to know about that.

We will talk about that a bit later

So I stayed in Austria, we did get out, escape there for 10 days

07:00 one time, but then the work wasn't that hard and the food wasn't too bad, we survived. We got a Red Cross parcel fairly often, about once a fortnight. Towards the end of the war, in 1945, the

07:30 war was being lost by the Germans and they didn't know what to do, but they rounded us, hundreds and probably thousands of prisoners, rounded up to go into the mountains. Whatever old Hitler was going to do we don't know, he was going to use us a hostage, I'd say, and then in 1945, about the end of the war, a week or two before it ended the Yanks arrived at our camp and released

08:00 us. The Russians weren't far away either.

Could you briefly tell me what work you did after the war to bring us up to date with where we are now?

Well, I came back home, got a great welcome home. My cousin had died, see, that my father rented the farm to, he offered for me to go in halves with him while he went away and grew bananas. Which I did,

08:30 then after a year or so I took over the farm myself.

And how long did you do that farming work for?

Until I retired, really about 1970 or something like that. I was running the farm, we turned over from dairy cattle into beef cattle, that was pretty good, then about 1972

09:00 we, the boys were – I'm getting a bit tangled up now. No, we stayed on the farm till about 10 years ago, that's 1994, and the boys took over the farm, while we came into town to live, that's where we are here now.

Thank you very much for that, what I'll do now is go back and talk about your childhood

09:30 **a bit more in detail.**

I didn't mention anything about Nonie, my wife.

When did you marry her?

1947, just after the war when I came back. She came from Barrowville and we got married in – I always get into trouble about that,

10:00 our anniversary day, in March 1947 we were married. Then we've got five children, three girls two boys, and they've all done very well for themselves, all got jobs. And that's about all. They've all got great lives,

10:30 they're still going together.

Thank you. What I've wanted to ask you about your childhood is whereabouts you grew up and what it was like growing up there.

Actually, growing up as a kid we had a marvellous time, I think better than what the kids have today. We were all out on the farm, there were things to do.

11:00 One thing, had horses to ride and swimming in the creeks and the schoolwork, we, I enjoyed school, I went all right at school until my mother died, I would have carried on, I would have probably got a job of some sort. I was really happy about our home life.

Whereabouts was the farm?

It was about

11:30 six mile out of Macksville on the Taylors Arm Road, ever heard of it? No, well, six mile out, it was a wonderful farm, it was on 300 acres, and my grandfather settled there way back in 1860, he settled on that same block, that was a virgin scrub that he selected there, and my Dad

12:00 finished up with it, then we finished up with it and our son is still on it.

And what kind of farming was your family doing when you were a child?

It was dairying, every farm on the river was a dairy in those days, there were at least 4–500 dairy farms on this river, only a small river but every block of ground was a dairy farm, or 99 per cent

12:30 We used to milk by hand, started daylight of a morning, get home from school and do a bit more. We thrived on that. We got milking machines in when I came back after the war, my cousin had machines, milking machines and I had them from then

13:00 on, I could do the dairying myself while Nonie looked after the kids.

How many cows did you have when you were growing up?

Well, we had, at the best we would have had 75 AIS cows, that's Australian Illawarra Shorthorns, red cows, they were good cows, wonderful cows and we all had to milk our share when we were there. But cricket

13:30 was our main thing. I played a lot of cricket even as a kid, Joel and I used to go down the bull paddock on the pitch and play cricket, we were pretty good in the finish.

Where you playing with kids around the area as well?

Oh yes, all the farms had fairly big families.

14:00 An uncle of mine had 14 kids in his family, there was eight in our family and there was all these people around not far away, maybe half a mile away, but on his farm…we had wonderful times, we'd get together to play cricket. My father built a pitch in one of our paddocks,

14:30 a full length pitch, and of a Saturday afternoon quite a lot of the young ones would roll up to practice.

What was the system with the dairy farms in the region, was there a Milk Co-op?

No, it was all cream production in those days, milk factories didn't come till after the war. But it was,

15:00 we had the cream cans and the carters used to take them to the river. The river was a road in those days, the early days, there was a road to Macksville but it wasn't fit for, there wasn't tracks in those days either, but the launches on the river used to pick up the cream half a mile away from our dairy and pick up all along the inside of the river from Macksville.

15:30 And they would bring all the bread and meat out too. It was pretty well done. The floods were a bit of trouble. When the floods came we had to throw the milk away at times for a few days.

Those barges that came in to take the cream, where were they travelling to?

They were going to Macksville,

16:00 they had a butter factory built, they had a centenary last year, a hundred years the factory was going, but the factory has been closed since the war. All those factories have gone, but the Co-op, that's part of the old dairy company, that's the big shop in town, it's still going. That was the centenary of it last year.

16:30 **Could you tell me about the school you went to?**

Well, I went to two other schools. I went to, the first school was maybe only a quarter of a mile away, we went there till we got into trouble with a teacher that was there. I had another brother, Bob, he died when he was going to the Kempsey High School, he

17:00 was very clever, anyhow, the teacher. I don't know what, I think I know the reason, this shouldn't be put on the tape, I don't think. But we had a, my father had a man building our a big bull paddock, split rail fence and he was there mornings and he used to bring a kid down from up the river where he lived himself to go to school, when it come nine o'clock this

17:30 builder of the fence put his finger in his mouth and he give a whistle as much for the teacher to get the kids in school, 'cause he was a bit of a hopeless teacher and I think he got offside with our family or something like that. Anyhow, at school one day Bob didn't know a question of some sort, that was my brother, he was two years older than me, and the teacher belted him over the legs with a stick. So the next day

18:00 we went across to Uranga school. We had a boat, Dad put us across in the boat, we walked to school at Uranga while ever that teacher was at Tumurra, so when he went away we came back to Tumurra. Then I'd reached the super-primary stage of learning, so I went to Macksville's super primary school, and that's when my mother died

18:30 and I had to leave it after a couple of years.

How did your mother die?

She had cancer. Yes, she had a terrible death.

And after your mother died, where did you go from there?

Well, I, yes, I stayed on the farm with Dad

19:00 until he decided to sell the herd. He came to town to live, and I stayed with Ron. I worked around, I had a motorbike then, I used to go around different places doing jobs, sometimes bushing with a brush-hook

What was that, sorry?

A brush-hook.

What did you do?

19:30 Oh, brush the bushes and rubbish, farmers had to keep their paddocks clean, you know, tidied up ferns and all sort of things. Rubbish would come up and you'd get jobs brushing. From one end of the river to the other doing that sort of thing. Then the war came up, I went up to Queensland. I had an uncle up there growing cane.

20:00 I went up to his place, he didn't have any work for me 'cause it was off season. But he did get me a job up at Maleny with a wonderful family up there and that was varying again, milking cows and playing cricket.

I understand you also worked at Grafton and one point doing, was that correct, doing timber?

Yes, we, my brother, he was camped out at what they called OBX

20:30 Creek on the way to Glen Innes, the old road to Glen Innes, about 20 miles out of Grafton. From there we used to drive out into the up on the Buccarumbi Range out to where we had there was wonderful timber. We used to pull these trees and get sleepers out of them and poles and make octagon poles, eight sided poles

21:00 that's take a little bit off all the way along. But the sleepers were wonderful timber for sleepers, red ironbark. And there wasn't much, mostly just enough for a sleeper, take a little bit of on the inside. My brother used to square them while Joe and I would fall the tree, saw it up in lengths and rake it up into millets, and then

21:30 I would help my brother Nick, he would line it out as square as deeper, and my job was to notch in all the way along, not far apart, a notch in two foot apart, and Nick would square the sleeper. And from there the sleepers went by, we had timber trucks then down to the railway, South Grafton, where they would be inspected

22:00 and passed if they were good enough. They always got passed. And we got about three shillings a sleeper, three [shillings] and six [pence] for ironbark, I think it was. That's not much money. But today they'd be worth three pounds something each or more. The price was very low in those days.

Could you tell me the process of cutting down a tree for sleepers, from the moment

22:30 **you went there and what kind of equipment you used?**

You walked around a tree that you thought would be good. You'd hit it with an axe, the sound of it would tell you if it was solid or not. That was a good sign, you could pick a tree that way. Then you get the crosscut saw, you'd put a belly in one side where you wanted to fall it, take a cut out

23:00 with the axe, that would give you where you wanted to aim for it to hit the ground, then you'd get in the back with a crosscut saw far as you'd go in, as you went further in you'd put a wedge in behind it, you'd tip it over that way.

How large were these trees that you were…?

Mostly about three foot diameter, they were fairly, something like that. Had a heavy bark on them,

23:30 that was the first job, to peel the bark off, which was simple enough when you did it straight away because the sap was under the bark and it would peel off fairly easy. You did it with a crowbar, of course. And you'd saw it

This work at Grafton, was it before or after Maleny?

It was before I went to Maleny. I had a good time there,

24:00 but I was only with Nick and Joe for about six months and then I intended to go to Nambour and Maleny, that's what I intended to do, and I took off on my motorbike, I had a motorbike, AJS [A.J. Stevens], two and three quarter horse power. I used to ride it, they used to send me into Grafton very often for half a dozen

24:30 loaves of bread. I don't know how I carried it.

Whereabouts where you living at Grafton?

I was on the outskirts of what they called Ryan Street, can't think of the number of it. That's where Nick was living.

25:00 **Was it you three boys in the house together or…?**

Oh no, Nick he had a family of his own, Joe wasn't married, and I was anxious to get away up to Queensland and I took off one day, on a very hot day, I know, and I got to Maleny and me face was burning 'cause I had no shield in front of the motorbike

25:30 and it was a bitumen road, most of it was bitumen, I was cooked. I rode right through to Nambour, then I got this job up in Maleny.

Could we talk about the motorbike for a bit, what did it look like, as in…?

Much the same, I suppose, as they are today, only a lot lighter, it wasn't very big at all,

26:00 it was two and three quarter horse power, it had twin exhausts and petrol driven and it didn't have any shield like they do today; they have a shield in front of them, didn't have that.

Were motorbikes very common?

Well, I had a mate had one and he didn't go with me, but we rode all over the Nambucca brushing

26:30 and that sort of thing. He had an Indian motorbike. The old nose is runny, I've got a stinking cold in the head. I didn't think I'd be ready to see you today.

Oh, you haven't been well.

It come on me on the Sunday, I went to church, then we went up to the farm where our daughter and other son is. I don't know what happened. I got a chill or something.

27:00 **When you got to Maleny, could you explain the sort of work you were doing there?**

Yes, it was dairying, nothing else, but in between dairying you had to fill the day doing work, you couldn't get away with doing nothing, even then it was, grubbing was another job we did a lot. Up in Queensland they didn't brush their paddocks like they did down

27:30 here. See, you brush them down there, they shoot up again. Up in Queensland they mostly grubbed them out, dug 'em out and they wouldn't go again. It was a better way of doing it. We did a lot of that. Then I ploughed ground up there too. He had a couple of horses that I used to plough. Plant corn.

What was the

28:00 **kind of equipment that you were using for ploughing?**

Just an ordinary grass plough, new ground, you'd have a grass plough which would just go under the roots about four inches and roll the furrow back as you ploughed. And when the ground was worked up more you used, I think they call them clipper ploughs

28:30 and they'd plough a good bit deeper. And they'd go a few inches deep and that was, get the ground ready to grow stuff in; when you turn grass over you had to wait for it to rot away before it was fit to grow stuff in. I think that explains it a little bit.

29:00 **And the place where you were living, were you living in accommodation on the farm?**

I was living with a family, they had two boys and a girl, the boys were twins too. They weren't a middle like that, wonderful old people they were, named McCork, Clarence McCork. One of the boys, the last one, he died just recently.

Had the Depression

29:30 **affected the farming life?**

Oh, my word, but things were cheap those days, you could buy a pair of boots, hobnail boots, for about one dollar, it was money in those days, 10 shillings, 10 or 12 shillings. But everything was very, very cheap, but our wages were cheap too,

30:00 I was only getting a quid [pound] a week and my tucker. That was my wage, and that was a standard wage for anybody working those days.

How had the Depression impacted on the farms that you were seeing?

The farmers, if they had a herd they would want about 50 cows to make a good living, I'd say, the more the better,

30:30 but it was all cream, they'd milk the cattle, separate it and get the cream and it'd all go to the factory to make into butter. And if they had a herd of 50 they'd be doing fairly well. Although butter, I forget the prices, 18 pence a pound, which was, but today, I forget now what butter's worth.

31:00 **Did the depression impact on your family?**

They all, me eldest brother Nick, he had a bad time, he got married young and he had two or three

young kids, that's why he started to work in the bush cutting sleepers, there was no other work. He didn't have enough money to go onto a farm. He didn't

31:30 like farming anyhow. But he was very good in the bush, but even then the prices of a sleeper, only three shillings a sleeper, that's very, very poor wage, and you got to cart it into town to the railway too. That knocked a hole in it.

32:00 **The job you were doing at Maleny, how long did you do that for?**

Well, I was there for two years, the first year I was, we met on cricket, the two boys there too, they played cricket, and I'll tell you about the cricket. We were the second team in Maleny, and A and B team,

32:30 we were the second team, now we did so well we won the competition, and there must have been eight other teams in the district. But I had a great year. I was a slow bowler and I got a lot of wickets and I could bat a bit too, but we won the competition. It was every Saturday we'd go away to play.

How far away from Maleny

33:00 **were you travelling to play cricket?**

Well, to Kenilworth, that would be at least 25 mile I suppose, Maleny was up on a hill a bit like the Dorrigo, you know the Dorrigo? Just the same, just a plateau. We'd have to go off the range to play three or four different teams.

At this stage was there much talk of

33:30 **what was happening in Europe with Hitler?**

Not really, but once the war was declared, they were very patriotic in Maleny, very, very patriotic. They used to have meetings all over the place and talk about it. There were a few Germans, settlers at Maleny and they got a bit of

34:00 a bad time too. People were anti-German at that stage, and they had a picture show in Maleny, and if these German settlers were there, they were good people, wonderful people, but they didn't want to stand while the anthem was being played and the other people behind them would make them stand up while the anthem was being played.

34:30 They were very patriotic in Maleny; I think all the places were in those days.

These meetings that the people had in Maleny, where were they held?

Private homes, they'd arrange it and they'd go to, oh, there might be 40 or 50 people there, old people, the older ones, they were the ones that were worried the most, the young people, they were ready to go to war, but the old ones were trying to

35:00 urge them on, I think. I know I remember going to a few parties where they were drinking pretty well and having a good time. Mostly old people there.

What kind of things were being said at these meetings?

They'd be talking about the war, but we, me myself, I wasn't, we'd be there with some other younger people, we weren't really interested.

35:30 **I guess they were worried about the war, how it was going to turn out, but I remember a couple of big parties they had. 50 people, a lot of people.**

You said the German settlers there had a bit of a hard time.

Well, they weren't over-popular, I'll say that, but they

36:00 didn't interfere with them in any way. But they were good farmers, wonderful farmers, the Germans. They were on good properties too. There was a sawmill out in one place, I think they called it Whitta, that'd be 'Vitta' in German, but a lot of them were working there. They got along all right, there was no problem whatever as far as

36:30 the people, 'cause they behaved themselves.

What were your thoughts at the time about the war?

Well, I always intended to go; I thought it would be great to get away. I think all the young fellows thought that, they wanted to go fight. I knew that, we all knew that it was a

37:00 terrific risk and all that attached to it, but we still wanted to go, all the young people. Or most of them.

What were your reasons for wanting to go?

We knew all about the First World War, how so many of our young people got killed because of the First

World War, and we didn't want it to happen again,

37:30 didn't want to lose the war, we wanted to win.

Were there many families in Maleny who had lost men to the First World War?

I'm not real sure, I think so, it was on a roll in a big

38:00 hall there, there's a lot, I don't know. But they usually, when they had an honour roll in country, they put all the names of those who enlisted on the roll, if they were killed in action or something they put a star next to their names; I'm not sure, I don't remember how many was killed, but there would have been a lot, I'd say, 'cause they lost a terrific amount

38:30 in the First World War. Even this last war, they got the Honour Roll on the wall in the RSL [Returned Services League] in Maleny. I think my name is on it because I enlisted. I haven't seen it, but they tell me it's there.

As a young man at that time in Maleny what kinds of discussions were they having

39:00 **about the war?**

We'd only meet them at cricket and that's all they'd talk about, the damned, the cricket. Not really. I think the war stopped the cricket in 19, towards, it started in '39 the war, in 1940

39:30 something they stopped all games like that, they didn't think it was right to be playing cricket while the war was on. That's the old people who thought that.

What kind of impact would that have had on the small towns that relied on the cricket?

A lot of soldiers went away, they enlisted and they were gone for the years

40:00 **during the war, it really made the place pretty quiet, when all the young fellows had gone out of the town, I suppose they just carried on.**

Do you remember the day war was declared?

I do, yes, my people I worked for, they were very

40:30 church minded, Church of England I think it was we went to that night. I remember old Churchill said they'd declared war on Germany; I remember that as well as any. But I intended to join up at all times if it did come to war, but I made sure I enlisted pretty soon after that. But I remember the day

41:00 as, one Sunday we went to church. We learnt the war was on. It was pretty sad for the old people, but for blokes like myself, we were looking forward to it.

Was the announcement made in church?

Tape 2

00:35 **Jim, can I ask you about how you would listen to the cricket and Don Bradman at the time.**

We used to go to my auntie's place, she was a spinster, postmistress at Talarn. She had a wireless, the only wireless within 50 miles, and she invited us to go and listen

01:00 to the cricket. And the cricket was wonderful to listen to over there, it was a bit of a fraud because they were getting cables from England out to Australia, and the smart cricketers in Sydney or Melbourne wherever it was. Put it together like, if the bat was hitting the ball, they'd tap a pencil on the table or something like that. It was very good,

01:30 but it was marvellous to listen to Bradman getting hundreds of runs.

You mentioned that your parents were very patriotic, what was your family's experience with World War 1?

Well, he had nothing to do with the war, he reared eight kids, he couldn't be expected to enlist, could he? But he was very patriotic,

02:00 so when we came along, Joe and I, he called us, Jellicoe Hilton my brother and Joffre Milton for me. Jellicoe was the admiral of the British Navy, and Joffre was a French general. I'm not very happy about that.

What, being named after a Frenchman?

02:30 French general in the army. But they were top man in the First World War, no doubt about that. Jellicoe

was the Admiral, won the Battle of Trafalgar, and I think that Joffre, he was a great army officer.

Did your parents talk much about the First World War?

Not really,

03:00 I think our parents were like all the other parents in those days, they never talked much to kids. They talked to themselves, no doubt, but we were kept in the dark on almost anything.

So what did you expect then from fighting in the war?

We expected to win, everybody,

03:30 the Germans would have done that too, but everyone expected to win in the long run.

What did you expect in regard to how tough it would be?

It was better than what I thought really, I knew, I'd read books on how the war was going. The First World War, it was

04:00 cruel, shocking. I don't think we reached that stage at any time, in my time at the war. It was tough enough, but the Germans in the Western Front, they were shocking the way it was there. Nearly standing on bodies in the trenches, mud and all that,

04:30 in the desert there was no rain at all, although the dust storms were shocking, when you got them you couldn't see your hand in front of your face, a good dust storm

Where did you go in Maleny to enlist?

I filled in a form somewhere in the paper I got hold of, and I was called up to go into

05:00 Brisbane, to the Enoggera camp. And I was checked out there by the doctors and all the others, the dentists and so forth. That's where I really enlisted, there.

What did you think of Brisbane when you arrived there?

It was carrying on just the same, like it was in the war. There were a lot of soldiers and that about, but

05:30 when we enlisted we were dressed in what they call giggle dress. Have you heard of that?

Can you explain what giggle dress is?

Well, you had a funny rag hat, and the clothes were loose. Giggle dress we used to call it, with a giggle hat. They were good working clothes. Didn't look much like army clothes

06:00 **And what were the other men like who were in Enoggera?**

They were just the same as us, NCOs [non-commissioned officers], they'd be dressed up in proper army gear but we would be mostly in, I remember one day we had to go to Brisbane, it was about 20 mile away, we went by tram into Brisbane

06:30 to be x-rayed. I think all the people were, not necessarily laughing, but they ought to be. Blokes in giggle dress.

What was the giggle dress for?

Cheap clothes, I suppose, work clothes. You'd have your uniform put away and looked after, but this was just to work in. It would get pretty dirty.

07:00 **What did the camp in Enoggera look like?**

Well, it was pretty rough and ready; the sheds didn't have roofs on them, mostly. I know that when we'd go to a church parade on a Sunday you were allowed to leave your hat on because there was no roof on the, it was pretty rough and ready, they were only getting it going.

07:30 Wasn't very far advanced, but I think it got better all the time.

How did your father know that you'd joined the army?

I was up at Maleny at the time and my Dad and my sister lived at Macksville, and I would have wrote down and told them, he wasn't worried, not at all. It hurt my sisters,

08:00 I had four sisters, I don't think they wanted me to go.

Had your other brothers joined up at this stage?

No, he enlisted when I was going away, after the march through Brisbane going away to go on the boat. He was at Grafton, and he had enlisted then but he hadn't been called up

08:30 **That was Joe?**

Yes. But he was as fit as, fitter than me. He was a wonderful cricketer, you know. He scored three centuries in one season, that's how good he was with the bat, he was good, and yet he died six months after he went into camp. I was away all the time. I knew he'd enlisted and I was expecting

09:00 **to see him somewhere. I used to see a group of fellows, I didn't know them, but I'd walk around to study them, I thought he might be, have been amongst them. We were getting reinforcements coming in all the time. I couldn't find him, it wasn't until I got into Tobruk that I learned that he'd died.**

09:30 **How did you receive that news?**

I got a letter from my sister, Velma it was, we were in Tobruk in the Salient position too, I think at the time, that's the way it goes, can't do anything about it.

And what had happened to him, Jim, how had he become ill?

I don't know, for really sure, as they do they practice

10:00 training with a medicine ball, they're very heavy, they're probably about five or six kilos, and they throw them around and I think he got hit with it in the face. It must have caused a bit of injury there 'cause they treated him with radium treatment, and my sister was a qualified sister, she was working

10:30 in Sydney and used to go and see him pretty often, nearly every day I suppose. And he told her that the doctors, when they had the radium on him, they forgot about him, left it on too long. I don't know about that, but he was quite positive they did use radium on him in 1940. I read not very long ago,

11:00 five or six years ago how there were so many soldiers treated with radium, a couple of thousand I think it said in the paper, and I don't know how they finished up, but I reckon it give Joe leukaemia. I'd reckon it must have been that, 'cause it was leukaemia that killed him.

What did the army tell you

11:30 **about his sickness after the war?**

I got the details of a doctor's report and all that, he went into camp and then he was sent into hospital, it did say, I don't know where they are now for sure but, that he had been treated for influenza. But they didn't mention,

12:00 different doctors wrote on this form details, it didn't mention anything about radium, I suppose they wouldn't be allowed to. But they did use it in 1940.

What did you know about radium treatment at the time?

Not a thing, I don't think they knew much themselves, they thought it might have been an experiment maybe, they thought it might do some good, it mightn't

12:30 do any harm. Do you remember Carmen Lawrence, the [Federal] Minister? Well, I heard her say when this was brought up in the paper that I read five years ago, how there were 2000 soldiers treated with radium treatment. She denied it straight out. She said it wasn't used until

13:00 1946. She was wrong, somebody was wrong.

If we can go back to talk about your initial training, Jim, what were you first taught when you were at Enoggera?

The worst part was getting on the parade ground and doing drill.

13:30 Marching up and down, I remember one, where was it somewhere, I didn't know how to march properly or anything. Anyway, one afternoon they sent them off to march 50 yards down, come back, I was marching down like they do with the lifesavers, feet up in the air in the sand. When I came back he asked me was I a lifesaver. I felt a fool.

14:00 But I didn't know much about it. But that was, it was very monotonous, the parade-ground drill. It was good in the long run. I eventually got on the shooting range, because I'd had a rifle at home I could shoot pretty straight. I remember I got a possible the first time I fired.

A possum?

A possible.

A possible. Can you explain what a possible is?

14:30 I got given five shots to fire. I got them grooved them in a certain circle and that was what they called a possible. I was pretty good with a rifle.

What sort of guns were you being trained with?

Ordinary .303s, military rifles, the best they had.

15:00 **The other men who were in training, in your battalion, were they country men?**

They came from everywhere. Anywhere at all they could have come from. We'd be called up in groups. They'd arrive, they all called up on a certain date,

15:30 but they could have come from everywhere. All the people that I enlisted with went into camp, they were all Queenslanders, they gave us numbers straight away, two Xs for Queenslanders, then they called them up in alphabetical order.

How long were you in that training camp for before

16:00 **they began calling for people to go overseas?**

I might have been there… I've got it all written down. I think I enlisted in the 5th of May, I think. I was away on the boat on the 18th, about six weeks, five or six weeks, and I'd been out on the range a couple of times, and that

16:30 was the main thing, we wanted to learn how to shoot.

What sort of training or preparations were you having for a campaign, where were you being prepared to fight?

It was just like, the parade ground was monotonous, but then we'd get on to bayonet practice. They had a big bag up

17:00 on a couple of sticks, chaff bag, full of chaff. And you'd have to charge and stab that. That was one of the things. We weren't up to any explosives at all. We didn't have at that stage.

Where did you think you might be going once you left Australia?

I thought we'd surely go

17:30 to the Middle East, but we went straight to England. England was in terrible danger at the time. France had capitulated and I think Hitler would have went into England, I expect, to make terms with England. 'Cause they were more or less cousins, royalty, the Germans. But that didn't come off, then they couldn't

18:00 win the war. Battle of the Air, that they decided to bomb the dickens out of London and all those other towns.

While you were in training how did you receive news about what was happening in the war, how did you know?

At home in Brisbane we had the papers every day. The headlines were never

18:30 any good. Losing all the time. Lost France and all those other countries. Most men, that was the lucky part I think during the war, we got through to London, without being hit by a submarine.

Did those headlines telling you how badly and how serious things were going, did that make you more keen to get over there?

I think so.

19:00 I'd say we wanted to do our bit, but there was certainly bad news all the time, one after another. Nothing seemed to go right.

Can you explain to me, then, what happened when you finished your training, how you ended up leaving Australia?

We got final leave; six days final leave, I think. I came home

19:30 and seen everybody here at Macksville and Grafton. We'd seen every one of my family, which was very good. I think nobody was crying really about going away. We thought we'd go away

20:00 and be back home in a couple of years. That's what nearly everybody thought about it.

Did you pack any personal items?

Not really, I did have a girlfriend at the time; I had a photo of her, that's about all, and a photo of Joe.

Was your girl friend from Macksville

20:30 **or…?**

She came from Grafton, I met her there. A pretty poor story, as it turns out. I went away, I wrote to her and she wrote to me right through for five years, when I come home I learned that she was already

married.

21:00 **She was already married before you left, or she married while you were away?**

While I was away. But I think I was lucky. But why would she write to me and not say a word? She got married nearly straight after the war. But that happened to dozens of blokes in the army, they used to joke

21:30 about it. 'Dear John' letters [letters informing that a relationship is over] we used to call them.

Do you think that she thought if she wrote to you while you were away and told you she was married that would have a bad impact given that you were at the war?

I wouldn't think so, no.

So what do you remember about these Dear John

22:00 **letters that men got?**

Various ones in the camp, they'd get their mail and then they'd have a short note to say it's all, over sort of thing. That's what we used to call 'Dear John' letters. It did happen a lot, I can't complain, it did happen a great lot.

At that time how aware were

22:30 **you that the women who were seeing American servicemen?**

We didn't know much about that at all, we were over the other side, didn't know anything. I went straight to England, we got there about July, I didn't get a letter from home till I come back to the Middle East. The army, all the letters that were supposed to go to

23:00 England, they should have been sorted out, we should have got a letter, but I never got a letter till I come to the Middle East and I used to get packets of 25 in a bundle.

Why do you think you didn't receive letters in England?

The army was too stupid. They sent all the mail to the Middle East, there was only one division in England, and there was a couple of divisions in the Middle East and that's what happened to every body.

23:30 They never got mail at home, from home in England. When we come back in January to the, in the Middle East I got packets of 25 dozen letters wrapped up together. I reckon that's an awful disgrace to the post office.

So once you'd had your farewell to your family, can you tell me what

24:00 **happened then in terms of sailing away with 9th Division?**

We were only reinforcements when we went away, we got along real well, Victorians, not Victorians, South Australians and Queenslanders on our boat. We had a whale of a time going over. We didn't have to make our own beds and we sat down at the one table every time

24:30 and got waited on; we were actually passengers.

What was the ship like?

It was a great boat, the Strathmore, about 2200 tonnage, but it used to roll. Some boats, I don't know how they stopped it, but some boats didn't roll at all. But the Strathmore in rough weather, you'd be leaning one way, and then leaning the

25:00 other way. It was a wonderful boat just the same.

Did you know that you were being sent over as reinforcements for 9th Division?

It wasn't formed, the 9th Division wasn't formed, it was just formed when we got to England. The 8th Division went ahead of us, they went on the Queen Mary and couple other big ships; there was a lot of soldiers on that.

25:30 And when we got to England, the 9th Division wasn't, it was going to be the 9th Division. But our Battalion was called the 71st Battalion when we got there, that was following on from the First World War. Anyhow, when we come back to the Middle East after being in England they called us the 32nd.

26:00 **So what happened once you got to England?**

We went down to Salisbury Plains, Liverpool, it was all training there. I think we were only down there a few days when they formed our new battalion, 71st. It was all patrolling

26:30 around the place on Salisbury Plains, we'd go out there after a week to a certain place and they had to, I don't know, in case the Germans come over in parachutes, things like that, we were ready, we were training, being trained all the time, digging trenches.

27:00 it was all chalky ground there. Once you broke the surface it was white chalk.

You mentioned that up until that time and including that time England was getting hammered badly, can you tell me about what your impressions were of England were when you arrived?

Well,

27:30 it was wintertime. Not a green leaf on the trees, it was pretty grim. It was very quiet then the bombing hadn't started. It was the phoney war at that stage. Remember that? Then in

28:00 about September, that's when Hitler decided to send the bombers over. He lost, our wonderful pilots they done the job, they knocked out a lot of bombers and fighters. Hitler couldn't win the war, that's when he decided to go somewhere else. Getting ready for Russia

Were you still in England when the Battle of Britain…?

Oh yes,

28:30 We were lucky, I think, we weren't in the towns, we were out on Salisbury Plains. Street after street wiped right out; house after house, rows of them. We saw it all.

How would the, can you remember how the English people were coping

29:00 **with the Battle of Britain?**

I think they were marvellous the way they stood up to it. They'd get into bomb shelters whenever they could. But they lost an awful number of people, you'd see rows of miles of houses wiped right out. Streets of them. Coventry was wiped right out. Then he started on London.

29:30 London was, half the town was wiped out. I think they were mighty game, very, very game.

And how did they treat Australians soldiers who were in?

We were very welcome. Very, very welcome, they treated us very good.

Did you have leave, and were you able to go out?

Yes, we got six days' leave.

30:00 We were promised it and eventually got it. We went up to Scotland, that was great, to get up to Glasgow.

How did you travel to Glasgow from…?

By train, by train to Glasgow. It was something to look forward, going up there, terrific. I had a close relation with somebody out in Australia that sent me

30:30 where to go visit these people. An old lady and her daughter, and I could understand the old lady a lot better than the daughter. They were Scottish. We had a good time there for a couple of days, and we eventually got home to camp.

What did the camp look like at Salisbury?

It was all tents, Salisbury, but eventually we

31:00 went into barracks. They were all brick barracks; they would have used them in the First World War. Salisbury was an old camp from the First World War.

You mention that you arrived during winter, what sort of heating was there in the camp?

There wasn't really. It must have been.

31:30 When we got into the barracks we had coal fires then, but we were in tents for a start, and there was no heating there. But in the barracks we had little places where we had coal fires and a chimney. But only a slow fire, take a while to get a bit of heat.

And how did the uniform you were given by the army suit

32:00 **England?**

It was very good, pretty good. Our overcoats weren't much, we had to try to get Pommy overcoats if we could, they were nearly a double breaster, a lot better than our Australian overcoats, our coats were a bit on the thin side.

How were you able to get a Pommy overcoat?

I don't know, I never had one, but some of them did. I think they

32:30 did a swap with some cigarettes or beer or something like that. A lot of the officers had them too.

What preparations or what plans were made in the camp for air raids?

They all had bomb shelters, slit trenches just outside the barracks and that, they were always there. That was the first thing we did whenever

33:00 we went anywhere, we had to dig slit trenches. They weren't very deep, about five, six feet.

And what was the purpose of a slit trench?

A direct hit wouldn't be any good, but anything either side, the shrapnel, you'd be a lot safer; a direct hit would be a dead loss.

33:30 **So can you tell me what sort of other training you did while you were in England?**

We went out as units, companies, and it was mostly bayonet practice, one of the main things, and shooting on the rifle range. Nothing else, much.

34:00 A lot of marches. Our colonel, he was keen to make his battalion the best of the whole lot. He'd put a route march on, 25 mile with your pack on, out and back. We used to cope with that pretty well, different ones would fall out. 25 miles is a fair way.

What would happen to those

34:30 **men that weren't fit enough for that sort of…?**

They had ambulances or trucks coming along to pick up anyone who fell out. It would be no problem.

And what happened to those men if they weren't fit enough for that sort of exercise?

They'd get over it, they'd recover. Probably only blisters on their feet.

35:00 But they'd recover all right for the next one. Our colonel, he was pretty keen to get his troops pretty fit.

What did you know about what was happening in the desert at that time?

Nothing was really happening at that stage.

35:30 We knew about the, Germany hadn't crossed the Mediterranean to do it in. And our fellows were belting the hell out of Mussolini's troops, they knocked them out of Ethiopia and then up the desert, Bardia and then Tobruk. The Eyeties [Italians] didn't want to fight,

36:00 they only wanted to get out of it, I think. There were thousands and thousands of them captured in the desert before we ever went out there.

How did you receive notice that you were going to the desert?

The way they issued certain clothes, we had tropical gear, shorts and shirts and that sort of thing. It had to come 'cause they,

36:30 it was pretty safe in England, they knew that Hitler wasn't. While I was in England they had a, what they call it. The barges were being around the ports in France

37:00 The planes identified thousands of barges, and that looked like they were going to go across the Chanel. One night we got a call out on patrol that an invasion scare was on. Anyhow, it didn't go, but we knew roughly what stopped it, the British navy, I understood they had petrol lined up around

37:30 the beaches to light up if they came. That would have stopped them. But I don't know, I think the navy wiped it out anyhow. Stopped the barges from coming over.

What other preparations were being made for an invasion? Was there wire on the beach?

Yes, there would have been mines

38:00 in various places. Hitler had to get control of the air before he could come. He had to come over with parachutes, but he didn't have control. The British pilot and

38:30 air force. I think he realised he couldn't do it. Then again I think he wanted to make terms with England, what I've read.

Where did you leave England from, what port?

We went up to Glasgow, no, Gourack I think, you heard of that name, Gourack? Some name like that, that was the place, and it was

39:00 overnight, we all got the flu on the boat, went through. Plague went right through the boat, everybody was sick the next day. But it only lasted a day or two, then they were getting the convoy ready up there. There must have been 160 ships in the convoy, something like that.

And what

39:30 **was the ship like that you travelled on?**

It was a beauty as far as riding the seas, never wobbled at all. It was a beauty. It was the Falconia, it was a big ship too, twenty-odd thousand tons. It had been a good ship.

What sort of escort did you have?

Plenty of cruisers and a lot of destroyers all away round the convoy.

40:00 And nothing happened until we got, nothing happened right round. We went nearly across to America, then we come back the other way through Sierra Leone, it was a hot place there. Stopped there about three or four days. The natives

40:30 were bringing out oranges, bananas and the officers on the boat were trying to keep them away. Then one day one of the smart officers, one of our officers too threw teargas, it wasn't teargas something like it, and it went right through the ship this gas. The sailors on the boat, they were going to kill the officer

41:00 if they could find him. The natives, they'd have bananas and that, then they'd dive for money. You'd throw two bob [shillings] over, they'd dive, go down 20, 30 foot to get it before it hit the bottom. They were clever.

Tape 3

00:40 **Jim, you were talking about the gas that was used on the boat, was that teargas used to keep the locals away from the boat?**

That was the idea of it, the wind must have changed or he threw it on the wrong side of the boat, and

01:00 it came back through the portholes, and it went right through the ship. It never hurt anybody, but it was annoying I think. The idea to try to keep these natives away. They were in little canoes, just room enough to sit in, and how they could do it. Blokes on the boat would throw two bob in, twenty cents, and they'd dive down to get it,

01:30 some of the silly buggers used to wrap a penny in silver paper, they'd dive for that too and they wouldn't be too happy about that. That was the idea, to keep them away. I don't know why, it could have been dangerous; they could have had a bomb to plant on the boat, something like that. But how they used to be sitting in the boat, canoe it is,

02:00 about six or eight foot long, and to dive out, they'd go out over the end, and they wouldn't tip their boat over, it was a work of art how they did that.

What were your impressions of Sierra Leone?

We didn't get off the boat, it was very, very hot; steamy heat all day long. We didn't get off the boat at all; we were there for at least two, three days

02:30 while they re-shielded that sort of thing on the boats.

Could you tell me about your journey from Sierra Leone, what happened next?

We were going south all the time to Cape Town, we went round to Durban, took about three or four weeks, I suppose, till we got there, the whole convoy. Must have been at least

03:00 sixty boats counting the cruisers and destroyers. Everything went well, the weather was good and the boats never gave a wobble at all. We went right around into Durban, it was a good trip.

What were the

03:30 **conditions like on the boat?**

We were all in hammocks over our mess tables, everywhere was hammocks side by side, they were good to sleep in when you got used to them. I don't know how many men was on the boat. Our whole battalion was on it, there would have been a thousand there. All the boats would have had,

04:00 been loaded like that.

And when you reached Durban did you go ashore there?

Yes, we were looked after very well. I understand that the convoy ahead of us, they played up a bit, the Australians, when they got to Cape Town. They nearly took over the trams and things like that. When we got off the boat as soon as we were there to pick us up they took

04:30 us away and didn't give us a chance to play up or anything. Cars were there to drive us around, looked after us very well at Durban.

What was that place like?

Beautiful town, seaside there was, we used to go swimming. A beautiful town, Durban, very rich I think.

05:00 But they didn't do any work, the whites, the natives, the blacks did all the work. I'd say they lived like lords, the white people. But the blacks did all the work.

So what could you see of the relationship between the whites and the blacks?

They seemed to get along all right. I suppose they had a job they were permanently working for,

05:30 but I think they got along all right. I think later on it was a real fight. They got treated, I'd say they were treated very poorly, pay'd be no good.

Where were you staying when you were in Durban?

We used to come and go from the boat each time; we didn't stay out overnight. Drive us up on the

06:00 mountains, didn't see any lions, but there was a little lion on top of the outback.

What kind of things would you do while you were in town?

Main thing would be to find a pub and have a drink. But when we were in these cars, I think they took us to their house on one or two occasions. They were beautiful homes,

06:30 two storeys and the whites didn't do a thing at all, the blacks did all the work. They were real servants. It was all right.

And where did your trip take you after Durban?

We were on our way up to the Suez Canal from Durban. There was one lady that was there and I got a

07:00 copy of a poem that was printed in 1915. I'll have to show you that one. You'll see it later. It's about the Australians when they went to war in 1915. She was on the, as we went past to go out of the harbour she was waving

07:30 flags. She was very patriotic I'd say. It took us about three or four weeks to get to the Suez Canal. We got off there and marched so far and got on a train to Gaza in Palestine.

So when you were on that train, can you remember what you were seeing out the window?

08:00 It was all desert, very poor country. Sand hills and don't think it was very rocky, and it was very poor country, wouldn't feed a flea I don't think. When we'd stop at a station, there were odd places where we stayed; the Arabs would come swarming round trying to sell us this and that.

08:30 I suppose they were mostly Jews, 'cause we reckoned if you bought anything, next time the price would jump up. But we learnt to trade with them pretty good in the finish, I think.

What kind of things were you trading?

Oh, they had little ornaments, worthless really.

09:00 Don't think there was any fruit or anything to eat, but they had little gadgets, ribbons, and I don't know, not very much.

Was this the first time you'd seen the desert?

Yes, first time we were there. We went straight to England in the first place, come back to the Middle East.

What were your impressions

09:30 **of seeing country like that, how different was it for you?**

It was very, very poor country, wouldn't grow hardly a tree. Transplanted gum trees over there in certain places from the First World War, but they did well, they did quite well, the gum trees. But the country was, oh, when you got to Gaza in Israel there was fertile

10:00 country there, oranges and fruit perhaps. Oranges grow particularly well, huge, and they were full of juice. You'd get a glass of juice out of one orange and half another one, you'd get a glass of pure juice, wonderful, Jaffa oranges.

So when you arrived

10:30 **in Gaza, could you explain where you were camped and what that was like?**

It was a huge camp when we got there, 'cause the other two divisions had already gone over there, a huge camp, Gaza. It was all tents, no buildings really.

11:00 **And the food that you were eating at this time?**

Well, I'd have to say the food was very good, very good. In the mess tents, I'd say the food was very good. Not like when we went to England. When we went to the tent to have dinner, there was cocoa on the table. Cocoa, the Aussies went on strike about that, they wouldn't have it.

11:30 They marched down to the major, this was in England, but they only wanted tea. Not cocoa.

And were you living on army rations at this time?

Well, not bully beef and that, but it would have been cooked up in different ways. Mostly potatoes, vegetables.

12:00 **What were you doing on a daily basis at Gaza?**

Just training all the time, or route marches and training out in the, they call them wadi [dry streambed] out there. And we'd be training as a unit, as a company. That sort of thing.

12:30 **What were you told about where you would be going?**

They wouldn't tell you anything, no. But we knew that Greece was in bad trouble at the time, we thought we would have went to Greece, but that was when we got to Mersa Matruh, it was too late

13:00 then. That was when we went up the desert to Tobruk. The evacuation was already taking place in Greece while we were up at Mersa Matruh.

So how long were you in Gaza before you went up to Mersa Matruh?

Only a few weeks, I think, it wasn't long at all, we didn't have time to play cricket or much sport up there. I think it was only a few weeks before we went

13:30 across the canal to the desert.

How did you cross the canal?

We had ferries, there was a big ferry, I think, maybe two ferries, one would be going one way and one coming back. All the traffic on one'd be camels on one and army blokes on the other one. Had a big canteen there,

14:00 went straight to the canteen and buy what we could. The money changed into Gyppos, Egyptian. And then we caught a train to Mersa Matruh. I'm a bit dubious about that, I suppose we did.

14:30 We came down in transport, army trucks, so I think we must have gone by army trucks to Mersa Matruh.

Could you tell me about Mersa Matruh, what you were doing there?

Well, we were there; it looked like we were going to go across to Greece, that's why we went there in the first place, I'd say. But we're only guessing,

15:00 but then they lost the battle there, so, and it was on up in the desert they were getting into trouble. They got as far as Tripoli, then the Germans chased them right back to Tobruk. So that's where we had to go to. Up to Tobruk.

What kinds of stories were you hearing at the time about what had happened in Greece?

15:30 We knew that they were beaten badly, we could, they got beaten in Greece, then Crete. Crete got beaten there by the paratroops, German paratroops; and it looked for a while like we were going to go there, but then when the situation turned bad in the desert 6th Division got chased right back.

16:00 I think I'm a bit wrong there, it was the 9th Division that got chased back, they got as far as Tripoli. Some of them to get back into Tobruk; they made a fortress there. I had a cousin of mine was 16 days getting back, the Arabs helped him to get back. That would have been April 1940.

16:30 1941.

Could you tell me about the journey you made to the front line, to the fighting. What preparations were made?

Actually, from Mersa Matruh the water was very rough, and our boat was only a, it was called a chopper [?], at about

17:00 5000 tons was about all it was. It moved at about 10 knots an hour, that was its speed. We got to Tobruk, but the water was too rough and none of our company could get on. So we sailed off, and next

day, I think the, a week later the rest of the battalion came by destroyers up to Tobruk. But when we got to Tobruk

17:30 there was a real battle on at the time. And our ship, we were only off it half an hour before it was sunk. And our company there we didn't do anything in that fighting. But the rest of our battalion, that division there that got chased back from Tripoli, they put up a good show and they beat them Germans on the front line. But when our battalion

18:00 arrived, first of our battalion arrived, we relieved one of the battalions on the front line.

Could you tell me about the entrance to Tobruk, what it looks like from the boat?

It's a beautiful harbour, but the city or town was knocked around a lot with fighting and that when the 6th Division captured Tobruk.

18:30 There wasn't too much of it left. It wasn't a very big place, but a beautiful harbour. A lot of sunken boats in the harbour, of course.

And what kind of activity was going on when you came in?

What was going on?

The enemy activity.

Well, they only had, when we arrived there was a good battle on then.

19:00 But the Germans got beat in that action. They were regrouping, I suppose, and our blokes were regrouping too. But there was no actual permanent fighting, oh, they'd be sniping away at the. No attacks really.

How did your ship get sunk?

Stukas, Stuka bombers.

19:30 I don't think it was a direct hit, I think it was a near miss and it went straight to the bottom. It was a very old ship. But that could have happened outside the harbour, and we were lucky to be off it.

Did you see that happen?

Yes, I was up on the, we got off as soon as we got in the harbour, we disembarked, might have been a few hundred yards, not much more,

20:00 and the planes come over. Every day they would dive-bomb us on the harbour and in the town. Every day. Stuka bombers.

Could you describe what it's like to stand on a hill and watch the Stuka bombers come in?

It was very exciting, well, time after time

20:30 I seen these dive-bombers come over, they'd come in and dive, one after the other like that. It was something to see, as long as we were safe.

What was the noise like?

It was plenty of noise. Our blokes had Bofors guns [anti-aircraft], about half a dozen

21:00 guns firing together. They never used to hit many of the planes just the same, but an odd one would come down, very few. Pretty hard to bring 'em down, there was a lot of space there, I suppose. But the great thing is, German Stukas come over, and one after the other dived down. They couldn't miss with their guns, their bombs, they shouldn't anyhow.

21:30 **Was there anyone on your ship when it went down?**

No, well, only the few sailors and the captain, that's all, that would have been all that went when it went down. The mast was still sticking out of the water, top of the mast.

Were they able to evacuate, do you know?

I wouldn't have a clue. I suppose they could have if they were lucky.

22:00 It was, by the time they get bombed once, any boats that were in the harbour, they got sunk. Destroyers of a night time used to only come in at midnight and out before dawn.

Once you were off the ship, where did you go in Tobruk?

The officer had to find our positions to take over,

22:30 they would have been advised about where we had to go. We went to relieve the 17th Battalion, I think it was, and that's where Edmondson won his VC [Victoria Cross]. But we missed that battle, or we were

just after it.

So what was your daily routine at Tobruk?

23:00 We went, mostly digging trenches. We weren't out doing any route marches or anything like that. Staying at our post, trying to improve our post in any way we could.

What do you mean by that, in what way could you improve it?

Slit trenches,

23:30 dig them out a bit deeper. Some of the posts, they were concrete posts; they were built by Mussolini years before. That was in the perimeter, a good many of them were like that. I'm pretty sure the one we went to straight away had a big tank trap in front of it. It was quite liveable; there was no rain in those days. No rain

24:00 out there, only needed to worry about sandstorm, dust storm.

And did dust storms happen very often?

Not really often, I'd say you'd expect one every fortnight or so. Very dusty, you wouldn't see your hand in front of your face. But that was good for both sides, no action

24:30 while that's going on.

What was the first sign that a dust storm was coming?

There would be a few clouds, dust clouds I suppose, showing up. There was one place there where the trucks used to, a big dump area, it was all stirred up and there was no end of dust

25:00 there. Probably a lot of the dust came from there. But it would last for days, a couple of days, and you couldn't get away from it.

What would you do in a dust storm?

Nothing, I don't know, nothing at all really. Before we got up to Tobruk the dust storms were shockingly bad,

25:30 and it used to build up a lot of dust around the tents when we got up to Tobruk.

Can you describe to me the process of digging a trench and how you decided where it would go?

Well, that was the officers; the big shots say where it had to be. They had a

26:00 colonel, then he'd pass the message on to the captains and lieutenants that would tell us what to do. We were always told what to do.

And were you staying in the trenches all the time, or…?

26:30 We'd sleep on top of the ground if it was safe. If we thought it was. There would be too many fleas in the trench, I'd say. Crikey, fleas and ticks. One exciting thing used to be, of an afternoon they'd stir up the rats,

27:00 somebody would stir a rat up and everybody would be after it. Catch this rat.

What kinds of things would you do to pass the time when you were living in these trenches?

I had no trouble; I used to write home as often as I could. I did a lot of that.

27:30 That's where I started to write that poetry thing in Tobruk. And we were cooped up in the Salient position for three or four weeks and only come out of night time. It wasn't safe to come out during the day. You'd come out nighttime. Both sides would have a, what do you call it, they'd go quiet while

28:00 supper was being brought up, both sides, I reckon. When that was over they'd be into it again. Start shooting again.

For the benefit of the tape, I know we've spoken about your poetry, but could you explain what it is that you actually did, what you created while you were away.

I don't know, I must have had a

28:30 bit of streak in me, to start writing like that, 'cause I don't know why I just started, I had plenty of time too, I'd only write a couple of lines. The next day I might write a few more.

What were you writing about?

I was telling the story of our battalion. Six months, "Six weeks out from our fair land

29:00 we arrived in England," that was the first line of it and I was gradually writing, bringing it up to date, right down to Durban and up to the Suez Canal, that sort of thing. I think it was the whole story of what we did in the battalion, to me it's all right, but you mightn't find it looks like that.

29:30 But that's how I did it, just to cover what we did.

What did you find to write it on this poem?

I always had letter material to write on. A pad, but we only had pen and ink, no biros those days.

30:00 That would have been great biros; some of the writing I did with pen and ink has faded away. It passed the time away. I never used to show it to anybody. I was a bit shy about that.

Would you write this in the trenches during the day?

Yes, there was no lights, only in the day time.

30:30 **Do you remember some of it that you might be able to recite?**

I roughly know it all. I'd have to get the book and have a look. We might get you to do that a bit later, get the book and we'll ask you to read some out for us.

31:00 I know I tried to cover everything that we did.

What were some of the other things that men were doing at that time to pass the time?

They would have been doing the same as me, writing home and maybe sharpening bayonets. Used to dig them in the ground, that would sharpen them

31:30 didn't have any files or anything like that. Really not doing anything, nothing much. Checking their gear. We only used to get down to the beach every now and again, had to get out of the. When we were in the Salient

32:00 we had one bloke out of each section would have the day off to go back with the food truck that brought the tucker up, and stay overnight and come back the next night. I know I went down to the harbour there one time like that and I saw my mate up in hospital.

32:30 **Was there a lot of firing overheard at this point?**

There was a German spotter plane, he'd been given details of where the posts were and where the mortar bombs were landing and he'd send word back to the Germans and they'd be firing over nearly all day long.

33:00 But a lot of their bombs were duds. They must have had some big problems in their factories, I reckon, 'cause a lot of them, the bombs you'd hear them come, 'Bang', and they'd do nothing, it was good luck to us. A lot weren't, though.

What

33:30 **could you feel when the bomb landed when you were in the trenches?**

You'd be pretty scared, it depends on how far away. We were pretty lucky; I don't think their aims were all that good. But the plane was flying, going backwards and forwards giving directions. They could have done a lot better with their shooting, I think.

34:00 **Were many people injured at this time while you were there?**

Not a great lot. My mate had got some shrapnel in his leg, one of my best mates. At night I went out for a day off. He got hit through the leg, went into hospital,

34:30 and you wouldn't believe it, but the Eyeties came over in high-level bombers, they bombed the hospital, killed him. There was casualties all the time, I think I was lucky.

How long were you in Tobruk for?

I think we arrived there in

35:00 April, we were there until, six months, about till, the end of September we were relieved.

Were you in those trenches all the time or did you move?

No, we did three and four weeks in the Salient, then we'd be shifted back to what they called it, Blue Line I think, for a couple of weeks, then we'd go to another position.

35:30 But the Salient was the closest one; I mean that the two armies were a lot closer than anywhere else. I think I did about three or four front line positions. Some of them not as bad as the Salient.

When you were at the front lines in those positions, how did your job change?

36:00 You'd be in the real front line, looking for targets to shoot at, that was the main thing, but at night time we'd, we wouldn't do any, patrols were the main thing in Tobruk, out every night in patrols.

36:30 Not so much in the Salient. We were too close to do any patrolling there, but in other places we'd be out every night on patrols. See what we could find or come across.

When you go on patrol, how many men are going on patrol?

Depends, they could have had a floating patrol, what I was in then at times, a floating patrol is a group of

37:00 men, might have a couple of sections, three sections, but you'd never come across any enemy much out there, but I know one time we were sent out with sticky bombs to put on these tanks that were out there. They were stationed in front of us with searchlights on, well, you couldn't get close to them, but that was the idea

37:30 we'd be sent out with sticky bombs to try and plaster on to these tanks and blow them up. But I never got to that stage, I don't think we did. It might have been all right in country that's got plenty of cover, but not out in the desert. It was as flat as a pancake and we could be seen a mile away. Night time was not very dark over there.

38:00 **Could you explain what sticky bombs are?**

Yes, they were a thing nearly as big as your hand with a handle on it. And it had a sticky cover over it, which you were supposed to peel off, and bang it onto the tank, when it went off it would do a lot of damage. But they would have been good in, say, over in England

38:30 with the hedges and things like that, but you couldn't see to get close enough to a tank, not with the searchlights on. But still, we trained in England to use them, but I don't think they were very successful in the desert.

Was the floating patrol, I just want to clarify that, was that just because Fighting patrol, Fighting patrol, was it, was that named

39:00 **that because it had a mixture of divisions in it or…?**

No, only sections, a number of sections, I think, 14 men or something like that, couple of dozen. That'd be as big as it gets, but they'd be roaming round, especially the area to go, not to see if they could come across the enemy either. To have a fight with. I don't think

39:30 they were all that successful, fighting patrols; they were ready, though, just in case. Mostly we'd go out listening to see what was going on see what the enemy was doing. But every night, the whole time we were in Tobruk there'd be patrols out soon as it became dark enough, they'd go out there. I think that worried the enemy a lot.

40:00 That these patrols were always out there.

What was the Elysian Patrol, what were you carrying when you were doing that?

Mostly rifles and grenades, we were all armed with them, Real Toms, that's a grenade. And maybe one Bren gun [machine gun], old guns,

40:30 Tommy guns [Thompson submachine gun]. Some in the group would have a Tommy gun, others would have a Bren gun, others would have, mostly have rifles.

Could you describe what it's like to leave your trench at night and go on these patrols in the darkness?

41:00 It's exciting, a bit scared, hoping for the best and all that. Your ears would be glued to every single sound. I think they might have done the same things, the Germans, we used to come across.

41:30 telephone wires, they'd be lying on the ground, we'd come across them, so I think they were doing the same as us, they'd have patrols out too. But we didn't clash too often.

What kind of sounds were there at night when you were on patrol?

There would be shooting everywhere.

42:00 In the Salient position our blokes used to attack their…

Tape 4

00:32 **Jim, when you were in the frontline at Tobruk, roughly how far away would the enemy have been?**

Varying distances, in the Salient only might be a hundred yards, but in some other places, front line positions, there were about 60 positions around the perimeter,

01:00 it was like a half a circle. Some of them would have been thousand yards, two thousand yards in some places. Especially on the east and southern side, going towards the northern side where the road went on towards Benghazi. The positions were a lot closer.

01:30 **You mention that there were a lot of Italians getting taken prisoner.**

They were only taken when the 6th Division went up and captured Derna, they got a thousand Italian prisoners, the same in Tobruk. A great lot of prisoners there.

What impressions did you get of the Italians as soldiers?

I never really had contact with them much as far as the fighting part of it, but I think they threw the

02:00 towel in very easy. They didn't want to fight; they were forced to go by their Emperor [actually Duce], Mussolini. They were sent out there and they didn't have the heart in it, I don't think. They surrendered quite easy. Especially at El Alamein.

Did the firing, was the firing, at Tobruk was there firing going all the time, or was there times when it stopped?

02:30 Not all the time, we were in, the first position we were in there wasn't too much firing there, but when we went into the Salient position there was shooting going on nearly all the time in the day time, a lot. That's why you'd stop down in your trench all day. Dugouts, because when

03:00 the 9th Division was thrown back into Tobruk they were chased by the Germans, then when they had this battle, when we got there in April the Germans captured posts number 5, 6 7, I think. They were captured by the Germans and they held them, at times our fellows would go retake them

03:30 and they'd lose them again, there was continuous fighting there.

So can you describe for me what happened there at the Battle of the Salient?

There was no battle on while I was there, but there was plenty of shooting. Neither side attacked, although we sent a couple of platoons to take up a position.

04:00 I think we almost captured it, but we were held up and had to pull back again. There was too much wire around their post. We lost a few men on that. They didn't capture the post, but they held those positions for a long time.

What might a post look like, how big?

Well, a section,

04:30 couple of sections would man one position, a post, they called them posts, they were numbered by the Italians, they had it all worked out years before. They had this perimeter around Tobruk, they were going to safeguard Tobruk, they were numbered. A position would be about a quarter mile apart, each position, that's about four-five hundred yards

05:00 apart.

In terms of the amount of Allied men and their equipment, how did it compare to what the Germans had?

I think it would be pretty even as far as the Germans went there. I doubt if there were only Italians in the perimeter facing the Aussies, there may have been some faraway place, out and out line,

05:30 outline, but we only came across Germans in front of us.

What did their machinery and equipment seem like?

Similar to our own, machine guns, Fiat machine guns, different altogether to ours, but they were mighty good guns, I think.

06:00 I was talking about one attack that I was in. Went to capture one position, I'm not sure of the number, might have been 5–7, it's probably in me diary or somewhere the number of it, but some of our fellows got caught up in the barbed wire, they were killed, and the next day our blokes,

06:30 officers were trying to get a truce on so they could go and bring them back. And they, I think they brought some back, but they only wanted the truce for an hour or two, and I know that two of our blokes were on the German side of the wire when the truce expired. Grabbed them, captured them, didn't let them back at all. I don't think that was very good of them,

07:00 not very friendly, was it. I met up with them when I was a POW in Germany. And that one bloke, they called him Socks Simons. He was a bit cuckoo, though. Anyhow, this is getting away from your story, but in the camp at Udine, he was always a bit sort of cheeky, they used to get vino, that's wine, into the

camp, I don't know

07:30 how, and he must have been a bit under the weather, this day. An officer was going around, he had an interpreter with him and old Socks started giving him a hard time, abusing him and that, and this interpreter pulled a revolver out and shot old Simons dead. There was no need to have done it, to have killed him like that, but he did. I was there

08:00 I didn't see it, I think I was probably in gaol; I did 30 days in gaol in that camp. Do you want to go on to that?

I might just ask you some more questions about Africa. You mentioned that incident where you had some men stuck on the wire. How would you actually go about taking a position? What would each man be doing, and how long would it take?

They would all have their rifles, machine gun,

08:30 Bren, they'd charge in and the idea was to overrun the position and kill the people that were in there. That's all it amounted to. They had this wire, I don't know how they got held up but you get caught on the wire, it's pretty hard to get off that. That was the end of them, really. But the next day they had a truce to go and get the men

09:00 back the bodies back or something. They did so much, but when the ones who were still looking around, they got captured by the Germans, taken right away.

How could you call a truce, how did that work?

Don't ask me that really, but I suppose that they put up a white flag and draw their attention to it and somebody might have gone forward and offered a truce to the Germans. Both sides

09:30 laid low and stopped their firing. That's about the only way it could be done.

Can you tell me about the surrender leaflets that the enemy were dropping over the Allies at Tobruk?

I remember as well as anything; it was a spotter plane, that's what we called it, a German spotter plane, I think he was well armed, 'cause we used to shoot like the dickens and you couldn't miss it, but I think they used to bounce off, the bullets.

10:00 He'd go up and down, he was signalling to the artillery and mortar men where the shells were landing and that, that's where these leaflets were dropped, they were dropped in thousands. Across the front line. Nobody took any notice of them, they thought it was great. Good souvenirs, I didn't bring one home but I've got a copy of one. It was a bigger sheet of paper than that, though.

10:30 **We all know now that the troops that were involved in Tobruk were called 'rats', what was the atmosphere like, what was the mood like amongst the men in?**

I think they were pretty contented; it was the big shots who thought we should be relieved. What was our man, Blamey

11:00 Tom Blamey. He thought we'd been there long enough, but people were getting sores and things on them a lot. Sores that wouldn't heal up, ulcers on their legs, and everybody in shorts. There was no grog in the place, no beer, never had a drink of beer the whole time I was in Tobruk. I think it did come up a bit, but I think the big shots got that.

11:30 But I think that was the main reason they thought they were getting a bit worn out. 'Cause patrols were out every night. Every position would have a patrol out. Just to see what was going on. Wouldn't go too far, some might only go a thousand yards.

Given that there were so many patrols happening,

12:00 **what did you think, how likely did you think a German advance was?**

Well, I think the people in the know would have a fair idea. We didn't have any planes there; the last two planes were shot down when we first got there. We never had any planes there.

12:30 They must have had a fair idea what troops were coming across from Germany through Tripoli; they'd know what armour they really had, I guess. They didn't really have enough after they got beaten in the April battle. They really never put on another large attack.

What was the water supply like at Tobruk?

13:00 A bottle of water a day, it wasn't very good water but that was your limit. You had to wash, shave and brush your teeth with it. That's about all you'd get. We could have done with more. But the water, they had wells there and I think the wells were all right. Sometimes both sides used to poison the water. I've heard

13:30 of that.

How would you know if the wells had been poisoned?

Taste, and you'd know straight away. I don't know if our fellows ever done it, but I think there were some wells poisoned when we got there. You couldn't use them.

And what about going to the toilet?

That's a bit of a private question.

14:00 We had, well, in the trenches, slit trenches, they were only that deep, you couldn't stand up, if you stood up your head would be in the air. We used to have jam tins, that was one of the ways. Pretty shocking, wasn't it? But that was one way; while you were down all through the day, you couldn't get out, if you did you'd be taking an awful

14:30 risk.

So when you left Tobruk what was the status of the siege?

I think it had settled down fairly well, the Germans, the British were building up strong to try and relieve Tobruk. That's what it says on that pamphlet about, "Surrender, Aussie."

15:00 They attempted once or twice to come up from Egypt with armour, they got knocked back, the Germans had their main body down past Tobruk and there wasn't much chance of getting through to relieve us, so we came out by boat, all but one battalion, that was the 13th Battalion, they stopped there until

15:30 the war was, until they came up strong from El Alamain. Montgomery [Montgomery was not actually in command yet], when he come up they fought their way out to meet them.

While you were at Tobruk, was there a local population there?

No, the civvies [civilians] had all gone. I think there was a good many battalion prisoners there. They were just in an enclosure

16:00 and weren't doing anything, don't think they had them working at all, but the captured thousands and thousands of prisoners, Italians.

So where did you go from Tobruk?

We got on the boat, Ardeer was the name of the boat, she was a minelayer, it means that through the middle

16:30 of the boat they had a tram line running to the stern, where they drive these mines, and it was fast, they reckoned it could do, they told us it could do 40 knots, that's nearly 50 mile an hour, nearly. We got on at, we went to catch the boat before dusk, but the boat didn't come in till nearly midnight. Then we were away, and we were down in Alexandria

17:00 about some time in the afternoon, 4 o'clock or something. A terrific ride out. But each night there'd be a, a destroyer would come in either to bring in supplies or take people out. Just about every night, suitable nights, mostly turned out to be a moonlight night, I think. But they lost a lot of

17:30 ships on that run, destroyers.

On the Tobruk ferry run?

Yes, I can't think of a name, the Waterhen was one.

Was there evidence of shipwrecks or boats being sunk, how dangerous it was, could you see any of that?

No I didn't, it was a beautiful little harbour, not very big at all,

18:00 but I think it was deep water once you got outside the harbour.

So from there you travelled to Alexandria, what were your impressions of Alexandria, what did you think?

Well, we didn't really see much of Alexandria; from there we went on a train straight up to Palestine again, but El Alamein, not El Alamein,

18:30 but Alexandria was an important place. It has a good harbour there, I don't remember too much about that.

At that point what sense did you have about how quickly the enemy was moving towards Egypt?

Well, they were, when we got out it was very close to the

19:00 lifting of the siege, we got out, say, in September, and it was November I think before the siege was

lifted, and Montgomery's army came up in, the 13th Battalion came out, but they lost a lot of men fighting their way out in that battle. 13th Battalion was the

19:30 9th Div. A cousin of mine was in it.

So from Alexandria, could you tell me what happened when you left Alexandria?

Yes, we went up to Palestine, had a good time after getting out of Tobruk.

20:00 **When you say a good time, could you tell me what you did?**

We did a three-day bus tour of Palestine, instead of going on leave our army officer, he suggested that we go on a bus tour. We drove around to different places; all we would do would be drinking beer. That's about all I think. Not much

20:30 else. Bits of parties, drinking parties. There wouldn't have been anything else to do.

What was the beer like?

Mostly hot, warm. It was never cooler like we have here. I used to drink very little. I used to stay with the boys a bit, but I didn't drink very much.

21:00 I never smoked, I couldn't stand cigarettes. But we did about three days driving around Palestine. Not much to see.

What contact did you have with the locals?

21:30 **at Palestine?**

Not much at all. We couldn't talk their language much, only knew a little bit. Because I was talking about cricket before, I got the job to get a Palestinian to plough a furrow around our cricket pitch. For a boundary.

22:00 I had an interpreter, we went down and got a bloke, he came and did it with a, I think he had a camel with a plough behind it. Put a furrow right around as a boundary. It was one of the things I had to do with them.

So what sort of a pitch were you able to produce in the desert?

The army got to work early in the piece and they made a lot of concrete pitches.

22:30 Wherever we went there were concrete pitches with a mat on them. They were pretty good, same as they are out here. They were what I always play on. There was no turf on the grass; we were playing on sand or something.

And what was the equipment like you were using?

Oh, we had good equipment then, very good. All the bats and balls were well made.

23:00 Our battalion was pretty good at cricket, we done really well. In fact, I was the captain in the inter-battalion games.

And what sort of over matches would you play?

Just a one-day game, a few hours in between, say,

23:30 breakfast in the morning, you'd go away to have a game and have to get back for supper at night, a few hours, four or five hours. They were inter-unit, inter-battalion games.

Wbere were you sleeping when you were in Palestine?

24:00 We had tents, all tents in Palestine, I think they were, what do they call them, in a circle, six or eight men in a tent, big thick top on it. Bill tents I think they were called. But we tied our rifles

24:30 to the centre post of the tent, a chain went through them, so we all was told that the Arabs used to get in and pinch them, I doubted that but they supposed to be, that was the usual thing of a night time, tie your rifles to the post.

What were the conditions like in Palestine?

Hot and dry, didn't rain. The only time it rained, we got a flood one

25:00 time one Christmas, '42 Christmas time. That was very heavy rain, floods everywhere.

That's Biblical.

It's a bit strange for over there, but they do get a lot of rain at Christmas time.

What sort of celebrations were you able to have at Christmas in '42?

The cooks used to make plum puddings,

25:30 and quite a good dinner, they'd import stuff that was, you'd never see any other time, oysters, which I never liked. Used to be a good Christmas dinner.

Where did you go from Palestine?

To Syria, we had to relieve the 7th Division, they came home,

26:00 and we went up there to finish what they were doing.

What were they doing?

They'd already captured Syria, the 7th Division, they'd beat Vichy French there, and they were on a post, building up the post, in case. They expected the

26:30 Germans to make an incursion through there, that was on the cards, they thought. But that didn't happen, but we were very downhearted about that the 7th and 6th going home and we had to go up there in trucks while they come home on a boat.

27:00 I think the people in Syria were a big improvement on the Palestinians. They were, well, a lot of Vichy French were there, it was the Vichies they were fighting there, but still they were a lot whiter and more educated. Different class of people all together.

How did they respond to the Australian troops?

They had a fight

27:30 on their hands. They were still loyal to Pétain, I think it was, that French bloke, he surrendered to the Germans and they were sort of backing him, the French. I think they had a pretty hard fight there.

28:00 The Governor-General, he got the VC there, didn't he? What was his name?

Cutler.

No, wasn't that name [actually it was], he was the Governor of New South Wales, he had a wooden leg. I can't think, I've got a book here, of his story.

How did you travel, from Palestine

28:30 **to Syria?**

By truck, in fact I went up in the first lot to go up. Half a dozen trucks, I was in the first ones to go up and be ready for when the main battalion came, rest of the division. We were told where

29:00 everybody was going to be stationed, each unit. It was very cold up there in the hills. Before we left there we went out on a stunt up way out into the stony desert. What did they call it?

29:30 Gerral [?] desert, through Syria, for three weeks the whole battalion was there and they had three weeks practicing for how they were going to fight in the future. We had live ammunition, they had to.

What sort of practice where you doing?

30:00 Just making out we were going to capture a certain position. It might be a dozen trucks loaded with men; they'd all go in. Over a start line, and go ahead to try and take the position. It was only make believe, of course. But the big shots would be up around on the hill watching it, picking up all the faults and what was good and what wasn't.

30:30 That was learning the 'box formation', they called it. Can't tell you a lot about that; but the whole battalion, once it's attacked they sort of form a box and they put armour all around it. A bit hard to describe. But we went there for three weeks and came back,

31:00 and the situation was grim in the desert; the English tanks were getting belted outside of Tobruk. We were to get six-day leave, and none of us got any. They called that off straight away and we had to race down to El Alamein.

Just going back to Syria, you mention that the bigwigs would be up on the hill watching what was going wrong or what was being done

31:30 **right, how would you receive that feedback, what would happen once you had finished your exercise?**

The officer that passed it down from the big shot to the next one, they'd tell us how it wasn't going well, sometimes they'd give us a lot of praise. It would come back to all the troops by, say, the lieutenants

32:00 or the captains from the hierarchy.

What did you think of your command at that time?

We were very happy with our command, captains and wonderful blokes. I think you couldn't fault them. The only one we never ever liked were sergeant majors. They were all too

32:30 fussy, trying to find fault with something; that was, you know, in your dress or something like that, or your rifle's not clean enough or something like that. But otherwise he was all right; he was as game as Ned Kelly anyhow.

He was what, sorry?

He was game as Ned Kelly.

So what sort of point,

33:00 **positions were you fortifying in Syria?**

In hillside places where it was overlooking a road or something of that nature, I'd say, where it had a good view, that could be useful. But we used to have a, we didn't do all the work, we used to have with civvies there with us and we were in charge of them

33:30 and they got to do most of the work, but we were all downhearted about it. The Japs [Japanese] were getting close to Australia and we were stuck up there. Read that in that book that I wrote, for sure.

What did you know at that point about what the Japanese were doing in the Pacific?

We got word back about how 8 Division was over run in Singapore

34:00 that was shocking. Whole division. And they went down, didn't take them long to take Singapore and they were on their way. It was only, in my book, what I've read of it the Coral Sea Battle that stopped it. And our troops up in New Guinea helped a lot too.

So as the Japanese were making their way through

34:30 **the Malayan Peninsula and into New Guinea, what did you think about how vulnerable Australia was?**

We were very worried, very, very worried. We were over there, and it was so bad at home. We were very worried.

35:00 **Who organised the civilians, where did the civilians come from who were with you, fighting with you in Syria?**

I'd say, I don't know for sure, but I'd say that 7th Division blokes had all those people working for them or with them. They would have passed them on to us when we

35:30 took over. That's how we got to get them I'd say. We were doing all sorts of stupid things like making dummy rocks, that's right, out of Plaster of Paris, and they'd get, I suppose in the distance it would look very good, but it wouldn't stop a bullet very well. We did a good bit of that in different places, moulded dummy rocks.

36:00 I suppose it's Plaster of Paris, that's what I'd call it. You'd have the powder, and you'd mix it with water and it would set into a fairly hard looking rock.

And what was the purpose of the dummy rock?

To make the position look more stronger, and the people in their positions behind it, make it look pretty good,

36:30 a lot stronger I'd think. Something to do, I think. Kept us busy.

What theory was there at that time about any Turkish involvement in the war?

Well, we didn't know of any, I didn't know of any, but the heads thought, the big shots or the

37:00 brigadiers or somebody, talked about it, and it was general knowledge that they thought it could happen. It's a wonder they didn't, I don't know why they didn't, 'cause Turkey had a treaty with the Germans and they would have let them go through. Hitler had other things on his mind, he wanted to attack Russia. That's what saved it, I'd say.

Given that the situation in the Asia Pacific

37:30 **was very critical what did you think about how necessary your role was in Syria?**

We thought we should have been out of it. Cranky, very. We were disappointed and despondent about it. Because we, when the 7th and the 6th came home we should have came too, I think. Although they did do a good job in Syria.

38:00 I suppose somebody had to take over from them and they didn't have anybody else. I think it's probably the right thing to have done. Otherwise they could have come through Syria, Germany.

What evidence was there of any enemy scouts or spotters in that Syrian region?

I don't remember any. Can't think I saw anything

38:30 of it. Don't think Germany had any plans to go through Syria at that stage. It would have through Turkey if they got to go.

How was the physical landscape in Syria different to what you'd been used to in

39:00 **the African desert, in Tobruk?**

It was altogether different. It was mountainous, steep hills, snow on the tops of the hills, it was pretty cold there. We went up to what they call the cedars, the Lebanon cedars and it was mighty cold there too. We used to still go on route marches at different times.

39:30 Another position we had was the tunnel, ran alongside the highway, alongside the Mediterranean, we were camped there, at there, the Gardner Tunnel. Trucks would come along, we'd have to go through them, and come back the other way two trips on both ends, they didn't want it destroyed or anything

40:00 But we were camped between the tunnel and the Mediterranean. The sheer drop of hundreds of feet, and our tent was right over the top of that.

You'd just come out of the desert where it was hot, and you mentioned that Syria was cold, what changes did you make?

They changed our clothes, I'm sure we had warmer

40:30 clothes. But I don't know why we didn't fall into the Mediterranean at that tent. You'd only go in one end of the tent to get into the tent; you wouldn't go around to the back. I'm sure two of our blokes came back drunk one night and got in there round the back.

41:00 **Where could you go to drink in Syria?**

Into Beirut, it wasn't far away; it was a very long tunnel, maybe two or three hundred yards on, I suppose. But we used to help ourselves to different things that were on the trucks. We used to ride with them right through.

41:30 If we saw something we fancied, say, meat or something like that. We'd throw a bit off, and WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s. Not very honest, we weren't, still…

Tape 5

00:33 **Jim, how long were you in Syria for?**

I've got to work that, right up after the desert show, that would have been about, come out of Tobruk in September, then the desert show, first Montgomery through to Tripoli, would have

01:00 been about in the new year.

I was asking you how long you were in Syria for.

The desert show was finished as far as our fellows, Australian troops were concerned. They come home, must have been in the new year of '42. About February, something like that. We went straight,

01:30 no, it might have been a bit later, 'cause we went down to El Alamein, we went out in the desert and had a manoeuvre out there for a month. Would have been, I suppose, about three months in Syria.

Where did you go once you left Syria?

We came back to,

02:00 I think it was Beirut, 'cause we were all going to get leave, six days leave to go there. But that's still in Syria, and that was knocked on the head and we left there and we raced down to El Alamein. We went down by truck to El Alamein.

What were you told about the reason why your leave

02:30 **was cancelled so quickly?**

We all knew it was in the local paper over there about us being posted. And the writing about how our tanks got beaten up, and Knightsbridge I think it was. They were outgunned by the German tanks, better tanks. And that's why the race was on. It was just like; it went up and down a few times in the desert.

03:00 The 6th Division got right up to Tripoli, the Germans came and hunted them back through Egypt. Then our blokes went up to, Montgomery got up there, no, it wasn't Montgomery, then they got pushed back again, then the Germans came down a fourth time. That was a bit of a joke, I forget now the words I used in that poem about they come backwards and forwards so many times.

03:30 **So when you were sent down what was the scene that awaited you?**

Just the same, the desert, we went straight to El Alamein, took up a position there. The Germans attacked nearly straight away. We went in and attacked the first

04:00 night we got there. We took our positions and took a few prisoners, captured a gun. Next day or two the Germans attacked us, that's where my trouble started. I was taken prisoner at El Alamein.

When the signal is given to attack, what actually happens?

Usually, the usual thing is to put barrage gunfire

04:30 over to soften the ground up, or whatever's near the camp, and then they send the troops in. That's the usual way of doing it, and that's what happened, although in our case I was taken prisoner, the Germans only sent tanks in. We were overrun by tanks, they came back to get their gun that they'd lost, they hooked it up and they rounded a platoon of us up.

05:00 We were in slit trenches, we couldn't do a thing.

Was it day time or night time?

Day time, but we attacked at night time. Two o'clock in the morning we went in and did our attack. The Germans, they always fought in the day time, pretty well.

What were you armed with?

I had the Bren gun at that time. That was my, my offsider with me

05:30 used to carry so many magazines. But you can't shoot at a tank with a Bren gun or rifle. They had to use big tanks. We were very disappointed; our artillery should have stopped that. They promised us everything before we went in, they'd give us all the support we wanted but when that came

06:00 they never fired a shot.

What kind of support had you been told?

Well, they said everything, that included tank support for sure, but they, artillery, that's what we should have got, artillery, 'cause in Tobruk the artillery stopped the German tanks. But down here I don't know what or why

06:30 Although after we had gone back half a mile or more, taken by the Germans, what was left of us, they started firing shells over. Nearly getting us.

Where was the artillery positioned in relation to you?

Well back behind the front line, artillery, well back, might be a mile back, half a mile

07:00 But there was no reason why they couldn't have stopped these tanks, I reckon. We were very disgusted about that.

Could you explain, in as much detail as you can, the day of your capture from the moment you woke up in the morning, what actually happened that day?

It happened about, after the capture?

07:30 **No, before the capture if you could…**

We were on top of the world. We reckoned we'd blocked Rommel after that capture, that attack that night, we'd done very well, and our blokes were sniping away, shooting. Although a battalion came to us to do an attack, the 43rd, through our battalions they got into,

08:00 they overrun their target and most of them got captured, the tanks rounded them all up, nearly a whole battalion, that was the 43rd that, the morning of our capture. But we were on top of the world, we'd done what we had to do, that was a bad boon when this other battalion overrun their target. They couldn't dig in, it was too stony and the tanks were all around them.

08:30 That was one of the bad moves of the war.

How far away from you were they?

They would have went a mile past up through our, they got bombed by the planes as they went through, a marvellous sight; I've got a story about. That's a verse in the book. Bombs engulfed them,

09:00 all the smoke in the air you couldn't see them. But when the smoke cleared they were going on, but

they went too far. And when they were in a bad piece of ground where they couldn't dig in, nearly sitting up on top of the ground. Their CO [Commanding Officer], who was he?

09:30 He called it quits and surrendered. He didn't want his men being killed for nothing. Tanks all round them, couldn't do a thing. That would have been four, five hundred men I suppose.

Had you got word that this had happened straight away?

We seen it. Actually seen it, they went through our lines to get a further position

10:00 on us, take more ground, they evidently went too far and went past where they should have went and then stopped in a position where they could have formed up a defence, it would have been all right, but they went too far.

How do you form a defence, what do you actually do when you're doing that?

Dig in, or if there are rocks

10:30 there get behind them, that sort of thing. But I think the main thing is to dig in, which they couldn't. It's a funny sort of country there, just rocks and no soil at all.

So this had happened in the morning, so in the morning the

11:00 **other group had been captured, what where you doing at this stage?**

We couldn't do anything; we were just holding our positions.

11:30 **The morning this other group had already been captured, what were you doing at that point?**

We were just keeping our eyes open for any enemy in sight, I think, but we didn't know a lot about it. That they'd been captured, that was a bit later on

12:00 But for a start we knew they'd gone. It was a real shemozzle really. I think it was a bad move, they went too far, their target wasn't as far as what they were.

What could you see in front of you at this stage?

The visibility was never good in the desert,

12:30 it was hazy, very hazy; we knew they'd got into trouble. But we saw them go through; they went right through our lines, happy as larks. Then it got quiet along there. No shooting, so that was a good sign, we didn't know for sure, but we had a fair idea, they got into trouble.

13:00 **So during the day what was happening for you?**

We'd captured a gun through the night, an anti-tank gun; our section was shooting away with that at the enemy. I think they

13:30 hit one, wasn't a tank, it was a vehicle of some sort, I think they put it out of action. It was a beautiful gun, never had any training on it whatever. They worked it out how to use it, and they were, the shells that would go there, what do they call it, you could see them in the air, eliminated they were, I can't think of the word

14:00 They could hit the ground and bounce but they were lead, shot you know, can't think of the word for that. They have it in bullets too. You can see them. The Italians or Germans, they used to have a lot of them. You could see them going through the air.

Where they like flares?

No,

14:30 I'll think of the word, but I can't think of it now. I'm getting too old.

At what point were the German tanks coming towards you?

We saw probably four or five hundred yards

15:00 away when we first saw them lined up. We could see something was on then, all of a sudden a barrage come over that'd mortars and shells, they were lined up on our positions. They wanted that gun back, that's most likely what they were looking for it, I think. A smokescreen was fired,

15:30 a smokebomb, you couldn't see through it, you could hear the tanks coming, maybe we should have cleared out, we didn't. We were told to stop in our trenches, even the tanks could ride over us and they wouldn't hurt us. It's a bit silly. This smokescreen cleared, it had had time to fizzle out, then the tanks run

16:00 right over the top of us. We couldn't do a thing.

What does it sound like to have tanks coming over the top of you?

We didn't let them get that close. They stopped around a bit, their guns were aimed at us, they wouldn't have hesitated to run over us anyhow if we were in our trenches. The trenches were only four or five foot deep.

16:30 Some of our fellows had held up a flag and surrendered and we followed them, but there was only about 15 of what was left of our platoon, some of them were killed, some mortar bombs landed on our trenches and killed some of our fellows.

17:00 But the Germans were very good, I know one bloke, his arm was just hanging in shreds. A German gave me a big bandage to tie it up, he didn't have to do that, but he did. Called me over and gave me a bandage. I think he was a,

17:30 on the anti-tank team, section, and his arm was ruined. But I tied it up as best I could and the German was very good. They pointed which way we had to go. But we weren't out very far at all and our artillery started firing. That's what. If they'd only done it a bit sooner we

18:00 might have been saved.

Did they injure more men with that artillery?

No, I don't think they did, 'cause I remember we were in a huddle in one place and they were over, not far away from us but a few yards off; I probably think they were aiming at us. They might have thought we were a group of Germans. It wasn't very

18:30 satisfactory. But that's the way of the army, there's mistakes all the time. So after that the Germans signalled for us to climb on their tanks. We rode back so far with them. But the Germans treated us pretty good.

How were you communicating with the Germans

19:00 **at this point?**

We really weren't, I didn't know any German, I don't think anybody else did, they'd point, I suppose, point to get on the tank, ride back with them.

What was going through your mind at this point?

We were really disgusted, we though we were let down, 'cause they'd promised us everything

19:30 before the attack. And we didn't get it. I know our fellow were very down hearted about it.

Where were you taken on their tanks?

We went back, not very far to what they call their laager,

20:00 that's where they got their tanks, held them, kept them in a laager. We were handed over to the Italians, which we didn't like that either.

Do you know why that happened?

It was regulations by Hitler; in fact the Germans apologised to us and said, "We've got to hand you over to the Italians,"

20:30 because that was regulations, because all prisoners in the desert had to go through Italy, handed over to them. And that's how we come to be with them.

Had you been told what to do in the event of capture?

Yes, we were supposed to give just our name and number. We were always told to do that.

21:00 In fact in my pay-book I, they would have wanted to know where we'd been and that, I think I tore out the word Tobruk, 'cause I'd been in, my pay-book, just tore it out. That was trying to be a bit silly, I suppose. But that's what we were told. Just name and number and rank.

What did you have on you when you were captured?

21:30 Shirts and shorts. Before we went into action that night, the truck came along with our packs and kit bags and we all got clean clothes on, and that's all we had, shirts and shorts. And it got pretty cold. It's always cold in the desert at night.

Did you have any personal

22:00 **possessions on you?**

I just had me pay-book and that's about all. I did have a funny sort of a photo on a piece of tin. I don't know what they call it. It was of this girl, Grace that I may have mentioned,

22:30 It was very nice; I would have had it in my pocket there. And the Eyeties, would search you, and, “Primo, primo,” they’d say.

When you were handed over to the Italians, could you explain what happened in that first day of being handed over?

We went to a

23:00 camp, we travelled in a big bus, trucks. There were plenty of guards. We went to a camp, I don’t know the name of it, but I don’t think it was far away from Tobruk; in the desert, an oasis. We were penned in there by wire, we stopped there till the next day, a

23:30 few days later we went on another trip by truck, probably as far as Benghazi. There was a big camp there. The starvation started when we were captured. We had nothing to eat and nothing on ourselves. We’d get a ladle of skilly, soup, tomato soup I think it was

24:00 that’s all we’d get each day, once a day. Water was pretty scarce too. At this oasis, where we stopped there for a little while, a couple of our blokes tried to escape up under a truck. Trying to hang on under a truck, but they got caught. The Eyeties treated them very roughly. Tied them up by their thumbs and hardly let them touch the ground

24:30 I was going to say how the ticks, in the camp. There were ticks everywhere, crawling everywhere, I think they came from the palm trees, must have been breeding there. Ticks and fleas and flies. The whole lot was there.

Were you tied up at this point?

No,

25:00 No, I was never tied up. I don’t know if any of them did, only those two chaps who tried to escape, they were a bit too game, but they didn’t get far. The Italians gave them a rough time though. But eventually we got to Benghazi, and the compound there, it contained Indians and

25:30 Australians, there was thousands of men there, it was shocking. No shade from the sun, hardly any water, and the sewerage system was just a pit and it was just disgraceful.

That first camp at the oasis, how were you sleeping?

On the ground, just the way we were, there were no huts or nothing like that. You just sleep. We were all had our mates and we just huddled together a bit. But the food was nonexistent, really. By the time we got ready to go across the boat from Benghazi, I would have weighed ten stone when I was first captured and I reckon I wouldn’t

26:00 have weighed more than six

26:30 when I, after a couple of months there.

Were you questioned?

By the Germans, they questioned me when we were first taken. The Germans, an officer went through our pockets, he didn’t ask us much, he wanted to get rid

27:00 of us, I think, hand us over to the Eyeties.

Do you remember what he did ask you?

Not really. I think he just went through your wallet, he didn’t ask questions much at all, he just wanted to look at everything.

27:30 In fact I doubt if he would have been able to talk English. He talked German anyhow.

The camp at Benghazi, could you explain the layout of the camp, how it actually looked like?

There were palm trees, oasis of course, but I don’t know where the water was, I didn’t see any,

28:00 just a few trees and a sort of a flat place, plenty of shade there. It was still very hot, we weren’t there very long till we got shifted on to Benghazi where, no shelter whatever there. And there we got this ladle of skilly once a day. There was no meat in it,

28:30 mostly tomato soup I reckon.

As you approached that camp from the outside, what did it look like?

It was just a bare barbed wire fence was all you could see, and it was all flat country. There was no buildings or anything there. I think not far away there was a

29:00 great heap of salt. Salt used to be one of the products of the town, I suppose, salt. But that was a fair way away, but you could see that, there was nothing else you could see, there was just a wilderness.

And what did you do each day in

29:30 **that camp?**

I just sat around, I think. There was nothing to do; you couldn't go past the border. Some blokes would be walking non-stop looking for cigarettes, butts. Don't know if they ever found any, but there were no issues or anything like that. But I do remember a couple of fellows walking all day long looking for something to smoke. They had a craze.

30:00 Then they'd go off their head. One bloke did, tried to climb the wire and they just shot him. Then all of a sudden one day the word come to go down to the harbour, I think we marched down. To get on the boat to

30:30 go across the Mediterranean.

Do you have an idea of how long you were in Benghazi for?

We were captured in July, it wasn't long before we got to Benghazi, and it would have been

31:00 December before we got to Benghazi [Italy?].

So what was the climate like at this point?

No rain, dry, cold of a night, no shelter, we still slept on top of the ground in shirts, no change of clothes, it wasn't very nice. But every time you'd stand up, you'd just about have a blackout.

31:30 We'd deteriorated, and most of them had beri-beri, their face would all swell up, that's the beri-beri infection. And of course everybody had diarrhoea, 90 per cent, I reckon. What was the hygiene like, nonexistent, it was terrible

32:00 Just a big pit overflowing with filth. I think they used to come and get a few prisoners to go out and do a bit of work. Probably on a boat or something. I've been told that, but I can't remember them gong. But I think they might have taken a few out.

32:30 But the food was really nil.

What would go through your mind while you were sitting in that camp and the lack of food?

I don't know, I can't remember much about how I would have felt, but I always took things as they come,

33:00 I stood up to everything pretty well. Nothing we could do about it. But we weren't very happy. I remember the first night we were captured; we thought we should have got some blankets to keep us warm. That would have been a joke. I thought of that. No, I think the Italians, their attitude was

33:30 to keep us down in low morale, so we wouldn't play up or do anything, I think that was their attitude.

Did the guards have a particular routine of what they had to do during the day?

Not really, they were right around on the barbed wire and they just kept an eye on everything there.

34:00 Don't think they worried anybody. I know this one bloke tried to climb the fence, he was committing suicide. It couldn't have been long before they rioted I suppose. 'Cause it was in an awful state, but then they just about put a lot of us to go on a boat one morning

34:30 We must have been there quite a few months, three or four months.

What kind of boats was it that you got on?

Italian steamer, had a few, the hold was to go on the boat, we just go straight on and went down into a hold, big square.

35:00 A bit bigger than this room. Probably 100 men in it. Just room to stand up or sit down. You couldn't lay down, then they'd allowed us to go down, and then if anybody wanted to go to the toilets on top, over the side of the boat. You had to be pretty active to climb up the ladder.

35:30 That's very poor, disgraceful. And most of the blokes had diarrhoea anyway. There was one boat; none of us were on it. I think there were Aussies on it, prisoner of war boat, it was torpedoed, some of them survived but a lot didn't

36:00 that was round about that time; we knew a bit about it. We'd heard about it. Submarine torpedo.

What kind of news were you able to get about what was happening?

No, we wasn't getting anything, didn't know a thing. Not there, a bit further on when we got to the place, Udine, 6th Divvy fellows,

36:30 they had news that was taken in Greece and Crete and was up-to-date with all the war. But we were in the dark.

So you crossed on this boat, where did you end up when you sighted land again?

We went through the Corinth Canal, that's through Greece

37:00 across to Taranto, that's an old town, Taranto, from there we got deloused, they started the clippers and went right over, beard and all in the one go. Went through a delousing place, then they gave us Italian, civilian clothes I think it was

37:30 might have been army, Italian army clothes. I wasn't very happy about that either. But at least we were clean again after months and months of never having a shower or anything.

When you were taken to a delousing place, what did they do there?

We all took our clothes off; they probably took that away and burned it.

38:00 When we come out of the shower we had this haircut, shave, and then they gave us clothes to wear, we were really Eyeties again, looked like them anyhow. But then after that we went straight onto a cattle truck train. Do you know what a cattle truck train is? It's just got little slats in the wall, you can't, you can see through it,

38:30 we were in that right till the top end of Italy, Udine, up near the Yugoslav border.

I wanted to talk to you about that journey on the truck, what could you see out, what could you see?

I mean, trucks on the railway they were.

When you were on the train looking out?

39:00 You could see the countryside in the gap between the slats. Made of steel, I suppose. You could see the tomatoes growing on the hills, they were red-ripe with tomatoes, in certain places they grew a lot of tomatoes, no wonder they fed us on tomatoes. They took us, I'd say it's eight hundred miles on the train

39:30 to Udine, and I can't remember getting off the train. I think it went pretty much non-stop.

How many people were jammed in with you?

It was full up, maybe 20, 30 in each truck; there'd be a good many trucks.

40:00 **Was there any space to move around?**

Yes, you could move around a little bit, not much. Like in here, if you had 40 people in here, you'd be cramped. It was a bit like that. We got through to Udine okay. And I got interrogated there, they went through us.

40:30 And then we got sent into huts to live in. A hundred men in each hut. The beds were two-tier beds, one on top of the other. That was all right there; eventually you got a food parcel. Red Cross

41:00 food parcel. Firstly once a week, but they didn't always come that often. But they were beautiful food parcels; I think the best ones were Canadian. Canadian Red Cross, they'd have a big block of chocolate, tea, sugar, tin of fish most likely,

41:30 and biscuits.

Had you been fed anything on the cattle train going up?

No. I don't recall getting anything from the train. I don't recall ever getting off the train. We'd just about had it when we got there. It would have taken at least a day or more to get there. Maybe two days, but I can't remember getting off the train.

Tape 6

00:32 **Jim, before we talk about that camp at Udine I just want to ask you a couple of questions about El Alamein, when you were pretty much trapped in the trenches, and while you were engaged in that battle, what aerial support did you have?**

I think we had it pretty good. The air

01:00 force had been built up pretty very strong in Asia, it wasn't long before we won the Battle of El Alamein, they nearly had complete control, the British Air Force. They'd come over pretty regular and we were glad to see them.

So while you were actually fighting in the trenches at El Alamein, what was happening in the air?

Dogfights. It was going on all

01:30 the time. It was something to see, it really was, you know. When a plane tried to knock another one out, a lot of that. They seemed to disappear and you wouldn't see them come down but they were put out of action or something. I think we were starting to get very strong in the air force. I know in that book I said something about

02:00 the air force going over, I called them a Rules Team in the air, like Australian Rules; 18 planes going together. I spent, had to be 500, or literally that you saw sometimes

How can you tell, can you tell me just…?

I just can't think of the words, had to have been 500, we would have said nice work Rev, but still it's not enough or something like that.

02:30 Bit silly, but we did have nearly complete control of the air. I think that really went a long way to win the battle at El Alamein.

What knowledge at the time did you have of the high number of Australian casualties?

I wasn't at El Alamein that long, only lasted a few weeks, but they,

03:00 our blokes were sent in and they were knocked over left and right in the attacks. When we went in that night, we were lucky, we only had, our section leader got bowled over, but there would have been other casualties. But when the Germans attacked our platoon I'd say half of our platoon were wiped out. And we survived.

How was your section

03:30 **leader bowled over?**

We were going into attack that night, a bullet collected him as he was going in with his gun. I thought he was dead. But I believe when I come home and I saw a letter in 2/32nd paper over in Perth

04:00 That's where I first heard about it. I can't think of his name, but he's living up in Queensland, and he's up there OK. But he's in hospital now. But I thought he was dead that night. I'll tell you a funny thing, as we charged in, going into action, the whole

04:30 company anyhow, one of the officers, we were all leaning forward to dodge the bullets, and our officer, he was saying, "Stand up straight." He was standing up straight himself, but by crikey I reckon that was ridiculous. Going as hard as they could without falling over. He was singing out, "Stand up straight." I think that was ridiculous.

05:00 He was brave, I'd say, anyhow. And not too many noticed that, but I noticed it. I had the Bren gun; we were leaning over going forward, as hard as, the bigger chance you got of hitting something.

What was sort of medical support was there for the injured?

05:30 Every unit had stretcher-bearers. They were always busy there, the done a great job, the stretcher-bearers. One time in Tobruk, one of our blokes trod on a mine, ruined his ankle; we didn't have any stretcher-bearers there, what we did,

06:00 we put our overcoats together and put guns with a bayonet on the end of them and used them to carry him out. Marvellous what they can do.

How close to you were the stretcher-bearers at El Alamain?

I don't know how they picked up our section leader, they would have got him

06:30 next morning or that night. They would have been there in the headquarters company; they always had them there. They weren't in our section, but they were in another part of the headquarters company.

07:00 **What do you think now of the commanders, Montgomery, at the Battle of El Alamein, particularly the amount of Australian casualties?**

I think they did pretty well, I think there were more casualties on the German side. They were sent in similar to what they sent our fellows in. Bit like in the First World War, they just sent them in

07:30 I think it was a little bit like that, but I think Montgomery was a wonderful soldier. I think our colonel was a great soldier, our top men were.

How did they prove themselves to be good soldiers?

Hardly clever enough to answer that one,

08:00 I think they did the right thing, most of the time. In the Battle of El Alamein, it was a clever bit of work the way Montgomery he had his troops, Australians in one place, in vital places. I think that was pretty clever on his part. He organised a lot of these dummy tanks and guns that they had spread around

08:30 the place. Just the, well, that's all good tactics.

Did you use dummy tanks?

They had them there, but I don't know, I didn't have anything to do with them, but they had them there, built there. In additions they would have looked all right. They were pretty clever men.

How common in your experience

09:00 **was the use of dummy rocks, dummy tanks, fake scenery?**

The dummy tanks at El Alamein, they would have been pretty generous, they were spread all across the front line, but as far as the dummy rocks in Syria, they were just something to keep us busy, I think. They wouldn't be much good.

09:30 **You mentioned at Benghazi that there were lots of different nationalities; Indians, Australians, British, how did the Italians treat the different nationalities?**

They didn't do anything. They brought the skilly in and that's about all they did. They didn't treat them in any way,

10:00 give them bread or anything like that. Not even lemons, and they grow lemons over there pretty well. I'd say they didn't treat them any worse either way.

10:30 **When you were at Udine, you mentioned that you were interrogated, what did the interrogation room look like?**

We were just out on the parade ground; they didn't go into any sort of hut at all. Tables there, in front of the goalpost, and they'd check your wallet or whatever you had, but they didn't. They didn't worry us. We were told not to give

11:00 anything more than our number or rank. That's all we did.

Can you describe what the conditions in that camp were like?

I'd say it was well organised, I think it was a hundred men to a tent, men to a hut rather.

11:30 All made of pine boards one above the other, a bed. Everything was kept pretty clean and looked pretty good. Probably only new, maybe a year or so old probably. Every so many days they'd put on a search.

12:00 And everything would have to be pulled to pieces. Beds would be pulled to pieces, they were all fitted together, all your gear would be taken out. Italians'd inspect it; they'd keep you out for hours on the parade ground. When they got sick of it themselves, they'd tell us we could go inside. I don't like the Italians much, the way that I got treated anyhow.

12:30 I went to the ablutions to have a wash and shower, almost back to the camp, and a bullet landed alongside my foot. Nearly instantly these Carabinieri [paramilitary police] guards were there. But the old commandant of the camp, he wanted his gaol inside of the camp.

13:00 He wanted it kept it full. I think I came into that category, to keep the gaol full. So I got grabbed by these Carabinieri and I had to go back to me hut and get me dixie and away I went to gaol. I did 30 days there. I never got a charge sheet, just put in gaol and let out after 30 days. And we was

13:30 this gaol, they'd be in a little cell, six or eight men. Side by side on a wooden shelf, sorta. We'd come out for an hour every day, and through the day all we'd get was a ladle of skilly.

14:00 I was never happy about that. That was pretty rough treatment. Besides that, do you remember something about the Dieppe raid by the Canadians?

Can you explain?

At the English Channel, they wanted to test it out, the German defences on France. They called it the Dieppe raid, a few thousand Canadians did it, they captured a few Germans

14:30 before they got out, but not many got out, nearly all Canadians were captured or killed. What they did with the Germans, they captured them and manacled, put handcuffs on them like that. And while I was in the gaol in, hardly worth thinking about,

15:00 while I was in the gaol, nearly every day they'd put these handcuffs, we called them 'darbies', and you'd sit like that for hours of day time, because the Canadians did that to the Germans. Their commandant got word of that and he thought he'd try it on us. Actually, it wasn't, it was just the indignity of it.

15:30 It wasn't hurting at all; you just had to sit there with these darbies on your hands. But I got out of there

after 30 days and our sergeant in charge of all the POWs, I think he was a New Zealander, he organised for me to go on a

16:00 working party of a Roman Catholic chapel they were building. Help with the civvies [civilians], not that there was any work, but an extra loaf of bread. And that was pretty good. And then I was in there the, my section, it was the day we were captured, we all stuck together. They got taken away on a

16:30 party outside the camp permanently. I don't know where it was, but somewhere in Italy, they had to go work on a property, farm or anything at all, I don't know. Anyhow, when Italy threw the towel in they capitulated, these mates of mine.

17:00 They were released when the war finished, where they were, but the Germans came and recaptured them, and they made them dig their own graves.

17:30 Pretty terrible that, wasn't it. Not long after that I was, a mate and I, we were

18:00 sent out onto a forestry place to work in the bush, falling pine trees and chopping them up, sawing them up into lengths. That was in, but there was a lot happened before that, though.

I just want to take you back to that first working party, Jim, how common was it for the men in the camp

18:30 **to go outside on these working…?**

That was the first one that I had to do with in Udine that went out on a working party. But I guess there were others that went out. There were thousands of men there. There was a compound, nearly a thousand Australians there. There was nearly a thousand Pommies, and Indians,

19:00 there would have been just as many Indians. Thousands of people there.

How was the camp divided according to the different nationalities?

One section was Australian, one Indian; they were all on their own. Pommies and the others. Three different groups. Might have been a few others mixed in, I think there were a few Canadians.

And were you still with members of your

19:30 **battalion who had been captured at this stage?**

Yes, just a few. Half a dozen of them in the platoon were knocked off on the day I was taken. They separated us. Alan Bogie and myself, his name's mentioned in that book quite a bit. He's a great mate. He and I went out,

20:00 he was a lance corporal; he didn't have to go on the working party 'cause he was a corporal. But he wanted to go so he could be with me. So he told them he was just a private. We left that camp eventually, after the Italians threw the towel in, we were taken by train into Austria. The Germans around, they never opened the gates at all.

20:30 The Italians should have done that. They should have opened the gates and let us out no matter what happened to us, but they didn't. And the Germans around the camp with flamethrowers and you couldn't do a thing; you had to get straight onto the train to Austria.

Can I just ask you about that working party, where did you, how far did you travel to outside of the camp to build the church?

21:00 It was in the camp. Right in the whole area that chapel, beautiful it was.

21:30 I didn't mind, I enjoyed my time doing that. Wasn't very big, only a small place, probably hold about, might have held a hundred. But they were civvies that come in, and we just used to go and carry some bricks or whatever they needed. But it was something to do. But I still think really that the New Zealand officer in charge of us, he wangled that for me. He realised I got a rough time going to gaol without a charge sheet.

So, that time that you did spend in gaol, and you

22:00 **were sitting handcuffed, what were you thinking?**

God knows. Down in the dumps, no doubt about that. We reckoned they wouldn't leave it on us all day.

22:30 I thought it was nearly the lowest of the low to be treated like that. But that's one of the reasons why I don't like the Italians.

23:00 **How were you treated by the Italian civilians who worked on the church, compared to the guards?**

We had nothing to do with them, really; they were good, very friendly. They knew their work and done a

great job.

Could you tell me what your day-to-day routine would be, what

23:30 **time you would wake up.**

We'd get out on the parade ground about eight o'clock. Then whatever we had in our, was left in our food parcels, we had breakfast, and after that we'd come back and sit around; we'd do a lot of walking around the compound. You could walk around the whole compound.

24:00 The compound was up 14 foot high, I'd say, very high. The guards all the way around, right up high, they could see everything.

What knowledge did you have at the time of where the closest town was?

Well, Udine, I think is a fairly big town but, I don't think

24:30 I was ever in it or saw what it was, pretty big town. It's in the earthquake area, 'cause not so many years ago it got knocked about very badly, Udine, that earthquake, but nothing happened while we were there.

Beyond the compound, what did the countryside look like?

I think typical to England, all beautifully

25:00 green, looked good, agricultural. Very good country, I think.

What sort of crops were people able to grow inside the compound?

They had their little gardens, the 6th Division fellows had their gardens, and I think they got their fertilizer from the latrines. If you can believe that.

25:30 But they grew, oh, all sorts of, we never had a garden in my time there, but the 6th Division fellows did, they'd been there since Greece and Crete. 18 months ahead of us.

How did those long term 6th Division POWs seem to you when you arrived?

Very, very friendly, good, and they told us all the things to do

26:00 that was, and they had, don't know how, they had crystal sets, I don't know much about it. But they had the story of the war all the time. They knew what was going on. They were able to hide it from the Italians in all the searches, we always knew what was going on while I was in the camp. How the war was going. They were very good, the recent Crete fellows. They had had

26:30 a hard time. I think they marched for hundreds of miles to get into Austria. And when they, when we, just before we shifted from Italy

27:00 we knew we were going the next day or so, our blokes grabbed everything they could we'd bought, and they bought the pianos I think. I don't know how they'd bought them, but somehow they'd got them in, some way. But they couldn't take them with them so they smashed them. Pianos, beautiful pianos.

Where were the pianos?

In the little huts. I think the Italians were pretty musical and they wanted to keep us entertained, but,

27:30 and they also gave us, each compound got a, what's these things you play with your fingers and air in them? Accordions

Piano accordions

Each compound got one of them. That was very good. And the Catholic people came to the camp and they got new names, picked up, and sent, relayed our names back to

28:00 Australia. That would have been probably the first news they would have got back in Australia of where we were, a lot of us. That was very good.

So were they local Catholic priests?

Yes, they were. They used to come and get the names of everybody. We were a new lot coming in there. I'd say they done that

28:30 to all the others. But when we went in them, I was sure it was them that got our names back to Australia, or told somebody, so they got to know where we were.

Given that you had those musical instruments, what sort of songs were the men singing?

All the latest, no music in me, but a lot of them had a lot of music in them

29:00 and talented and they'd, I don't know just anybody that played the piano accordion, but a beautiful

instrument. I don't know what happened to them in the finish, they may have taken them into Germany. I know some of the camps I was in, that one at Hinterhof, we were out in the timber country, some Pommies, they're

29:30 very clever on the banjo and things like that and they always wanted to know what was the latest tunes. I couldn't tell them much.

Was the Catholic Church completed while you were in the camp?

I think it was, I don't know if they had any services in it. We used to have a Church of England major who used to come into our camp.

30:00 He was a POW too. He used to give services in one of our huts, but weren't too many people, I always went, but there was never too many did. I think they didn't have much religion in them. Most of the blokes. He used to come every week, that old fellow.

How important was, were your religious beliefs

30:30 **at that time?**

I didn't, just took things as they come, didn't know what to expect. I don't know what the, I always went to church wherever I was. Still go.

What sort of talk was there about escaping in that camp?

31:00 The Australians in Number Three Compound, they made a tunnel, got out, just a few. It's written in some books how they did it. They started a tunnel under their own hut, got going underneath, and kept bringing the soil back, dispersing it all over the place. Got away with it

31:30 and got outside the far fence, the barbed wire where the guards were. But they got caught. Somebody got out, and then there was half of them still trying to get out through the tunnels, then somebody spilled the beans and they got caught. The Italians got them out all right, let them come out, but some got away, I don't know how far they got. It was a mighty effort

32:00 Must have went, say, 60 or 80 yards underground. I wouldn't like to go in that, I hated going under in the tunnel. 'Cause all the camps said they had plans to escape. Every camp I was in, that was the first thing you heard about in a new camp.

What would you hear

32:30 **about the escape plans?**

When you got to know a few of the blokes, they'd sort of catch on that you was interested. They always kept it pretty secret, they wouldn't let everybody know. I think every camp has an escape policy. My mate and I, Alan Bogie, we got out

33:00 when we went to the timber place. We were at a, it was only a big house, it held about 40 men, I suppose. A lot of rooms. We was always gonna, we stored our chocolate and cigarettes up for get-away day. This day we wanted to get away while there was a one-eyed guard was on. 'Cause we hated him, he was always spying on

33:30 everybody. So we, it didn't make any difference the day that suited us, we had a game of soccer on the side of a hill, which is not very good, but we played, and then we went straight to the toilet to have a wash and get towels, grabbed our files, we all had files to sharpen our axes when we were working in the bush. We took a file each and sneaked up the dead ground gully

34:00 to a fixed wire fence. Filed away, but filing away with a file made an awful noise. We thought we'd get picked up, but we didn't. Away we went.

Before we go on and talk more about that escape attempt, how did you know that the Italians had thrown in the towel? Can you recall

34:30 **the feeling?**

There was no announcement whatsoever in the camp. So I suppose some of the people who talked different languages got to know. But there was no announcement whatever. The first thing we knew the Germans were rounding the tanks and they opened the gates and we had to go. But that wasn't a fair go. But still, the Germans were in

35:00 control of the country, really. Hadn't thrown in the towel then.

So what did the Italian guards do when the Germans arrived?

I wouldn't know, they would have known it was all over; their government threw the towel in. The Italians might have thrown their guns away before that.

35:30 Before the Germans got there. But I think the Germans were in the know. 'Cause we didn't know a thing until the Germans got there.

Can you describe to me the number of Germans that arrived?

There wasn't a great lot, but they were all so well armed you wouldn't. One man with a flamethrower's equal to 20 others, I'd say. Plenty of them there, quite a lot there.

36:00 They would have had some tanks and big stuff too. And there was only one gate out of the compound. It was pretty easy for them.

What did you think about what your future would be under the Germans as opposed to the Italians?

I didn't like the Italians, but it turned out not so bad

36:30 While we were in Italy we had to sew a red patch on our trousers. And also one in the middle of the back, they gave us, six inches square in the middle of our back. That was the way they could identify us if we were POWs. The moment we got into Austria, the Germans made us pull them off and throw them away.

37:00 One thing in their favour, then in the camps, the Germans, they always had plenty of potatoes, we never had a potato in Italy and yet they grew them there. While we was in Germany the cooks had heaps of potatoes, we weren't allowed to peel them, they had to be cooked in their skins. The cooks'd do it that way.

37:30 That was another point in their favour. But I know they treated the Russians dreadful. Russian prisoners of war.

What contact did you have with Russian prisoners of war?

None at all, we saw them, we'd be in one compound alongside them. They were, they used to call us, what they call

38:00 us, capitalists, they knew that we volunteered to go over there, they would have all been conscripted, Germans too, I suppose. We were volunteers, they called us capitalists. But they were friendly; they got an awful time by the Germans. No food parcels, don't think they belonged to the Red Cross or something. Might have been something to do with it. They were dying of typhus

38:30 right alongside our camp. Starving and dying and freezing. We were a lot better off.

How did the Germans transport you from Italy to Austria?

We went by train through the Alps.

39:00 The train wasn't far away from where we were in Udine. Straight through the Alps to Austria.

So can you explain how you got from the camp to the train?

We would have marched with the Germans behind us with flamethrowers and things, we just had to go, had to go.

39:30 There was no way out of that. They used to demonstrate the flame-throwers. I can't remember much going through the tunnels; it's all tunnels to get through there. Can't remember the town we went to in Austria. A big place.

40:00 But from there we were sorted out to go on different jobs. Different ones. My mate and I went to, forestry place.

So when you arrived in Austria, what did the Germans do then?

They sorted us out, any officers, any NCOs, weren't allowed to work. They were kept on their own. But my mate, he told them he was only a private. We stayed together. They didn't keep them very long on their own. They had to get out. The Germans wanted everybody to work.

40:30 We weren't very long in that place at all. Shifted out to a camp, Camp Hinterhof I think.

So while you were being sorted out into these parties that were going to go off and work, were you in a prison camp?

41:00 Yes, we were in a prison camp, but I can't remember, we weren't in there very long. I think we got fed fairly well.

41:30 There were no Red Cross parcels there. But when we got to this Hinterhof, eventually we used to get food parcels, they didn't come regular. Probably once or twice a month. But when you got them you was on top of the world.

Tape 7

00:31 **Jim, I was wondering if you could talk to me about the Red Cross parcels and how they would arrive?**

They would have come through Geneva, I'd say. But a lot of countries supplied Red Cross parcels, especially Argentina. But I think the best was Canadian parcels, they had fish and

01:00 nearly everything in them; big block of chocolate, biscuits, tea. They were very good, but they had to go through the German authority; when we got our parcels, anything that was tinned had to be punctured. So we couldn't store it up or keep, to see if they could find a

01:30 compass or something like that in it. Which we did, but I never found one, but they used to find compasses in the tins, meat tin or any sort of a tin; but it had to be punctured. That meant that you nearly had to eat everything straight away. The food part of it. That wasn't good in a way, 'cause the other

02:00 parcels only come, probably average once a fortnight. Which I know some of the silly beggars had competitions to see if they could eat the full parcel as quick as they could. Have a competition. But that's ridiculous what they did, some of them. I think they kept the blokes alive in a big way. With them we were on top of the world.

02:30 Without it they were semi-starved.

How would you cook the food that came?

That's interesting. When we were in camps in Italy, the 6th Division blokes from Crete, they were clever, they got a, don't know where they got the little wheels from, four inch wheels, they nailed onto an axle

03:00 and nailed onto a board. They'd build a little fan, and I don't know what you call it, you'd turn the little handle and it'd fan fire into a little container. You could cook anything in that. All the blokes had to go out from each hut to a certain area to do their cooking.

03:30 It was something to see, they were string on these little trolleys, they'd lead them out onto the ground and then they'd do their cooking. I never forgot that. Our blokes soon got one going, my mate Alan. We used to make plum puddings. We used to roll the biscuits with a bottle, roll them into, make flour,

04:00 make a plum pudding. And rolled oats; as simple as anything. But you only had a certain time to go out to the parade ground, not the parade ground, the little area where you could do the cooking. About four o'clock of an evening, it was a sight to see. Dozens and dozens of these little trolleys out there with these gadgets.

What was the discipline like in the Italian camps?

04:30 They were evil, the Eyeties. That's one of the things I didn't like them about. If you were 40 or 50 yards away from a officer strutting by, they were very cocky in front of prisoners. You had to stand to attention while he walked 50, 60 yards past. If you didn't you'd get grabbed straight away by the Carabinieri

05:00 and in gaol for disrespect. That happened lots and lots of times. And our blokes weren't used to saluting anybody. Not much, anyhow. But that did happen; the discipline was over the odds. I think everything else was pretty straightforward.

When you went out on working

05:30 **parties, did you see many Italian locals?**

The only working party I went on was way out in the bush. At Hinterhof, and it was high up in the mountains. It was only, only had three months growing period up there, it was so high up. Beautiful looking place. But I think the countryside was

06:00 real agricultural land, most of it. The only people we had contact with were the workers, they were in charge of us, the forestry blokes. They'd tell us what we had to do. They were easygoing, very good, they were on our side.

I'm just a bit confused which country this is in at this stage.

Austria.

06:30 Very mountainous. They grew wonderful timber.

What would you do on that working party?

The only one I was at, the working part of it was, they had chainsaws out there, which they never had out here for another 10 years. In 1943 they had chainsaws to cut down trees. Simple as that, you could fall a tree in 10 minutes.

07:00 When it was felled, our next job was to saw it in certain lengths. The next job was take the bark off, it was one of my jobs, they called that a budler, I think. The bark peeled off easy. And then we used to take the bark, take it down to the road, which was a mile away,

07:30 and put it in, filled it up into piles, that wide and that high, bark along side by side. They had nothing to tie it with; I don't know how it stuck together. But we used to, when we done the job of getting off the bark, we had to take it down to the area. Something would pick it up.

08:00 Think they used to make, I dunno what they made of it. Used to use it for tanning, for one thing, but they would use it for something else too. Maybe firewood, then when the rain came or sleet, anything wet, these logs that we'd sawn up in certain lengths, ten, twelve foot long, we put them on our boots so we could walk on logs.

08:30 We'd strap them onto boots that had spikes on them. About six spikes down the front, then two on the heel, you could walk, nearly climb up a wall, nearly. And then they had a long steel thing with this handle in, it fairly long handle, you could reach out this piece of iron had a sharp point and you could dig it in and half a dozen,

09:00 three or four blokes could pull the logs anywhere. And then when it rained, or rain or sleet, these logs had to be slid down into the gully, I reckon easy a mile, flying head over turkey [head over heels]. They'd slide like anything down to the bottom. That was our job, really.

09:30 **When you were on that working party, were you away from camp for a long time?**

That working party, we used to go across the gully or river whatever it was, a mile to work. These hills where the timber was.

So you'd come back to the camp

10:00 **at night?**

At night, yeah. We'd get up and we'd have, I think there was coffee laid on, but it was what they call ersatz, make-believe coffee. They'd cook that up, the cooks had the stuff to make that up with. You'd have a cup of coffee and go to work, no breakfast. I think we used to come home for dinner. And we had plenty of potatoes

10:30 When we were Italy we never saw a potato. So that was pretty good. Then we used to walk past a stream, it was lousy with trout, we used to throw rocks at them, I don't know if we ever got any, but we never got any to take home. But there were plenty of trout in the stream. It was running all the time, beautiful clear water.

11:00 **I might just take you back to that journey you took from the Italian camp to Austria, how did you actually travel there?**

In train trucks, cattle trucks. That's all they were, same as what we'd have out here with cattle in them. There would be a door,

11:30 but they all locked. We never got out, I don't think.

And when you arrived in Austria, can you describe what the camp looked like?

It was only a staging sort of a camp we went to. Once the prisoners came in there, before they got them out to working parties. They wanted to have everybody working during the war. Even the,

12:00 they had thousands and thousands of French civilians and other countries in camps around the place. We weren't close to them, but I know they were there. Working in factories. Germans wanted everybody working. That's why we got shunted out to different places. Quick as they could get us, I think, which suited us fine.

So where were you actually living at this time?

This was,

12:30 it was Hinterhof, the name of the big double storey house; I think it was more of a guesthouse. And the German, Austrian big shots used to go out hunting the deer. Shooting. I think that's what it was built for. A resort, that sort of thing. But we were all in it

13:00 It was two storey, big, a lot of, must have been 40 was in that camp. We had a fence right round us.

Could you describe the living conditions in that house?

Pretty good. We had a good bed, each bloke had a bed of his own, and the house had to be kept very clean. Every weekend its floors washed out.

13:30 Tons of running water through the camp. It was quite good that way. The lighting was, but we did have heaters, it's a wonder the place wasn't burnt down, I wouldn't think. Both floors would have a heater in it, with pipes going up. And I reckon the pipes were red hot lots of times, but it was good, it wasn't cold.

14:00 Snow twelve foot high all around, a foot high around all the building. And we just had tracks of it. Wherever we wanted to go.

What kind of security was there to ensure you didn't leave the house?

A fence was right around, and there was a big guard out there too. So many guards camped in it. They weren't patrolling it at all. I think

14:30 the prisoners from Greece and Crete were happy to stop there. They were getting food parcels and plenty of brown bread and potatoes, they were quite happy there, they got the shock of their lives when my mate and I decided to escape. We didn't tell them, though. We got away after we'd had a game of soccer. We met someone up later, they reckon that

15:00 we were damn well mad to do that, leave a good place alone like that. It was a pretty good thing.

Could you tell me from the beginning about that escape plan that you hatched?

We'd planned it maybe six months beforehand, by putting, stockpiling chocolates and cigarettes and our shaving gear, had it all in a little Red Cross,

15:30 New Zealand butter tin; made a case out of a New Zealand butter tin. A work of art, it was about 15 inches long, with the lid and everything on it. Beautiful. Some tinsmith gave it to us in Udine, and I paid him with cigarettes for it. I gave him a lot more than what he asked for, because I didn't use them. Anyway, we had it chock-full when we were

16:00 ready to go. I'd had the toothache and I'd been down to the dentist with the guard, that's how I got that book. He went into a shop, I don't know how I paid for it but I got it. I didn't pinch it.

Which book was that?

The one that's got the original story with poetry, that red book. That's how I got it. And I had it all in me mind, what I had

16:30 written, or thought of before. When I started filling it up, I kept it, I don't think the Germans ever seen it, but I kept it in my own gear. They weren't, they didn't put any searches on to see what was going on, not while I was there.

Getting back to your plan for escape, you went to the dentist?

To get a tooth out, he was a big strong-looking dentist.

17:00 He pointed me to get in the chair. I pointed to the one what was aching. And he had the forceps in his hands all the time. He pulled it out, and it was the best tooth I've ever had out. I've had the lot out, but that one, it hurt coming out but no after-effects whatever. No novocaine, that's what makes it bad afterwards. And after I got back to the camp I was ready to go. I didn't want to go away with toothache,

17:30 I dreaded that. After we had this game of soccer, we had our gear ready, at all times. We grabbed the towels, we had a shower or something, grabbed the files and away we went. The dead ground; they couldn't see it from the guardhouse. It's a wonder they didn't have a better system, we just went up the gully, filed the wire and crawled out.

18:00 **How hard was it to file through the…?**

Not hard at all.

What were you using?

A file, an ordinary file, an ordinary file, it'd cut through anything. They've got sort of a flat edge on them and half a dozen rasps and I cut one side and bend the wire a bit and it would break. We had no trouble getting through that. Made a hole big enough to get through. Up the,

18:30 probably a thousand feet high, a couple of thousand, way uphill. We got up there and half an hour into the bush. What I did find there was a pamphlet dropped by the RAF [Royal Air Force] when they were flying over Austria during the war. It was two

19:00 big pamphlets, sheets of paper, a couple of sheets. "To Hitler on his Birthday, 20th of April." It had a sort of a cartoon of all these bombed out cities, Danzig and Stuttgart, I can't think of the name of… They were like bouquets. "For Hitler on his Birthday." And would you believe his birthday's

19:30 the same as mine? Pretty unbelievable. I brought that home; it's in the museum somewhere, over in Barrowville, Barrowville I think it is.

Where did you get the file from that you used?

With the Germans we had axes, we had to do a lot of chopping

20:00 with the axes. And they were to sharpen, keep the axes sharp. When a tree'd fall you'd have to trim the limbs off, a lot of limbs on them. The axe was the best way to do it. We used them a lot, and everybody

had a file. It's a wonder they didn't wake up to that.

So you made it into the bush up on the hill.

We just kept

20:30 going, our plan was to try and link up with the partisans in Yugoslavia. That was our plan, to make for that direction. Alan, he got a compass from somewhere, I'm not sure, could have got it out of one of the tins, in our food parcels. It showed us what direction to go. About the second night out there was the greatest storm I ever was in. Thunder

21:00 storm the whole works, and it poured rain, we were drenched. But the next day we dried out all right. They always say not to shelter under a tree, but we sheltered under this big pine tree. Anyhow, we kept on going across railway lines in the direction our compass pointed.

21:30 We were going pretty well. And then we were going through a lot of bush, there was a kid out, a young boy, about 14 years old, I think, and he spotted us, I think the word was out that somebody had escaped. He didn't come near us, but I think he went back to his father, his father happened to be a policeman, a damned policeman. That night we tried to cross the river.

22:00 We come to a bridge first, but it was loaded with guards on the bridge, we couldn't get across there. Anyhow, we thought we'd walk through the water. There was a raging torrent and I think we would've been drowned if we'd kept going. My mate was a bit taller than me; I think he saved me. It was cold and I was up chest high with water. I don't think we would have made it, it was a fairly wide

22:30 stream. But we went back to where we saw a dark clump of trees, we'd go and hide in there and see what we could do the next night. That was the idea. While we were going back to this clump there was a dog bark like blazes, must have spotted us or heard us. Then about nine o'clock the next morning I was having a shave, I like to always keep a bit tidy. And around us arrived the policeman with about half a dozen

23:00 civvies. They all had guns. Well, old Sydney was all right, but when Alan got the cigarettes out and gave them all some cigarettes we were getting along good with them, then we had to go back to the town. A good many mile, and there were a lot of people having a look at us, but we got to the policeman's house and

23:30 his wife could speak fluent English. They had kids, and we knew the guards would be around in a while to pick us up. To the farm. So we gave them chocolates and cigarettes and a little port to the policeman. I suppose we were the best godsend he ever met, I bet.

24:00 All the chocolates, beautiful chocolates, but it was going well when we was on the move. Anyhow, after that the guards took us to a camp; we had to front up to the forestry blokes that owned the timber that was being taken out of the bush. It must have been a big company, they were. We had to front up to them and they wanted to know why

24:30 we escaped, they were saying that all the other prisoners were quite content, and why did we get out? We just said straight out that it was a prisoner's duty to escape. They didn't say any more. But after that they, we was given on a charge sheet, absent without leave, I suppose, but not that at all.

25:00 But for escaping we were charged, and got sentenced to 21 days gaol. It was right up near the Swiss border. If we'd got out of there we would have been pretty close to Switzerland. But we didn't. We were considered gaolbirds after that. Wherever we went we were what they called Straflager.

25:30 That's where a lager is, a camp, and we didn't have much chance after that. But we done our bit. While they'd stopped us from escaping, anybody there at night, they'd have to take their pants off, and they were stored, put away under lock

26:00 and key. You couldn't go far without them. It was pretty smart of the Germans.

You mentioned that the policeman's wife spoke English.

Yes, she did, I don't know much about her, but she did.

What conversation did you have with her?

She wanted to know what we did at home; they couldn't believe that we'd volunteered to go to the war.

26:30 None of them could hardly believe that, none of them other people, they were all conscripted. She was very friendly.

How far away did you imagine the partisans were that you wanted to..?

We knew it would be hundreds of miles. We knew all about them because

27:00 they were playing up, causing a lot of trouble for the Germans, we knew that. But I think we would have been very fortunate to have got near them. Even then when you did they weren't all that good. They'd

nearly shoot you for a pair of boots, what I heard about them.

Did you have a particular town that you were aiming for?

We don't know, I didn't even know the towns, I didn't know anything about Yugoslavia; but we knew

27:30 that they were fighting the Germans very strongly. Causing a lot of trouble to the Germans. But the Germans treated them awful. Kill one of their men and they'd kill a hundred of theirs. Men, women and kids.

Could you describe the gaol that was near the Swiss border, could you describe what the gaol was like?

28:00 We didn't stop there very long at all. It would have been an enclosure, barbed wire. But they got us out nearly straight away to work somewhere else. We went to a city or town called Litzen. And we had to work around the factory, that was nearly straight away after our 21 days were up.

28:30 I got the terrible dose of the flu there, I was pretty sick, and the guard, he always used to come and get me to go and get the little bit of tucker they did give us, skilly and a bit of brown bread. I don't know why he had a bit of sympathy for me. Then there was another bloke, I'll never forget him, he was an Italian

29:00 and singing, he never stopped singing all the day in the gaol. I don't know what he did to be in there. But he had a terrific voice. He was one of those I do remember well during the 20 days. But as soon as that was over we were shunted off to another site to work round a factory. Digging holes for foundations for buildings or something. And the ground

29:30 was solid, solidly frozen pretty well. It was pretty hard work. That was one of the jobs. Another job was to unload gravel trucks would come in like rail trucks. My mate Bailey, he was as stubborn as Ned Kelly, he'd go on strike, he'd sit down on the job, and the guards

30:00 were nearly shooting him. When they come round every morning when you first arrived, you had to give them your name and number so they could put you down for pay. But we never got any pay. You'd give him your name in English, and the German, he could write it, no doubt, but he wouldn't accept it. He'd be doing his block, and the guard with him, nearly off their

30:30 rocker. He was a stubborn man. 'Cause I think they used to try them out, they'd go to the limit. They wouldn't get out to work, some of them. There was a New Zealander fellow there, he'd sit down in the hut and wouldn't get out. And the guard was roaring at him, put a bullet into the spout, and he still wouldn't go. I think eventually he did go, but he'd try them out.

31:00 **What where you wearing when you were a POW with the Germans?**

We eventually got British battledress. It was sent over from England, I suppose. It was Pommy clothes, and that was very good. We were all dressed, after a time in Germany, in clothes that came through the Red Cross, but we had good clothes there.

31:30 **You mentioned earlier that with the Italians you'd been given Italian clothing to wear, how difficult was that for you as an Australian soldier?**

You felt degraded all right. Completely degraded, because they were a bit like the clothes they wear today. These pants cut off about there, bit like that.

32:00 We put up with it; we couldn't do anything about it. We didn't like the red patches we had to sew on them.

What did the red patches, did they have words on them?

No, nothing at all, they were a real crimson piece of material, had to go on your knee and one in the middle of your back. So that if, I suppose, you escaped or anything like that you could be seen.

32:30 I make out the idea of it.

When you were working in the factory...

We was never in the factory, only outside it digging holes and anything like that, unloading trucks. But there were, 90 per cent of the workers in there were either French or

33:00 Belgian workers. They were conscripted, slaves they were. Most of them women. We didn't have any contact with them. We weren't allowed to. Be a criminal offence to talk to them, I think.

Did you have any idea how they were being treated?

Well, they looked fit enough,

33:30 they were young. They were capable of doing whatever work they had to do. They were always very, if they got news they'd speak to us very friendly, but I think they got treated very badly by the Germans.

But I'd say the Germans, troops and soldiers around the factories and that, were old timers, or

34:00 not fit for the front line. They weren't very good, but they could use their rifle butts all right. That's how they'd get you going.

34:30 **How much violence was there towards the prisoners?**

Not a lot, but if anybody was dragging the chain a bit, they'd bop them with the butt of their rifle, quick and lively. I never seen anybody, the only one that I've seen shot was old Socks Simons in Italy. But they,

35:00 if you did what they told you to do you'd get along all right. But we were fairly well fed there. After escaping that time we never got any more Red Cross parcels, I don't think I ever saw another one, because they weren't allowed. We used to go on sick parade, nothing wrong with us at all. I did have me fingers, a couple of them smashed

35:30 trying to lift a cement block, got caught underneath and didn't get away quick enough. Went to the, inside the factory, the girl there was doing a little bit of nurse work. Tied me hands up and that. I used to go back on sick parade when I didn't have to go to work.

36:00 Get out of work a lot, and used to go on sick parade. A lot of them used to break their arms and they wouldn't go on sick parade. Wouldn't go to work, I mean. I've seen them do that. They'd put their hand, arm over the corner of the bed and another bloke'd bash it with a lump of wood. They'd get out of work. Did I tell you about this doctor, he was on the outside? There was always a full bag of potatoes in the door of his surgery,

36:30 and everybody would deliberately go on sick parade to get their overcoat pockets full of potatoes. It was almost filled up. So he was on our side.

Whereabouts was the doctor?

At Litzen, it would have been in the town somewhere. The other sergeant that was in charge of us, he called for volunteers to

37:00 go on sick parade. We couldn't all go, but they used to take the limit if they could. Then after that it was, that was close to the finish and we were started, they disbanded the camp there and we started out on the forced march into the mountains, through the mountains.

Can I just ask you first where you were

37:30 **staying at Litzen, were you staying in similar accommodation to the previous camp?**

It was a POW camp, it was in barracks. It had a fence right round it. It had around 100 soldiers in it. They set it alight one night,

38:00 they'd be game to do that, set the kitchen alight. We all had our boots and cash locked up. That wasn't very nice, but I think they eventually got the fire out. They set the camp alight, our fellows. They'd come at anything.

Do you know how they set it alight?

They'd work out something, something from the kitchen maybe. That or they had matches, I suppose they had I don't know

38:30 about matches, never smoked. We were always issued with cigarettes, especially when we was, even in the army, in the food parcels too, there were so many packets of cigarettes, but I don't know about lighting, I never smoked and I never worried about it. But they'd find one way to light a fire.

Could you describe what happened that day when the fire was started?

You'd hear the

39:00 bells ringing for the fire brigade, I think the town had a fire brigade. I don't think they had a lot of water but they eventually got it out. I don't think it did that much damage, 'cause we were back in it again in a short time.

Were you taken out of the camp when that happened?

No, it was, fair bit of room outside the barracks. We were out there watching them do the best they could. I remember they didn't have much water in the hoses, and yet it's a wonderful country for water.

Was there any discipline for the people who started the fire, after?

Got no idea what happened to them, they mightn't even know who did it. Don't suppose they would, don't know about that. But they deliberately lit a fire.

39:30 Which is pretty dangerous. But I suppose the building would have been brick. The barracks would have been made out of brick.

Were there other attempts to escape at that particular barracks?

I know that they did have a plan going there to put a tunnel in. I was never involved in that.

40:00 'Cause, someone told me that they had a plan to escape, put a tunnel in. I don't know, we didn't stop at that place all that long. We were shifted around to various places, but they were all straflagers, we had to go to them.

40:30 **Could you explain what a straflager is?**

A German word, 'lager' means a camp and 'straff' really means 'trouble', I suppose. Straff means the same as, I don't know, get the dictionary for that. That's what they called them; Straflagers, and no Red Cross parcels came in while we were

41:00 in there.

How many of these camps were you shifted around in, in Austria?

One or two more after that one. But Litzen was the big one, big town there. It's a very big place. It was all the same sort of thing, outside work, round the factory…

41:30 End of tape

Tape 8

00:34 **Jim, you mentioned that in the Italian camp, the 6th Divvy guys had a crystal set, how did you know that the war was coming to an end in Austria, what signs were there?**

One of the main signs, we could see it in the sky. We used to see thousands of bomber planes flying from Italy to bomb Germany,

01:00 I think they used to go on to Russia, come back and do the same coming back. That's one of the reasons we knew it was getting that way. This is only in Austria that happened, but in Italy we didn't know much. They crystal set, I never seen one but I know they had one. And were very careful to keep it hidden when there was a search on.

01:30 We were right up to the spot on the war. They knew about the air raid.

So when these air raids were going over the camp what did you think that meant for your future, what did you think the German guards would do with you?

I thought of everything, I suppose, but

02:00 we were still in the camp. It was only when they took us out on the forced march into the mountains, as we climbed up higher, that's when we started to worry a little bit more, I think. I didn't think the Germans would do anything desperate.

So where did you think you were being taken on the march?

We didn't know, but it was higher up in the mountains, we nearly climbed it ever day, going up a bit further.

02:30 We used to go through to a big, I don't know, a big barn; there was hundreds and hundreds of soldiers marching, walking along, and they'd, some of them would stop here, some there. And they'd go to stop the night in the barn. The next day they'd go a bit further, wasn't altogether climbing up, but I don't know where they were going to, but it seemed to be going uphill most of the time.

03:00 **What were you eating along the way?**

I can't remember them giving us anything to eat at all. But our blokes, my mate Alan, the guards, as I said before, were a pretty decrepit lot, if you got away from them, and

03:30 the group was scattered out pretty well. You could easy duck off, one bloke could, not too many, and he come back with a great big rabbit, he had it in his blouse. Battledress blouse, he carried it there all day. We skinned it and cooked it. That was one day's feed. I think when we got to the barns of a night time they used to give us supper, probably some potatoes,

04:00 something like that, 'cause the Germans had plenty of potatoes, nobody else had them, Italy didn't have any, and they used to grow them there too.

Who owned these barns that you were staying in at night times?

They'd be German, well-to-do people, I'd say. They might have owned. Don't know what they'd, probably living on the trees in the forest, they might have been

04:30 (UNCLEAR), I don't know, they didn't have much fertile country around. It was nearly all pine trees, all

the trees were pine.

Overall, how were the men coping with walking this kind of distance?

I'd say most of them were pretty good. But there were some that was a bit doddery on their feet.

05:00 But we went through this village, you'd see these, oh, a lot of the old people would come out and bring water cans to give them a drink of water, or some food. Some of the ones they wouldn't worry about, the blokes were walking well. The ones that were dragging behind, they'd help them out a bit. The people were very good.

How did they treat the German

05:30 **guards?**

The people?

The locals.

I don't know, I don't think they'd have much time; they wouldn't be able to do anything. The Germans would dictate to them what they wanted. They'd get all the food they wanted. I think it was a pretty grim time, the food was very scarce.

06:00 **While you were being marched through Austria, what evidence did you see in these towns of the Nazi regime?**

I'll answer that and say that, not a thing at all. Didn't destroy anything in the towns, because it was their own country then. We didn't know a thing about the, what do they call it,

06:30 when they, get rid of the Jews, never knew a thing about it till after the war. And yet it was going on all the time. We didn't know about that.

Were there rumours?

Not really, we didn't know. Had no idea that the Germans were treating the Jews, well, I didn't, and I don't think anybody else did. They brought in Germany

07:00 they brought in Hitler's book, Mein Kampf, I read that. He hated the Jews then and he hated the Russians at the same time.

How did you acquire a copy of Mein Kampf?

The Germans brought it into the camp. I think they had visions of trying to persuade some of the prisoners to turncoat.

07:30 I do believe there's one or two that did in other camps. But nothing happened in our place.

What makes you think that there were turncoats in the camps?

The idea that one or two blokes went over to the Germans, joined the Germans. I think a lot of the countries did that too. A lot of Italians would have joined them.

08:00 But I'm pretty sure there was a very pretty paltry few, but there was a few.

So what did you think about Mein Kampf when you read it?

I didn't think much about it, but he was a maniac, I think. He should never have got where he was, but it's the people's own fault,

08:30 they allowed him to get where he was. And he was clever with it. Anybody who was against him, he got rid of them.

When you were walking through Austria, what sort of support did you see for Hitler?

There was nothing on the roads, they were all miles away. At the front or somewhere. Nothing at all. What I did notice, especially around Litzen, the young people, only kids

09:00 10 or 12 years old, marching every Sunday morning, Saturday morning, singing songs of victory and all that, and waving flags. They were brainwashed, right from that age.

What did they look like?

They were really well dressed, in uniform.

09:30 **So when you were marching through Austria, can you tell me what the end point was? What happened when you stopped marching?**

We only stopped at a barn or a big shed; they're quite big, bigger than this house, the barns. They were mainly

10:00 to store, feed their cattle what they had in the winter time. That's where we stopped. Probably had plenty of hay there to sleep, it wasn't cold, it was pretty good.

So what happened then, once you stopped marching?

We kept on going till the Yanks arrived.

10:30 And the last place we was at you couldn't, somebody said the Yanks were at the gates. And that spread all through the camp. That was really the end of it. End of the war for us. The Yanks, they arrived in a jeep, I think, for a start, next day there was quite a number of American officers

11:00 telling us what to do, what we couldn't do. Told us to stay where we were until they got the trucks ready to pick us up.

So at what point did you realise that the war in Europe was over?

We knew then when the Yanks arrived. It was over then, 'cause the next day, two mates of mine, we went for a walk. Supposed to stop in the camp, but we went

11:30 walking along a main road. Bumper to bumper with German trucks. And their troops all downhearted, they knew the war was over. One bloke pulled his medals off, and gave them to me. An Iron Cross. I remember they were bumper-to-bumper, miles of them I'd say, poor beggars; they were just like we were at.

12:00 El Alamein. Down in the dumps. From there I'd say we were motor trucked to Salzburg, I think it was. Salzburg

12:30 Aeroplanes were there to pick us up, and they flew us into Reims in France, we flew over big cities, and you should have seen the bomb craters all around the cities. The areas caved in, side by side. They certainly bombed them to pieces.

13:00 **Going back to when the Americans arrived, can you remember exactly who told you that the war was over in Europe?**

I don't know if anybody told us. I think we guessed it was over when the Americans got to that stage. I think we all knew it was over then. But I don't think anyone expressly

13:30 told us.

And what did the Americans look like, what were they travelling in?

A pair of jeeps, two jeeps came along, only two men in the front, two men in each, but they were, they knew there were camps, prisoners about, and they just wanted to find us. Then it was, next day, when we walked along that road.

14:00 Just there were endless trucks of the Germans. They weren't allowed to move, I'd say, they had to stop alongside their trucks.

And what can you recall about the town where you were when the Americans arrived, what did it look like?

It was only a big barn where we were. No town there. But everybody cooeed and threw their hats in the air

14:30 and went mad.

Can you tell me how it happened, that this German soldier gave you his

15:00 **medal, can you describe to me what happened?**

He was only a very young fellow. We was on the road and he was down below the road. He would have known the war was ended. He come up to me and he pulled his medals off and he gave them to me. Like that. I really should have sent that Iron Cross back to him at some time or other

15:30 but I gave it away to one of my nephews. Probably up in Grafton somewhere now. They were down in the dumps, absolutely downhearted.

What feelings did you have about them at that stage?

They weren't enemies then. They were harmless,

16:00 they'd thrown down there arms. They were just as down hearted as ever we were at El Alamein when we got captured. Same sort of thing. But they were only young fellows, poor beggars.

Can you describe to me what it feels like to be taken a prisoner?

It's nearly impossible to describe it.

16:30 Downhearted, didn't want it to happen. But you can't do anything about it. It's a terrible feeling; you

couldn’t get any worse, I don’t think. To be beaten like that.

17:00 **So what happened after the German soldier gave you the medal, where were you transported to next?**

17:30 It was probably the next day the American trucks arrived and carted us to Salzburg, it was a big town and that was very good. No one decided to clear out, they all stopped together. We went straight to the aerodrome.

What did the

18:00 **Americans feed you?**

I nearly forget that, we were too excited to eat. No, I don’t know, can’t remember what they gave us. They would have given us something, I suppose. But it would have been the next day, and we would have been, they mightn’t have given us anything.

Were you given new clothes?

No. No we had English battledress on, that was very good. Looked good with that

18:30 But we had to sort ourselves out into about 22 to go in each plane, and the planes were Lancaster bombers. They took about, carry about 22 soldiers. And there was no seats in them whatever, just the same as they were on bombing flights, they were.

19:00 Wires, millions of wires everywhere. But they were great to be in one of them Lancaster bombers. Best planes of the war, I think. They flew us to Reims in France.

You mentioned that there were bomb craters; can you describe what they looked like from the air, if you were able to see anything?

You could only see the craters, but the further way out from the city they were a bit scattered,

19:30 but they were side by side, so you could tell the whole city had been flattened.

And what was the mood like amongst the men on that plane?

Very, very happy, couldn’t be better, we were on our way home really. That was really good. At least everybody was fairly fit.

20:00 Only a short flight to get into Reims, might have been. No, I’ve got it wrong there, we flew in American Dakotas into Reims, and from Reims, that’s where we got into the Lancasters. These Dakotas weren’t allowed to fly into England. The Lancasters did,

20:30 that’s why we got on the Lancasters. To fly into England. The Dakotas were good planes, but the Americans would fly along with the door open, as casual as anything. You wouldn’t believe it.

What were your impressions of the American soldiers compared to the other nationalities you encountered during the war?

I liked the Yanks, I reckon they were pretty good soldiers.

21:00 Not right from the start. At the start they weren’t doing much good at all. They were as good as the best from what I’ve heard. They treated us really well, couldn’t be better. Reims was a great city, we could see a bit of it. I remember the cathedral had the top knocked

21:30 off it. I never forgot that

What sort of celebrations did you have while you were in France?

Nothing, there was no beer or anything like that. We didn’t have anything to celebrate with. I don’t think we did any celebrating when we got to England, much. I don’t recall. We were anxious to get home whenever we could. But we had to get dressed in

22:00 Australian Army uniform when we got to England, took us about a month to get dressed like that.

Where were you taken to when you arrived in England?

I’m not sure, Bournemouth. On the South Coast, I think.

22:30 We had a good time there, right on the seaside. That was, barracks there, we were well treated there. Eventually we were, they had a boat ready for us. I think it was the Mauritania; it was fairly big, probably 30 or 40,000.

23:00 And when we were ready we got on there and must have left the, I don’t know what harbour it would be. Do they have a harbour in Bournemouth? Don’t know; don’t know where we left from. But we went straight across to the Panama Canal. Went through it

23:30 From there we went down to Honolulu first. We saw Pearl Harbor, all the boats that was splattered there. In the harbour.

What did Pearl Harbor look like?

It was battered to blazes, with these boats still on the harbour floor. Great big boats. Aircraft carriers and battleships

24:00 It was awful to see. Well, it didn't take them long to build new ones. It was a great sight in Honolulu, the town part of it, beautiful beach, buildings. From there we went to Wellington in New Zealand.

24:30 Only stopped there, probably overnight, couldn't see anything much there. And from there to Sydney.

What did you do on the ship to pass the time?

25:00 Not very much, didn't, I don't think we were allowed any drinking or anything like that. Might have done a bit of reading. There was nothing to do. The boat was pretty quick; it didn't take long to, once you got into the Pacific. Walk along the deck and watch the fish if there was any about, that's about all. Bit of exercise.

25:30 **Can you describe the scene in Sydney when the boat arrived, what it looked like?**

Around the harbour the boat came in all right, I think there were boats coming in all the time, but our boat had a big crowd there.

26:00 My sister was there to meet me. Yes, it was the day. See, I had a two 'X' number and I had to be discharged in Queensland.

26:30 Otherwise I could have got discharged in Sydney, but I had to go to Queensland. But I didn't go straight away, I went to Macksville and got off there and gradually seen the rest of my family all around. Later on I went to Burleigh Heads. Tossed out there.

Can you remember what you first said to your sister when you got off the ship?

27:00 No, I don't think I… "Home again," or something. In our family we weren't very, how do I describe it? Dad wouldn't give you any credit for anything; he wouldn't knock you for anything.

27:30 What do you call that?

Practical?

He was practical, all right. I can't think, there's a better word for it than that. It's just like if you were playing cricket and you got a hundred runs, he wouldn't pat you on the back or anything like that or shake your hand. Not emotional at all. He was, when I got home to Macksville,

28:00 he just shook me hand, that's all it was. But Kath was different, I'd have to say that, she was very emotional.

Can you tell me about how she was different?

My father had no emotion in him at all, I don't think; probably he kept it under his hat. But Kath was,

28:30 give her a big cuddle and all that. No, but my father, he was always like that. He was a wonderful man but he had no emotion in him.

How much did you want to talk about the war when you got home?

I didn't want to talk at all, I told them a bit what I did.

29:00 One day I did tell him about the poetry that I wrote. He just told me straight out that he wasn't very keen on poetry. That hurt a little bit because, well, I think he had the idea that anyone who wrote poetry was a bit cuckoo. Just a little bit. He didn't say it, but I think he had that idea.

29:30 He didn't like poetry much. Anyhow, I think it kept me going. I would have been lost without it, I think.

How often now do you read over that poetry that you wrote during the war?

Every now and again I'll have a look at it. I know it's not very good, but it's something I did

30:00 myself. No, I don't mind having a glance at it. Did you say you've got the book that I sent to Elizabeth? What are you going to do with it?

We'll talk about that afterwards. What was it like

30:30 **after you were discharged to become a civilian?**

In my opinion, it didn't affect me at all. I don't think it did. I stood up to it. Was quite all right. I was lucky enough to join up with me cousin and work there. I don't mind working. I loved working. I could

work all day without

31:00 any trouble. But I think it was no problem at all to me. I know lots of people had trouble, but I coped all right.

What did you know of people having problems readjusting?

I know different ones been to Vietnam and they come home something shocking. Couldn't take it.

31:30 But I don't know anybody else in the Second World War couldn't take it. I know blokes that got addicted to drinking after the war. Quite a lot of them did that. Blokes up at Maleny, they were different people altogether when they came home.

32:00 **What correspondence did you have with your family when you were a prisoner of war?**

We always got lettercards to send home. I always wrote when I got anything to write on, or I used to write to

32:30 nearly everybody. Some in Queensland, some in Macksville, Melba, my sister, I wrote to her nearly ever 10 days if I had a way of getting a letter away. I used to get cards in the army sometimes. Printed card, you just have to fill in the "I am well," that sort of thing, just a printed sentence

33:00 to sort of, you'd tick it to say, card to send home. That was happened a few times. That was when you were in the front line sometimes.

You'd spent a long part of the war as a prisoner, how difficult

33:30 **was it to spend that amount of time not in combat?**

No trouble at all. We weren't fit enough most of the time. We were only second class, I'd say, 'cause when you'd stand up you'd get dizzy and have a blackout. We weren't very fit, I don't think we, I used to occupy meself,

34:00 if I had anything to read, all right. And your mates were always good fellows. A good time with them. And not one that wasn't my mate.

Looking back what do you think of the necessity of World War 11?

34:30 There's no doubt about it, it had to come. Germany, captured, took Poland when they were told not to. They went in there, that started it. I think they, Hitler had to be stopped, 'cause he and Russia were going to rule the world. And he would have turned on Russia too. But that was the plan. He had a thousand years Reich,

35:00 that's what he planned for. For the country. He was enough to be stopped, I think. And he was so cruel with it, wasn't he. He butchered six million Jews. But I don't know why we didn't know about that. But I don't think any of us did. I think one

35:30 thing came into the camp one time when we were in Germany, it was a list of who's who, anybody who had a Gold-something in their name, they were marked people straight away. Jews, and they would be obliterated.

Did you know anyone in the camp who was Jewish?

No.

36:00 No, I didn't.

36:30 The second paragraph down, I'll probably break down halfway.

\n[Verse follows]\n With swelling hearts admit me\n And a swallowing throat\n The lonely love of soldiers\n The last that some have wrote\n As down as many letters…\n

I can't read this, start again eh. Go on to the next verse.

\n[Verse follows]\n Too oft those printed field cards\n With the lines that I am well\n

37:00 With sole and scanty tokens of the front line we could tell\n

But today more than ever\n Within this dream I thought\n Oblivious to action in the battle to be fought\n At 14 hundred hours the turmoil still unturned\n Tanks, shells, the dogfights while the scorching sun a burn.\n 32nd Section's agog in highest glee\n The waiting was all over\n Tonight our turn would be\n

37:30 Just like the daily muster to learn the night's detail\n

To pack and choose killing guns to carry on the trail\n The boys had swift assembled and as the task was said\n The unleashed battle fever left faces fiery red\n Here is grand deficiency, unseen indecision\n For these are men, these Desert Rats, Aussie 9th Division\n Defenders strip machine guns and with the

graphite grease\n Assure perfect action of each automation piece.\n

38:00 There are storm troops stamped deep on every face\n

Nor would we at this hour choose sweet home to this place\n As across the drift they muster\n All smartly battle dressed\n There’s a thrill that’s exotic, exalting every breath\n The crimson sun dips in dust\n Its burning beams nigh spent\n

38:30 As rocketing smoke flies from every shell burst rent\n

In the final crows of dusk\n Sounds a quivering drone\n It’s the trucks and their arms as looming large they grow\n Laughing, jesting, standing by\n The joy of growing smokes\n Cheerful as a team of scouts\n Carefree as tiny folks\n When stretching blackened wire night’s maze disappears\n We fondly

39:00 recheck pouches, grenades and bandoliers.\n

Another page of history\n The sand-swept lines are struck\n Another battle venture\n As transports whine and buck\n On the tufted withered grass\n Of blood stained El Alamein\n And the boys’ vibrant voices\n Resound theme songs again\n

I’ll read this last verse.

\n[Verse follows]\n In rollicking songs of march as ever on we glide\n As softly sung

39:30 song of home\n

And some boys must have cried\n Would rise (UNCLEAR)\n Be as conscious as a dream\n As transports forge on westward\n Where fiery traces dream.\n

Thank you.

Sorry about that. I’m too chicken hearted.

Thank you so much for being part of the project. Thank you very much.