Australians at War Film Archive

Ian Macdonald - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 22nd May 2003

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/173

Tape 1

00:41 **Good morning, Ian.**

Good morning.

I'd just like to start today with where you were born and where you grew up?

I was born in Manly and grew up in Sydney, mostly in the North Shore area. In fact almost everywhere on the North Shore. My family seemed to

01:00 be a bunch of gypsies for some reason. I don't know. Maybe they couldn't pay the rent or something.

When were you born?

1921. And that makes me eighty-two next month.

Where did you go to school?

Variously at Chatswood High for a while, and then

01:30 I finished the last several years in North Sydney High, which was then a very good school and still is an excellent school. In fact I had a son who went there also, and a grandson. It is almost a dynasty at North Sydney High. I was lucky in going there, my brothers subsequently went to Barker, and I think I got a much better education than they did frankly.

02:00 I was a victim of the Depression of course. My father fell on hard times like so many people did at that stage.

What was your father doing?

He was an accountant. With a very good corporate practice, and he had a lot of quite major companies as clients. Some of which he was a director of. And when the Depression

02:30 came he also suffered severe illness as a result of war wounds from France in the First [World] War and it put him out of business for about a year. Of course he lost his practice. It just dissipated and he came out of the height of the Depression with no money and no practice and not much prospect, and in fact, still in pretty bad health. It was tough

03:00 times. He was, fortunately he was what was called a TPI. Totally permanent incapacitation, and he had a pension which was just sufficient to live on but not very comfortably. We did it pretty hard.

Did you have any siblings?

Two brothers, yes, both now gone. One of them

03:30 died quite young in an accident, the other fellow died only last year. They all served. My youngest brother, I think, joined the navy at sixteen right towards the end of the war, but worked in the minesweepers. My middle brother was a merchant service officer, he was in fact a radio officer

04:00 and he had quite a tough war. North Atlantic and so forth on Liberty ships, and saw quite a lot of nasty action.

The action your father saw during the First World War. Where was that?

He was in France, and I think

04:30 Passchendaele was where he was wounded – and very badly wounded. He had both legs shattered and they were going to amputate both legs above the knee, which he refused permission for and he survived and in fact lived quite an active life thereafter with one

05:00 leg that had lots of bits missing and one leg that wouldn't bend. But at least they were mobile and I think he probably took a good decision in not having the amputations. But of course it did leave him with this problem of intermittent sort of septicaemia used to break out because the things never really healed properly. So he, and nearly all his old mates were in the same position.

05:30 We used to have parties at home and there would be crutches and walking sticks all over the hall and these old boys with one arm or leg or eye, they were a great lot of blokes. They were really tremendous men. They had more casualties in that war than we did. More than we did. I mean so many of us came back in one piece, most of them seemed to have a bit missing by the time they got home. And they reckoned they were the lucky ones. They

06:00 were the ones that did get home.

Had your father served in the first AIF [Australian Imperial Force]?

In the first AIF. Yes. He was 30th Battalion. Which curiously enough became the Scottish Regiment in Sydney, which curiously enough I joined as a CMF [Citizens' Military Force] soldier, just before the war at the age of seventeen, I think I was. It was

06:30 like a club. It was quite an exclusive thing to belong to. You had to have Scottish origins and preferably a connection, so of course I got in very quickly because of my name and the fact that my father had been an officer in the original 30th, so I got straight in. It was a good experience. They were a good bunch of blokes

07:00 and we had very thorough training. They weren't playing, they were quite serious about soldiering. I think all of us, you know, this was 1938 I suppose, we recognized that inevitably there was going to be a conflict and that we would inevitably be sent to it or go to it voluntarily in most cases.

When your father had his gatherings would the men

07:30 **talk about their war experiences?**

Not very much, no, they never talked about those sort of things. Their experiences generally related to episodes on leave and scurrilous conduct on the part of some of the other colleagues that weren't present. They were a funny lot of blokes, they were very cheerful, very confident sort of people you know.

08:00 **Having seen how your father returned from the First World War, what did you think of warfare?**

What did I think of it, or what did he think?

What did you think?

I think I probably didn't have a lot of views about it but certainly my relatives did and I think I was probably imbued with the idea that it was a

08:30 terrible waste and that so many of my relatives had either died or been damaged quite radically as a result of the war. I think I probably grew up believing that it was not a good thing and I still believe that of course. I think it was

09:00 a period when it was expected that – unless you were an absolute ratbag – you accepted the fact that if there was a war, you were in it. You know, we were part of the British Empire and it was God, King and country and there was never any question about whether you would elect to be a soldier or not. You simply decided on

09:30 which service you were going to go into. And that's how it was for us. It was simply expected and nobody questioned it. The very few people who did question it, of course, became conscientious objectors and people sent them white feathers and that was something that none of us wanted to have happen to us.

Do you recall Anzac Days before the war?

Yes I do. We used to have

10:00 ceremonies at school and distinguished persons would address us. I don't remember Anzac Day quite as well as I remember Empire Day, which was another regular feature of school life. Every year we would have this terrible jingoistic meeting of the troops and I remember one year at North Sydney High we had

10:30 Billy Hughes, the ex-Prime Minister who had been known during the First War as the 'Little Digger'. And he came and gave us a jingoistic speech about the sun never sets on the British Empire and Rule Britannia was sung by the troops. It was all terrible stuff, but we believed it and I suppose at the same time there were several million young Germans in

11:00 Germany singing the Horst Wessel song and believing that just as much as we did. A bad situation for so many young men to be so ardently dedicated to their fatherland, you know. It was inevitable, I suppose,

that there'd be a conflict and we'd all be thrown into it whether we liked it or not.

11:30 **When you finished your schooling what plans or dreams did you think lay ahead for you?**

Sorry?

What did you have planned for your future?

I wanted to be an architect, and I had shown some artistic ability at school. I used to illustrate the school magazine and that sort of thing.

12:00 Because of the sort of social environment that my father moved in, he didn't know any artists except by reputation and that was probably not desirable anyway. But he did know a lot of architects so, and his philosophy was 'If you want to do something, you find out who can help you', and he always had mates he always had somebody who knew somebody who

12:30 could put you on the right track, you know. So he talked to his architect friends and one of them was a man I liked very much and he encouraged me to do architecture. Which I did in fact, I had a year articled to an architect in Sydney and probably if the war hadn't come I'd have been an architect and I'm not sure whether I would have enjoyed it or not in the long term because architecture

13:00 I think is a bit like advertising, which I ultimately went into. You are very much the victim of your clients and restricted in what you can do creatively for that reason. However, I have no regrets, I think advertising was good to me. It paid for the school fees and gave me a

13:30 few hours of frustration too, but it was exciting.

You joined the CMF, what prompted you to do this?

Probably loneliness to some extent. I had never been a great sportsman and in fact I hated football and I still have very little regard for it but

14:00 I think I was probably looking for the sort of flock mentality. I had been a bit of a loner up till that point and I think it was a good thing to do from a social point of view and in fact I made a lot of very good friends amongst the 30th Battalion people. And I think the second motive was probably

14:30 to get some understanding of what the army was about before I was inevitably thrown into it. Perhaps also, and I think this was probably supported by my father, to get some training before I was expected to go away would enable me to get a commission earlier in the piece and, which didn't happen I might add. But it was

15:00 probably a combination of those things which suggested that I should get into it. And of course wearing a uniform was probably seen as a good thing for catching birds, and probably it was. We had a lot of social activity. We used to have a regimental ball I think about every month and of course that was fun. Wearing the kilt always seemed to appeal

15:30 to people.

You speak of an inevitability about your eventual service, from when did you feel that?

Probably from maybe two years before the war started. It was seen by certainly people in my father's circle

16:00 as something that was inevitably going to happen. And people of his social, intellectual class and age were I think unanimous in believing that governments were doing nothing to avoid this inevitable conflict. I mean Hitler had been on the rampage for

16:30 years already by 1937 say, and Britain was still head in the sand. And I remember when the war did start my father told me with tears in his eyes, tears running down his cheeks. He was emotionally shattered by the announcement that we were at war,

17:00 and I remember him saying, "It's all that bloody Chamberlain. Bloody fool." And I think this was an attitude that had been evident ever since Mussolini started invading North Africa that sooner or later it was going to happen and no one was doing anything about it on our side. And indeed we were totally unprepared. Britain was totally unprepared, it was touch

17:30 and go, it was sheer luck really that we are not all talking German now or Japanese.

And once you gained an appreciation of this looming conflict was it something you were afraid of, or looked forward to?

It was scary. I think we, it was a mixture. I suppose for a lot of

18:00 people I think there was a sense of adventure about it, and I think a lot of people thought it was going to be over quickly and that we'd go over and have a hell of a good time and if we were lucky we'd get back and it would be huge adventure at the government's expense. I didn't really have that view and in fact this was encouraged by my father and his friends that it was likely to take a long time, which of

course it did.

18:30 And that it wasn't going to be pleasant all the time. I think I was apprehensive, certainly, I thought there was a good chance that I might not get back.

Did your father ever try and dissuade you from heading into military service?

No, he didn't dissuade me at all, he in fact recognised the inevitability of it and in fact

19:00 he would have been utterly ashamed of me if I hadn't volunteered. But he made a deal with me when the war started I was only eighteen and I was still in the CMF, in the 30th, and he told me that if the battalion went away as a battalion,

19:30 he wouldn't stop me from going. But if we didn't go away as a battalion he would want me to promise not to enlist until I was twenty. So I had a two-year wait basically, and what I didn't know at the time was that he had been talking to one of his old First War mates who was the Deputy Chief of the General Staff, a fellow called Chapman.

20:00 He rang Chappy and he said, "Is the 30th Battalion likely to go away as a Scottish Regiment?" And Chappy said: "No way Mac. Too many good officers there. We'll break them, up and send them round the other units." I remember saying to the old man. "You were an old bastard, you know. You were betting on a certainty. You don't do that." And so of course I inevitably had to wait until

20:30 I was twenty and I enlisted as soon as I, virtually as soon as I turned twenty.

Had you been working up until that point?

Yes. I had been with the architect of course. The minute the war was declared he shut his office. He said, "Architecture is buggered. We're not going to be able to do anything now."

21:00 He got a government job somewhere with the construction corps or something. So I went to De Havilland Aircraft, which was run at the time by another of Dad's old mates called Murray Jones and he hired me in what was then of course what they called a reserved occupation

21:30 and you were excluded from enlistment. But Dad and Murray Jones did a deal and Murray Jones said, "As soon as he wants to go, I will release him." Which he did. I had a year there, incredibly hard work. I was assistant supply manager and De Havilland at that stage were making Tiger Moth aircraft for the air force. And they were making

22:00 I think five aeroplanes a week or something, which is extraordinary for a backward country like this to be able to do. And my job was to make sure that all the bits were there when they put the aircraft together, and you can imagine how many thousands of pieces of stuff go into even a small aircraft like that. I used to lie awake at night wondering what would happen if some of the bits

22:30 didn't turn up on time. And we used to have these panics every now and again when things would get lost and in one case we had a ship that was sunk and all the compasses from the UK went to the bottom and the production line was held up because there weren't any compasses to put in the aircraft, you know. It was a frightening job and unfortunately it

23:00 was, I was playing way out of my league, I was only a kid really. But what it did unfortunately was that when I enlisted I put it on my CV [Curriculum Vitae] and the army said, "You're just the guy we need, you know, we need somebody that knows about stock control and procurement and all that sort of stuff. We're going to put you in the ordnance corps." And I said, "But I'm a machine gunner." They said,

23:30 "You'll get opportunities to use a machine gun." Which of course was total bullshit.

You mentioned earlier that your father reacted quite strongly when war was declared and you as a kid, as you say, of only eighteen, how did you react to the declaration?

How did I react?

24:00 I suppose with some feeling of shock. But I think it was so inevitable that I think we all recognized that it is only a question of when. And in a way I suppose there might have been some sense of relief that at least the waiting was over. A bit like we've seen recently with the Iraq thing and all that preliminary suspense that was going on, until actually the

24:30 declaration. I think in a way it was good. But then of course we went into a period, I think the first year of the war. It was called 'the Phoney War', and nothing really happened. We were, troops were being deployed and so forth, the 6th Division went away in 1940, I think. So there was a certain amount of activity but it wasn't really, we were still warming up at that stage.

25:00 It wasn't really until I went away in August 41 and I think that was probably when the real war started happening, you know.

Had you still been involved in the CMF up until your regular enlistment?

No. I had to drop out for that year I was with De Havilland. And that would have been a bit

contradictory to

25:30 be in a reserved occupation and in the army as well, so that was terminated, for that year, with some regret I might add. Although by that time a large number of the battalion had moved into AIF units and a lot of new people that probably I wouldn't have been quite as compatible with in there.

26:00 **The deal struck between you and your father about enlistment, was the rest of your family aware of it?**

Yes. And I had a fiancé at that stage, unofficial fiancé of course. We didn't get engaged as much in those days. It was too costly but we'd been an item as we now say, for some time.

26:30 She was apprehensive about the whole thing and of course all the people we knew were in much the same situation. Her brother had enlisted in the 6th Division and he had already gone to Germany as a POW [Prisoner of War], and so there was a reality about this that was something that we all recognized

27:00 as being no longer in the theory stage, it was all happening. And we in fact were married a week before I went away in 1941. Partly, I think, at the instigation of my Dad, he was a bit of a romantic and he

27:30 was fond of my wife and I think he thought it would be good for me to have a stabilising influence at home, which it probably was. And I don't remember very much about that period, I was so full of shots you know, all the needles they jabbed into us before we went away left me fairly

28:00 quite sick actually and a bit off it. So my recollection of that wonderful week was fairly vague. And I remember actually the occasion of the wedding, we had a little reception at my wife's parents place and they lived at that time at Corroba Point, which looked down over the harbour. And

28:30 I remember coming back from the church for the celebration and the [HMS] Queen Elizabeth was just dropping anchor almost at the bottom of the garden. I thought, "That's it. I'm not going to be here very long." And in fact we sailed almost exactly a week after our wedding. And I was away for eighteen months or so, so it wasn't really a good start to a marriage but

29:00 on the other hand it was a very good marriage. So you can't always get it right by doing it conventionally, can you?

And what about your mother? Knowing about your intention to enlist long before you did. Did that soften it for her?

I think she would have been very unhappy about it because she had been a young woman during the First World War and a lot of her

29:30 friends and a couple of relatives had died there. And she would have been pretty unhappy with three sons, there was a good chance that they might not come back. And I think she spent a pretty unhappy war with two of us away and the third one about to

30:00 go away, in fact he was very fortunate not to be a victim himself because the minesweepers were doing pretty dangerous work. And he was in a ship called Warrnambool, this was just after the war finished I think, but she hit a mine and sank and they lost quite a few lives. He was fortunate, he had paid off the trip before so,

30:30 all these things were a reality. The possibility of losing three sons must have been quite dominant in her mind right through the war and in fact she ended up with a very high blood pressure problem, which I am sure was induced by that stress and worry about the boys. Not an easy time for women, I think, particularly mothers.

31:00 **Well when it came time to depart you were not only leaving behind a family but a young bride, was it an emotional farewell?**

It was very emotional and the whole family, I think they must have chartered a motorboat or something. The whole family came out with a tartan rug to identify themselves and

31:30 I remember standing on the deck and thinking, "I wonder will I ever see any of those people again?" There was an awful finality about it. We knew it would be a long time, it was also conceivable that it might have been forever. I suppose they felt the same way too. It was very emotional, a very emotional time.

32:00 Of course one wasn't allowed to exhibit that, it was considered poor form. This was long before Bob Hawke cried on camera you know.

Just to get a clearer idea, you enlisted in June 1941?

July, I think it was. Yes.

July. And when did you actually depart?

I think August, so we were in for only a very short period of

time. I got a couple of stripes almost immediately because of the CMF service and so I was an NCO [Non Commissioned Officer] from almost day one, which I thought was a good step on the ladder to getting a commission. Not that I was particularly keen but I knew the old man would have been disappointed if I didn't, which he was.

And I think all it did for me really was to give me an awful sense of responsibility that I was really not looking forward to having. Even as a junior NCO and there were responsibilities and it took some of the fun out of it.

So you hadn't received very much training before departure?

Well,

CMF training was good, I mean I knew as much as I would have needed to know to hold a commission. In fact we were trained in the machine gun company of the battalion at company commander level. And the idea, basically, was to produce an officer cadre for the future.

So had I stayed in the machine guns I'm sure I would have got fairly quick promotion. But the army in its wisdom sent me to this other area and they were comfortable to have somebody doing what I was doing. They weren't concerned about my military career in the least, naturally.

I imagine as well as the sad emotions you would have been feeling on departure that perhaps there was that sense of adventure or at least excitement?

Oh yes. There was a degree of excitement. And the voyage itself was a bit exciting, in fact, because there were a lot of submarines around in the southern oceans at that stage and we went over in a convoy

with the Queen Elizabeth and the [HMS] Queen Mary, which were then the two biggest ships in the world. I believe there were eight thousand troops on the Elizabeth and seven thousand troops on the Mary, so that was a huge number of troops. Of course it would have been a very desirable target for the German U boats, and they were after us, there is no question. In consequence of this we were sent right down south into almost Antarctic

seas. way below the roaring forties. And the seas were incredibly rough. Going round the Great Australian Bight these two huge ships were sailing abreast and they were moving up and down and disappearing periodically under these huge waves and we had

an old warship called the [HMAS] Canberra as our escort. She got half way round the bight and turned back because she was rattling to pieces in these rough seas, so we were left without any sort of escort support at all. No aircraft cover of course, and that was nerve racking. We were very aware of the possibility

of getting blown up before we even got out of Australian waters. And then of course up through the Indian Ocean and they had a secret refuelling place there, I think it was probably the Seychelles, I'm not sure. This was kept very secret because I think previous convoys had gone to South Africa and I think the Germans probably

anticipated that that's where they would get us, on the way to Cape Town. We went up from there up through the Red Sea and we had another scare actually in the Red Sea, what was thought to be a U-Boat surfacing turned out to be a fishing boat, actually. But the two ships took off, their immediate action

was to separate and sail in opposite directions and in turning the ships around very quickly even the Elizabeth, eighty-eight thousand tons of ship just leaned over at forty-five degrees, it was like being in a huge hotel that had fallen on its side. And there were quite a number of accidents. People were,

I actually hurt my shoulder; I was sitting in the orderly room and I got thrown onto the bulkhead twenty or thirty feet away probably, crashed into the iron bulkhead. A couple of people were actually killed, one of them went down a lift shaft and another fellow went overboard, it was quite a frightening experience. And of course we got to Port

Tewfik, which was at the top of the Red Sea, and there was a huge ship. I think she was called the Georgie or some name like that. I think she had been a troop ship. And she had been bombed or torpedoed or something and she was up there sitting on the mud. Enormous thing. I thought, "God, not an encouraging sight." There but for the grace of

God.

What did you think had happened when the ship suddenly lilted like that?

It was totally incomprehensible. We were sailing in still water and they were fast, one of the engineers I got friendly with told me that they had actually tested the Elizabeth at thirty-eight knots which is forty miles an hour, which was

quite fast for eight-thousand tons of ship. There was absolutely no explanation of why, in fact it was

unbelievable. You think you're having a sort of episode that you are losing your balance but then you realize it's not you losing your balance but the ship, and there was sirens going and bells ringing and so forth and we knew there was an emergency, panic stations.

40:00 Very odd experience.

Did you suffer from your shoulder injury for long?

Oh no, it was superficial but I don't think I went on sick parade.

Had you been seasick at all?

No I wasn't, curiously enough. I don't know why that was because in fact I've never been particularly prone to seasickness but

40:30 almost everybody was of course. It was a pretty chunderous time, it was just hard walking round the decks without looking for somewhere to be sick, so I think you decided you weren't going to be sick. It was too undignified.

On that dignified note we will pause there, our tape has come to an end.

Tape 2

00:30 **Ian, I would just like to ask you about the troop ship carriage over to the Middle East. What was your accommodation like?**

The ship hadn't been fully converted at that stage; the lower decks had been turned into bunkhouses but the upper decks were still more or less in the way they were designed as an Atlantic luxury liner.

01:00 I was lucky enough to have a cabin which I shared with another NCO on A deck, which in peacetime would have cost an arm and a leg of course. It still had buttons which said 'Stewardess', and we used to push them all night, with no effect of course. But it was a beautiful old ship and there were places like the ballroom which was where we had our mess

01:30 hall, huge mess hall, which were left pretty well as they were when the ship was launched. You know, gilded ceilings and all sorts of decoration. They had taken the pianos out but that was about all. But it was a very beautiful luxury ship, not fully completed even at the time it was launched.

02:00 **What did you do for entertainment on the ship?**

Nothing. We were kept occupied pretty much all day; there were parades on deck and drill and PT parades – physical training and so forth. And then of course

02:30 the question of messing took almost hours for each meal. For the time one group had been fed the others would be lining up in the companionways waiting to get into the mess hall, so it was like a constant moving feast so to speak.

How was the standard of the food?

Awful, in fact we had a

03:00 riot on board at one stage. The troops in the first mess had been fed something they thought was off, in fact I'm sure it was. And they refused to leave until they were bought something else to eat and of course all the people behind them were impatient to get in and have

03:30 a feed and the noise, the pandemonium was huge; they were all banging on their mess tins. They finally had to get the ship's commanding officer, a Colonel Lamb as I remember, extraordinary how names stick in your head, isn't it? Colonel Lamb stood on a table and addressed the troops and the troops threw fish at him, which was petty conduct prejudicial but

04:00 they got through all right and the food did improve almost immediately. I remember Lamb saying, "The officers are eating the same food as you chaps. And we're not complaining." And there were loud cries of course. "Bullshit." Which it probably was.

What was discipline like on the ship?

It was pretty tight,

04:30 very tight. For the safety of the troops themselves there was no grog of course, it was very dangerous to walk around the decks. We did lose a couple of people over the side for reasons which were suspected to be illicit alcohol, and there were people falling down the companionways and so forth.

05:00 So it was very tight. Very tight control over where you went and there was a roll call every, I think twice a day at least, maybe more. And that was one of the experiences I least like to recall in fact; I was orderly

05:30 sergeant one night and I was calling the roll with the orderly officer of the day and we had to check into each of the cabins and mark the guys off. There was a standing order that none of the cabins were to be locked and we came to a cabin which was locked, and

06:00 the orderly officer told me to kick it in, which I did. And when the door flew open we found two of the blokes in flagrante delicto. And it was the only time in seven years in the army that I had ever seen any sign of overt homosexuality but it was probably one of the most shocking experiences I think I had during the

06:30 whole war. It just absolutely blew me away and I pulled the door shut again and the orderly officer kicked it open again and said, "Charge those men. Charge those men with whatever the charge is!" And they were blokes in my own section, so I knew them and I checked out in

07:00 AMR&O, which was the Australian Military Regulations and Orders and it was a book this thick and I found the correct charge, which was, "Conduct prejudicial to good order and military discipline in that he was engaged in the abominable crime 'buggery'." That was the official army charge which I of course had to write out, one

07:30 for each bloke and of course they were headed for court martial. I was horrified at the prospect of having to appear as the chief witness in the court martial and I remembered that I had met a fellow on the ship who was an old mate of my Dad's and he was going over to Palestine as the judge advocate general.

08:00 I think they called him. And he said, "Any time I can help just look me up." So I thought this is where he can help. So I told him the story and he was horrified, you know. He said, "I think I'll be conducting the court martial and as the senior legal officer on board, I think I can probably get by with your affidavits. You won't have to appear." And

08:30 appearing as a witness with two of your own blokes is not a happy experience. And he, bless him, took our affidavits and conducted the court martial and the two guys were taken off the ship as soon as we arrived and sent straight home for dishonourable discharge. Things have probably changed a little since then, I don't know. But as I say it was the only

09:00 experience during seven years all told with CMF and AIF service and I never saw the slightest sign of any homosexual activity, and of course it was illegal, it was totally frowned on by the authorities. That was an unhappy experience, I didn't enjoy that. We had a very strange bunch of guys in this particular section.

09:30 There was, these two fellows who were probably the least objectionable but we had five criminals in the group all together, including a couple of strong armed men who used to work for a very infamous abortionist in Sydney. Abortion of course in those days was a

10:00 hanging crime almost, and this fellow was making a huge amount of money out of it. And he kept these two fellows in his retinue as bodyguards and when the police got onto them they gave them the opportunity of facing charges or joining the army. So they joined the army and I copped them, and they were a couple

10:30 of bad news people. I had another fellow who was, Jimmy Coffey and Jimmy boasted of being leader of the Bank Corner Mob in Newcastle, which was a very famous razor gang. And he confessed to having killed a couple of people and for some reason he attached himself to me and he was

11:00 like my bodyguard. He was a tough little fellow, nobody would go near him. It was not unusual for the guys if they had won a few bucks at two-up to give it to Jimmy Coffey to mind it, because they knew no one would go near him. He also had, he was totally honourable in his transactions with his own people. You know, you could trust him with your life and he was one of the more colourful characters.

11:30 And there were a couple of others who were, one of them was an ex British sergeant major who had been discharged dishonourably from the Indian Army, and he was one of the, he was one of my greatest problems because he was resentful of authority. He had been in authority and he didn't like taking orders from a young pipsqueak

12:00 colonial twit like me. He was determined to get me and when we were issued with ammunition at Port Tewfik he said, "I've got one of these for you, sarge, when I've gone ashore. Just watch your arse mate." And Jimmy Coffey fortunately heard this and

12:30 he said, "Yeah, and I'll be watching yours too mate." It was a dramatic little scene. Fortunately, he got sent somewhere else, and Jimmy Coffey, poor devil, ended up in the black hole of Calcutta and died there unfortunately probably resisting arrest or something, and I had to charge him too. He

13:00 attacked the same orderly officer curiously enough that I had dealt with on the ship, went round and he was actually, he'd been AWL [Absent Without Leave]. He decided that he wanted to have a look at Syria so he just hitched a ride up and took a few days off and of course when he got back we had to charge him with AWL and he was put in the cells and this orderly officer made him get out of bed

13:30 one night to stand to attention. And Jimmy resented that and he struck him and I had to arrest him, and he was charged and he was sent to the Brits for some reason, I don't know why, and ended up in Calcutta where I heard he had perished. I was very sorry because I regarded him as one of my good

14:00 mates.

How many men were you actually in control of?

Probably about twenty-five or thirty at that stage. We were all working in small sections at that stage because it was so hard to, well you couldn't assemble more than about that many people on one place, anyway.

And when you were doing roll calls on the ship, how many people would you have to account for?

14:30 About your own section as a rule but I think on that occasion I was probably the deck orderly sergeant or something of the sort, I seem to remember that it was probably a larger group. Probably encompassing some of the other sections as well.

It sounds like an eventful trip to say the least?

Yes, it got adventurous from day one really.

15:00 **What was the mood aboard the ship?**

I think probably an element of adventure about it. I think during the early part of the trip when the seas were really rough there probably wasn't any mood at all. It was,

15:30 everybody was sort of pretty introverted at that stage. But as things progressed and we got into the Indian Ocean and it was warm and we could get up on deck there was a lot of two-up going on and we had a concert party there. I forget the man's name now but he was quite famous as a sort of Vaudeville artist and he had

16:00 a little band and so forth, Jim Gerald, he was a great two-up player. So there were some things happening I suppose, I was never really keen about the two-up but most of the guys were of course, a lot of money used to change hands.

The court martial of the two men from your section, did that take place on board

16:30 **the ship?**

I think so from memory. I wasn't there so I wouldn't be absolutely certain but I think the old man's mate conducted it on the ship. I subsequently met him again in Palestine and he was a very nice man, and lawyer of course.

17:00 **Did news of that court martial spread?**

Yeah, yes, the troops knew about it. In fact they knew about the arrest. I didn't talk about it obviously but whether the guys themselves talked or somebody else must have picked up on it. The people in the orderly room would have seen my charges going in anyway, there was nothing secret about it.

17:30 **What was the reaction like? The reaction to it?**

Disgust, I think would be the one word. It was, yeah, they were not approving. There was no compassion about it at all I don't think, and there wasn't much in those days.

18:00 They were a couple of bloody poofters you know, didn't want to know about them.

Do you think the disapproval was about the act or because they'd contravened military practice?

The act itself, I think. It's hard to understand in this day and age how violent homophobia was in those days,

18:30 and how probably fairly universal it was. I don't know whether there are more homosexual people in the community now than there were then or whether our tolerant attitude of today is something that would explain this. But in those days particularly in those

19:00 sort of environments it was just not on, and in fact most of us found it hard to believe it really existed. We were a bit like Queen Victoria, you know, it couldn't happen. And I think very few of us had had any first hand experience with it.

How long was the trip?

19:30 Six weeks, quite a long time in a confined space.

I'm just wondering if there were any cases of brawls, fights starting?

A few fights, yes, generally over money or something of that sort. There were also a detachment of

nurses on board

20:00 and they had quarters up on the top deck which were under heavy guard the whole time. It was said that some of the officers had bribed the guards to let them through the cordon, but I don't know whether that is true or not. I think they created a few problems amongst the officer cadre.

20:30 Probably things changed when they got ashore and went to the hospitals, we never saw them unless you happened to be on guard duty, you wouldn't know they were there. And I think probably the commanders thought it would be very dangerous to let them loose. Even when they were taking exercise on the boat deck there was a heavy cordon of troops all of the time.

21:00 **Was it a safe trip?**

Well we got there, but I think it was largely luck, it could well have ended in disaster. I think if the Germans had been a little bit more alert and if they had had better intelligence they couldn't have helped making a very

21:30 nasty impact on fifteen thousand troops, and boy that would have slowed things down.

Was there any correspondence with home during the trip?

Not during the voyage, no, the letters piled up when we arrived of course and quite a batch of mail then. But that only lasted for a fairly

22:00 brief time because when the Japanese came into the war they started shooting our planes down and then sinking our ships. We went I think for about five months without any mail from home at all, and that was a really big problem; it was very bad for morale, it was not a good situation at all. Fortunately our letters were getting home and

22:30 I used to write very regularly. You know, like every couple of days we would have these funny little blue letter card things and I'd send one of those off whenever I had a few moments, more or less. When they arrived home my wife would number them all carefully and tied them up in bundles, I wish I had them now. I'd find

23:00 them very useful, sort of aide memoire while I'm writing. I don't know what happened to them but I think probably my, well I don't really know. They got lost, I got theories about that but perhaps best left where they are.

Were you missing home and your wife during

23:30 **even the duration of the trip?**

Yeah, it was very homesick and very lonely and very concerned on her behalf as well as mine, you know. It was a big ask really to marry a twenty year old girl and then piss off

24:00 for eighteen months, see ya later. And I suppose both of us wondered what sort of people we were going to be at the end of the time and fortunately we had both changed obviously. We had matured and developed and taken new directions but it was still good, there was no doubt: the minute I got in the door I knew everything was

24:30 going to be fine. And in fact we were married for twenty-one years very happily, unfortunately she died very young of a heart attack, at forty-one which is a bit early. And so in a way I was glad we had married early when we did.

25:00 **How did you take refuge from your loneliness and homesickness?**

We used to play a lot of cards at night and there was always companionship if you wanted it. In fact one of the problems I think for me was finding ways to be alone if I wanted to be alone.

25:30 So I used to spend quite a bit of time in the orderly room writing letters and reading. I took a lot of books with me. Some of them deliberately, I remember reading on the ship a book by a man called H. B. Morton called In the Steps of the Master, and Morton was a sort of, not exactly Bill Bryson, but he was

26:00 a travel writer of the pre-war era and a good writer and he wrote, In the Steps of the Master based on Christ's trip through the Middle East. I found that fascinating because I was subsequently able to follow a lot of the tracks that Moreton talked about and it made me a bit of an authority on

26:30 where we were and there was so much of that country that's absolutely fascinating. I've got pictures which I will produce at some point which cover a lot of that area. It was just wonderful. When we got leave, which was reasonably often I suppose, you could fossick out these things. It was almost like a guidebook, I suppose, for me.

27:00 **You'd said earlier that you were a bit of a loner as a child. It must have been a bit of a rude shock being on a troop ship with eight thousand men?**

Yes, it was. And in fact I think for my first year in the AIF I felt somewhat of a misfit, I think. I had

never really mixed with people out of my own social class. I know that sounds snobbish but I grew up on the North Shore and I knew North Shore type people, you know. And when the, when I joined the army I realised that I was different. In fact in my

own section I was the only member apart from the OC [Officer Commanding] that had done the Leaving Certificate. And most of the guys, most of them Victorians, had grown up in the Mallee during the Depression, and they had left school when they were eleven and twelve to go and work on the farms, and I had one guy that literally used to make a

spelling mistake when he signed for his pay. And it was quite a simple name, not a difficult one to spell but he used to cross it out to start again sometimes. That kind of education level put a bit of a gap between our two sets of intellectual communication and I found that quite difficult.

In fact I tried to adjust to it and I tried to modify my language and not use words that I thought they might misunderstand, and of course initially they used to take the piss out of me and they'd put on these phoney Pommy accents and I used to find that quite embarrassing. I thought, "No, I've got to adjust to this. It's going to

make life very unfortunate for me." So I started to adopt their manner of speech, I suppose, as far as I could. And when I got home I remember one of the first things my Dad said, "For Christ's sake boy, where did you get that bloody Australian accent from?" He was horrified by it, you know, I suppose I adjusted back to it later on but the problem is it was a culture shock -

tying to adjust to people. It wasn't that we didn't get on well, I had huge respect for these fellows and we got on, you know, were good friends. But there was this difficulty of communication as much as anything else and a sort of cultural chasm that we had to jump over.

Did that prove a difficulty in

your role as an NCO?

Yes, it was difficult. I was seen to be for some reason, they would see me as being a bit elitist, you know; not one of the mob. Officers got away with this for some reason, it's an extraordinary thing. I think it goes right back to our convict ancestry

that an NCO is like a trusty. You could be a convict that's suddenly been made a jailer, you know, but officers are officers. They are people from a different sort of class, so an officer would be accepted and his authority would be respected as long as he did the job professionally.

But an NCO had to earn his stripes, you had to really work your way into the confidence of the guys you were dealing with. It was very hard work and I think the most successful NCOs were the rough necks, particularly the fellows who could fight a bit and probably played footy and had some of those common interests with the blokes. It wasn't until

later on that, when things started to go wrong, the guys would come to me to write letters for them, and in fact I became a kind of counsellor to many of them. Despite the fact that I was by far the youngest member of the group, I had guys almost old enough to be my father coming to me with their matrimonial problems and

legal problems and writing letters to the local parson to find out what the wife was up to with the Americans. It was a very strange sort of extra dimension to being an NCO in that situation.

Were you a socialiser? An easy socialiser?

A?

Did you socialise easily?

No, I didn't. And I never, at that point in my younger days I was never very socially motivated I suppose. I think that's why my wife and I became so close because we were both, I guess shy is the obvious word. We

were a little bit nervous in society and I think we sort of hung on to each other as a support, you know. And in fact continued to for most of our lives. It was, in fact, kind of mutual support, mutual socialisation.

Did you drink?

Oh yes. But none of us drank a great deal at that point because there simply wasn't very much to drink. And when we got up into the desert there was a beer issue, which was a third of a botte per day, per man perhaps. And it didn't always happen and when it did happen it was

warm and it was, sometimes we got Australian beer but often it was local Egyptian beer. There was one in particular that I can remember called Laziza, which was absolutely awful stuff and the blokes used to reckon it was made of piss. And in fact there was

35:00 a story around that the army medical people had analysed it and found that it did actually contain a percentage of human urine. This led to a story one of the blokes had about an uncle of his who was the inventor of a machine called 'A Piss to Beer machine', which they were trying to have installed in the hotels in Australia to convert and recycle used beer,

35:30 which I thought was a pretty ingenious idea but I don't think he ever got it on the market. I hope not.

You arrive in the Middle East in September? 41?

September, I think, yes.

After disembarking can you describe for me your first

36:00 **impressions of this new environment?**

Yeah, they were very brief in fact because we were sent from Port Tewfik which was not far from Cairo over the desert into Palestine, up in through areas which are now the Gaza Strip and round about that area and we were put into a camp

36:30 at a place called Barbara, which was a little Jewish settlement. And I was only there for a few days and I got very sick and I was sent to hospital with mumps. And when I got there I discovered that half the troops on the Elizabeth had also succumbed and there were three military

37:00 hospitals in Palestine at that stage. There was the 6th AGH [Australian General Hospital], which took all the troops off the Mary who had measles. And the 7th AGH, which took the troops from the Elizabeth who had the mumps. And the third hospital was known as the 8th Special, which was designed to take care of sexually transmitted diseases; of which there were a few.

37:30 And so my first month I think was in hospital and I got quite seriously sick as many of us did. And in fact I was very lucky I didn't end up sterile as many of the blokes did, sterile and in some cases impotent too. It is a very bad disease in adult life. So I

38:00 was kept in hospital for quite a while and then I went to a convalescent camp I think it was called. In a place called Kfar-Vitkin, which was a lovely little Jewish settlement on the coast. And I had a, I suppose three weeks or something there recuperating and then went back to my unit and

38:30 I had been, because of the disruption, I had been posted to a training section and I was given the job of smartening up the reinforcement officers when they arrived. Not an enviable task. It was stinking hot and we were out in the middle of the desert and these pasty faced kids had arrived

39:00 off the ships and I had the tasks of marching them over the sand dunes until they fell over and begged for mercy and it was, I knew I was sowing the seeds of discontent amongst a fairly large number of young officers. Most of them were public school boys that had been in the cadet corps, you know. And

39:30 they were very resentful, very resentful. In fact one of them at the end of the training period said, "You know Sergeant, I think my wildest hope is that one of these days you're going to march into my company and I am going to give you buggery." Unfortunately some months later the inevitable happened and there I was.

40:00 He said, "I've been waiting for you." I fortunately had a very sympathetic CO and I suggested that maybe another company would be a good idea.

What was the weather like at that point?

It was curious. Palestine, you think of Palestine as being a

40:30 pretty torrid sort of place but it can also be very cold and around Christmas time, which I think I hadn't been there very long at that stage. And I remember the first Christmas in Palestine as being spoilt by floods and storms and I think some snow

41:00 in some areas. I remember the Christmas dinner in Barbara under great big tents. And there was a tradition that officers would serve the troops Christmas lunch and as they bought in the food the tent blew down, you know, a couple of hundred guys in this

41:30 mass of canvas trying to fight their way out with meat and vegetables all over the floor and mud a foot thick.

Well Ian I know our tape is coming to an end so we will continue this episode after we have had a change.

Tape 3

00:30 **So before we take up your story in Palestine could you describe to me your field park unit?**

Yes a field park, this is an ordnance field park as distinct from an engineer field park, I'm not sure what they did. Our function was to provide bits and pieces for the light aid detachments as they

01:00 were known, the LADs [Light Aid Detachments] who were also part of the ordnance corps. And their function was to keep vehicles and other equipment in working order under battle conditions. So they were up in what was called the second echelon close up near the front. And we had to be, of course, alongside them. And we

01:30 supplied bits of tanks and trucks and all those sort of things that required urgent maintenance in the field. It was a very vital task of course and I suppose for every front line soldier there were probably a whole string of us

02:00 there as backup. In fact I noticed in one of the Iraqi War things they said that for every front line soldier in Iraq there were about a hundred backup troops, which seems to be rather a lot but there you go. And that was our function, it was a disappointing job in many respects because it meant that we were prime targets for the enemy

02:30 and on the other hand we weren't actively able to retaliate in any great degree. And we, of course, the German intelligence people would find out where we were, and it was pretty easy to track us. People were constantly visiting us and they would leave tracks up to our camp, no matter how well we were camouflaged, it was still pretty obvious what we were doing.

03:00 So we used to cop an awful lot of flak, particularly from the air and a bit of artillery, but the Stukas particularly used to give as an awful lot of trouble. They would isolate where we were and come down and bomb and strafe and try and knock us out of business. We were extremely lucky we got away with only quite minimal casualties.

03:30 But it worried me because having been trained as an infantryman and as a machine gunner in particular I thought, "All that training's been wasted now. Here I am virtually being a bloody clerk." Which is not what I joined the army for but the army in its wisdom probably thought they could find more machine gunners and probably not enough people

04:00 with my kind of experience. And I did in fact try and retaliate at one stage; I had a fellow I had got friendly with, a South African fellow in the South African division, he used to drop in on us for a cup of tea every now and again. He turned up one day with a breeder machine gun,

04:30 which was a beautiful Italian l weapon, half-inch ball and we had it mounted on an old truck axle and we used it as an anti-aircraft weapon. It wasn't all that effective but at least it made you feel good that you were at least making a gesture, and in fact I did get credited with shooting an Italian reconnaissance plane down. I'm not sure whether

05:00 I deserved it but certainly it went down and I hope that it was mine.

Well I would like to now go back to where we were at the end of last tape. You had recovered from your mumps which sounded fairly serious. And then you were sent to a convalescent camp on the coast.

05:30 **And where did you go after that?**

I think back to Palestine and it must have been back to Barbara. That's where I was doing this officer training, smartening up exercise. And I can't remember how long that lasted but it seemed quite a long time and in fact I was offered a promotion if I stayed there and I thought I didn't really want to be a drill sergeant for

06:00 the rest of my life, so I went back to the unit which explained why my rank kept going up and down. I started as a corporal and I was an acting sergeant several times and I finished the war as corporal, which didn't reflect on my inefficiency or anything, it was simply the luck of the draw.

06:30 **And where were you posted after your training camp?**

I think it must have been about that time that we were sent to Syria. And we had quite a number of months in Syria, my recollection is that it might have been about seven months.

07:00 And we arrived there very shortly after the armistice. There was a quite major war in Syria against the Vichy-French, and when they were defeated we were sent up there as I've subsequently learned, as a garrison force

07:30 in anticipation of Hitler moving down through Turkey, which was then neutral but he was expecting to get it onside. And the idea was to send a force down through Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine, up into North Africa and meet up with the Afrika Korps and put the Brits in a pincer movement, and of course in the process control the Suez Canal.

08:00 And it was a very rational strategy, I think it would have worked I'm sure with their forces. But apparently I read somewhere that Hitler had great confidence in a soothsayer sort of person. What do

you call those people? You know, predicting the future?

08:30 And she told Hitler that “This would not work. It would be bad luck.” So he didn’t do it, and I probably have to thank her for being there because if it had happened they’d have run over us like a flock of ants. It was just a, it would have been a pushover. Just a very dangerous potential situation. I think I’m going to have to have a

09:00 a little cough.

I’d like to take up the story again in Syria, you’ve just been posted to Syria. Can you tell me what happened there?

Yes, w arrived as I say just after the armistice. And the whole country at that stage was in famine, severe

09:30 famine, there were a lot of people dying we were told. And it was bitterly cold, inhospitable and I think our first assignment was in Aleppo, which was not an attractive place in my recollection. And the famine had reduced

10:00 the population to a fairly desperate degree. The French, the Vichy-French had departed and had I believe left their wives and girlfriends in Aleppo, unsupported, with no money, and in a country ravaged by famine. They consequently,

10:30 many of them I believe turned to prostitution. I had a story from our Don R [motorcycle despatch rider] who had been around to the French quarter investigating and he said that “There’s all these gorgeous sheilas round there. You’ve got no idea, they are absolutely wonderful.” And he said, “They reckon you can get two girls for a tin of bully beef and three eggs change,” which was no doubt an exaggeration but it was

11:00 in fact said that bully beef was legal tender in the French quarter. I never investigated it myself but certainly there were some very beautiful women around the streets all over Aleppo. We were there for long enough to get to know the town fairly well and I

11:30 had schoolboy French and of course Syria and Lebanon at that stage, well Syria particularly at that stage was still a French colony. And there were a lot of Free French people there and Foreign Legion and all sorts of officialdom, and it was decided that we needed an interpreter

12:00 to deal with the French officials. And I was the only person who had any sort of French at all and it was not really adequate to the task but it was sufficient to be able to have halting conversations with French officers and so forth. Consequently I used to try and meet up with as many of these French

12:30 as I could to get a bit of colloquial practise and we would have a drink together and meals and so forth, and they were good fun blokes too. The Free French, they were patriots and adventurers and I met a couple of foreign legionnaires. So I used to practice my French with these fellows and one night we were

13:00 joined by a man who said he was Dutch. And he joined the group and said, “I would like you to keep in touch. It’s been interesting talking to you,” and we had another meeting and he started asking a lot of what I thought were fairly pertinent questions, and I began to suspect that maybe he wasn’t Dutch at all.

13:30 We knew that there were spies all over Syria at that stage they were coming in on moonless nights, they would drop them in by aircraft with black parachutes and we used to find the parachutes as we moved up north later on lying around in the fields. So I smelt a rat with this bloke and I went to see the field security people, the FSS, and I

14:00 told them what had happened and they said, “Oh good. Let’s keep in touch and when are you meeting him again?” I told them that “He wanted me to meet his sister.” And I think this was an inducement to be a really close buddy and maybe he had ideas about pillow talk, I don’t know, he was certainly looking for information. So we turned up to this meeting with the

14:30 beautiful sister and the FSS moved in and arrested them both and took them in, and it transpired that they had been part of a little nest of spies who were operating, would you believe, out of the basement of the building in which the 9th Division Headquarters was located. So they were pretty cheeky. And this fellow had in fact,

15:00 he was a technician of some sort and he wasn’t supposed to be doing fieldwork at all but he just thought he would try his hand at it, which was his undoing, he was just not good at it. So that was a nice little episode and I felt that I had achieved something useful. I never got any thanks for it of course.

15:30 The other episode I had there was associated with the, this quite a personal little story really. While I was in Aleppo, I had my photograph taken to send home to the folks and let them know that I still had the right number of arms and legs. The photographer

16:00 was a Peruvian fellow and he was married to a very beautiful young Armenian girl, and they had a baby,

quite young, weeks old, I suppose. And he told me one night that, we came to be quite friendly, I used to call on them from time to time when I was on leave and

16:30 he told me one night “That his baby was dying of malnutrition.” And apparently his wife was so undernourished that she couldn’t feed the child and she couldn’t get any sort of substitute baby foods. He implored me to see if I could get them some milk. And he said, “You know we would be so grateful that

17:00 if you would like to sleep with my wife when you’re on leave we would both be happy for you to do so.” I thought that’s a bit weird, you know. But I recognised that they really were so desperate that that was an acceptable alternative to the baby dying. So I went off and I knew a cook was selling

17:30 rations to buy arrack which is the local, like ouzo, a terrible drink; dangerous stuff. And he was flogging this stuff for a bottle of arrack or two, so I bought some arrack and picked up a case of carnation milk. I took it round to them and they were incredibly grateful and then I had probably the worst part of the exercise

18:00 was telling them that I didn’t really think it was appropriate that I should sleep with his wife and he was hostile. It was quite an extraordinary meeting. I don’t think he used the work poofter but he meant, “Are you a poofter?” “No, not at all.” “You don’t find my wife beautiful?” I said, “Yes she is very beautiful.” And he said, “Maybe it’s the stuff they put in the tea.

18:30 The bromide, you know. Are you impotent?” And I said, “That is a myth. They don’t put stuff in the tea and if they do it doesn’t work.” And I showed him photographs of my wife and I said, “You know we were only married for a week before I left and I value your friendship and I think it would be better if we kept it as friends, you know.” We all had a big hug and got drunk and I felt good about having

19:00 rescued, I probably saved that child’s life if the truth were known. But it demonstrates how desperate people are in those sort of circumstances. And I was thinking of this, in fact I only recalled that episode quite recently when I was watching some of that footage from Iraq. The desperate straits that people find themselves in, in war and particularly post-war.

19:30 I think that’s happening over there at the moment now. I wonder how many of those sorts of episodes are going on at the moment.

Where were you living in Aleppo?

In Aleppo? We were in what had been French barracks. It was called the ‘Caserne Jenie’.

20:00 Whatever that meant. It was on top of a hill looking over Aleppo and it would have been a couple of miles walk. Walking home at night was particularly if you’d had a few convivial drinks on the way through it was quite a task, so we didn’t do it any more often than was absolutely necessary. Occasionally you’d be lucky enough to

20:30 strike a lift. And it was a pretty gloomy sort of place. It was a bit stone building, it looked almost like a jail, you know, it had cells and it was bitterly cold. The shaving water used to freeze over and you’d have to put it on the primus to break the ice down and it was filthy when we moved in.

21:00 The French troops are not the most hygienic and it was a lonely place, a forbidding place. The whole place was, the French didn’t seem to like us very much up there either, they were resentful of our taking over their barracks for some reason. We had an interesting little episode there: my commanding officer

21:30 at the time was a man who’d come out of the First War as a captain and had come into the Second [World] War still a captain, an absolute larrikin, he was a very strange man old enough to be my father of course and he went into town one night and couldn’t face the long walk home,

22:00 so he borrowed a motorcar which he had found parked outside the officer’s club and he drove home in it. Or almost home; he wrapped it around a lamp post, unfortunately just short of the camp. And of course the security people turned up to find out what had happened and he was charged and I forget now

22:30 what with, but stealing army property and it unfortunately turned out to be the brigadier’s car, a staff car. The brigadier was a man called Windeyer who subsequently had a very distinguished career back in Sydney as a lawyer. And he was determined to get this bloke and he court martialled him and in fact I had the

23:00 responsibility of taking him to the court martial, and he was charged and cautioned. It transpired that his brother was quite a distinguished senior officer and so they didn’t want to make too much of a noise about it. Funny, years and years after this I had an art gallery up on the North Shore and a fellow and his wife came in and we got chatting and it was

23:30 Windeyer and he said, “Have I met you before?” And I said, “You have but I’m sure you wouldn’t remember the circumstances. It was a court martial on the occasion when my commanding officer” – whose name I mentioned – “stole your staff car.” And he said, “That bastard, I remember him.” And he

said, “What happened to him?” And I said, “He came back to Sydney and resumed a successful practice.”

24:00 He said, “Too good for him.” Funny the little twist of fate that would bring him back. And he bought some paintings from me, which was very nice.

And how long did you spend at Aleppo?

I don’t remember but I guess it was weeks if not months and I’m not

24:30 quite clear now about the actual time frames but we went from Aleppo I think probably to Tripoli and we were camped in Tripoli on an olive grove which was again rather a dismal environment. Olive trees are gloomy,

25:00 they are a grey colour and they never seem to move. And it was very hot by that time and it was a stifling environment, and there was nothing there to look at apart from olive trees and, when we ultimately left I remember the troops inventing a song which said, “Thank Christ I shall never see, another bloody olive tree.” To the tune

25:30 of course of the famous song. And we were, in fact, very glad to get out of there, it was an inhospitable place. Although Tripoli itself, again this was an enormously long walk, down a huge stairway as I remember, a stone stairway that took you straight down the side of the mountain into the village.

26:00 And I think there were four hundred odd steps or something which you had to walk up on the way home. And they were quite dangerous, we had a couple of episodes of being fallen upon by the local bandits. They’d dart out of a side street and clobber you if you weren’t fairly alert. And actually I think

26:30 we must have gone to another place between Aleppo and Tripoli and that was a place called Latakia. Which is up close to the Turkish border, and that was pleasant, that was a nice little place. And strangely enough I came home the other night with a Lebanese taxi driver who told me that Latakia is now a very fashionable

27:00 tourist resort and I can imagine it would be nice there. But it was pretty lonely when we were there and I don’t ever remember seeing a village or a township, I suppose there was one but we never visited it. We were under canvas again up on a plateau and there was a farmhouse just

27:30 down the foot of the plateau, which I investigated and I got friendly with the fellow who owned it and he turned out to be a Frenchman called Monsieur Le Comte De Fueznel. And he was what we would call here a remittance man, and I told him about the British remittance men and he said, “Yes, that’s me. I’ve been sent out here by the family

28:00 to keep me out of the road.” And the family sent out a regular income for him to live in the manner to which he had been accustomed, which was probably pretty high living, I think. He had a good wine cellar and he was a charming bloke quite cultured and an interesting man. And he ran a little school

28:30 under the guardianship of the local monastery and while we were there he invited me to go and teach the boys English, which I did. And it was a nice little break, it was nice, I always used to enjoy getting involved with kids wherever we were around the Middle East and they were bright little fellows and they loved the English lessons and they were quite smart too.

29:00 Ultimately the count invited me to go and meet the monks up in the monastery and talk to them about Australia. Which I did and I was invited up there for dinner and these monks sat around this huge table and in due course I was asked to tell them all about Australia and

29:30 they were very interested. I think many of them hoped to immigrate here and I think some of them did, the church probably gave them some support in that. It was a wonderful night, they lived very well. They had some very good wines in their cellar and the food was good and they were very convivial sort of characters. Apparently they thought I

30:00 was funnier than Bob Hope, and I really wasn’t trying to be funny, I was trying to be informative. But some of the colloquial French that I had picked up from the troops was a bit unusual for these fellows in their cloistered monastery and I apparently caused quite a riot, I had them rolling in the isles, you know. I thought, “What’s funny about that?” It was good fun, I enjoyed it. It was probably about

30:30 the last meeting I had there with him. We never kept in touch, which I found strange, I don’t know why but I guess we got preoccupied with other things at that point. I think that’s one of the sad things about being in the army. You isolate those little events one by one and they lose significance as you move into another environment.

31:00 Pity about that.

You mentioned earlier that your unit was often strafed or attacked, in these postings that you’ve just mentioned, Aleppo, Latakia and Tripoli, did you come under fire?

No, no, no, the war was over at that stage. This was the period

31:30 of boredom. Somebody said, “War is ninety per cent boredom and ten per cent terror.” It was our ninety per cent boredom and it was terribly boring. Apart from the nice little episodes like meeting the Le Comte De Fueznel and so forth, there was no action for us at that point. It wasn’t until we went up to the desert, which was the next

32:00 move, and in fact that happened as I now remember from Tripoli. And I had my twenty-first birthday in Tripoli and went into town and had a few drinks to celebrate it with some of the blokes and, we drank a lot in Tripoli.

32:30 Far too much and I remember having reached the point at that stage where I could almost drink all night, without is affecting me aversely. You know, I think I probably out drank my companions and I ended up by meeting up with a young bloke who was a padre in one of the regiments,

33:00 he was so drunk that he couldn’t drive home. He said, “Can you drive?” And I said, “Yeah I’m fine.” He said, “If you drive me home you can take the car on to your camp and bring it back to me tomorrow.” I thought “Well that’s a generous deal, a beautiful.” So I drove home and when I got home I found that all the trucks had the motors running,

33:30 and the lights were on and somebody said, “Get in your bloody truck for Christ’s sake! We’re going.” So I had arrived home at two o’clock in the morning or something and that was our departure for the western desert. And we drive for, I think it was four nights and three days or three nights and four days or something

34:00 all the way from Tripoli down through Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, across the Sahara, through Cairo and past Alexandria to a place called Amiriya. It was a huge drive and we drove all the way without turning the motors off.

34:30 Most of the guys had a relief driver with them, and I had a fellow in my truck with me, called Rasbar. Joseph Rasbar, he was a Polish bloke, nice man. And I said, “You can drive one of these, can’t you Razz?” And he said, “No, but I am a quick learner.” And I said, “Not this trip, you’re not.”

35:00 So I drove the whole way myself, for all that time, you wouldn’t think it was possible for human energy to last that long but I suppose at twenty-one you can do things, I wouldn’t like to do it now. And in fact there were two of us who drove on our own, my good old mate Jack Parker. He had his thirty-ninth birthday in the desert, so he was one of the old blokes and

35:30 he also drove the whole way by himself and he didn’t even have anybody to wake him up, which, I said to Razz, “Your job is to keep me awake. If you see me drifting off, just wake up.” He sung Polish songs to me all the way down. That was a hideous drive. We weren’t allowed lights, we had no lights at all and the trucks were camouflaged

36:00 to make them look like British vehicles, so it was almost impossible to stay on the road sometimes because particularly when we got into the desert country the sand drifts would blow over the roads and we couldn’t see what was desert and what was road. And we had a device called a diff light, and the differentials

36:30 of the trucks were painted white and they had a little thing like a torch light shining down on them and that was all you could see. This little white light would sit in front of you and it was mesmerizing, it was very hard to judge how far away you were and whether the movement was really happening or not, but it kept us on the road. We all arrived there

37:00 in one piece. We arrived in the morning around, it must have been around Cairo I think, and all the British troops were going that way and we were going the other way and it was a somewhat depressing sight. They weren’t actually withdrawing but they were, well they were. They were doing strategic withdrawal, they weren’t deserting.

37:30 But it was quite unnerving to know that they had been driven out by the Afrika Korps and we were going in to meet them, which was a big task, we knew it was going to be tough. It was also one of the most vital strategic areas of the war.

You just mentioned that was after your twenty-first birthday.

38:00 **I’m trying to gauge the timeframe here, so when would this be? Are we now in 42?**

Yes. We’re in, I’ve got the dates somewhere. I’ll put them out later on but I kept a little, quite illegal I might add,

38:30 sort of record of where I went, I wrote them on the back of my wife’s photograph thinking that no one would have the gall to examine that too closely. I’ve still got that and it’s the only record I’ve got really of where I went. But I think it was the middle of 42 I guess. And

39:00 it was prior, some weeks or even months prior to the big Alamein Battle.

At the end of that long car drive where did you set up camp?

We moved into a British camp, or what had been a British camp I think in a place called Amiriya,

39:30 which is a bit west of Alexandria and my recollection is it was a kind of oasis, with palm trees and stuff around. And probably I don't think we were there for very long. I think my initial recollection is clouded by, I understand that I pulled my truck up, opened the door and fell out and

40:00 slept for twenty-four hours. Somebody threw a blanket over me and just left me there. And we moved from there to another place, which I don't know if it had a name, it was further west and closer to Alamein. And we were camped just in bunk holes, this was starting

40:30 to get to be like a real war. We moved into positions which had been occupied by, I think, the South Africans on the way through. And we just simply moved into their dugouts temporarily, they were very deep, they were like the old First War trenches; you could stand up in them. And

41:00 somebody came round, one of the old timers from previous campaigns came round and said, "Don't use those funk holes, you'll die in them." And apparently it was sandy country and apparently if you got a bomb blast too close to them and if you were in the funk hole you'd be buried alive which would be an unpleasant task. So we were advised to dig different kinds of funk hole s which we did,

41:30 shallow ones.

That's a very good place for us to pause our tape has run out.

Tape 4

00:30 **Ian, I would like to take up again and just ask you, were you aware of the other AIF divisions? Australian divisions when you moved to Alamein or near Alamein?**

Yes, we all knew the legend of Tobruk and so forth and a lot of the troops around the Alamein area,

01:00 of course, had been up and down the desert several times. And the South Africans in particular, who were next door to us, were always incredibly apologetic about having lost Tobruk, which in fact they didn't, they just had a guilt hang up about it. We saw quite a lot of them and several times we would sometimes have a drink with them on

01:30 leave and that sort of thing. And they would say, "We're terribly sorry, man. We buggered up then. We did really bad but I was at Gazala, man. It was shit hot at Gazala." And they were so anxious to make it right with the Australians because they thought we'd held onto Tobruk for so long and they'd lost it. It wasn't their fault at all, in fact the Brits pulled the plug on that, I think. But

02:00 we were very conscious of the earlier battles and of course it had sea sawed up and down North Africa time and time again starting at Bardia with the 6th Division and so forth. I guess most of us, I certainly had a lot of friends who served with the 6th Division and with the 7th. So we knew a good deal about it anecdotally, as well as from

02:30 the news reports. We were very conscious of going in sort of last man down, it was a challenge. And we also knew, it was very obvious that if we didn't hold Alamein the war was probably as good as over. It would have been very difficult to

03:00 pull out of that situation, and there was a good chance that they could have gone right through. It was only a question of extending their supply lines at one stage, that was all that stopped them. The fact that they couldn't keep up the petrol and ammunition, it was a very nasty situation.

And

03:30 **what was your general impression of the enemy at this stage?**

They were one of the finest armies in the world ever, I think, the Afrika Korps was elite, an elite army and Rommel was one of the most competent generals ever, a brilliant general. And he and Montgomery

04:00 probably shared the laurels of the finest leadership qualities in any war in any time, I think. And of course they had a huge, as I believe, a huge mutual respect for each other; and it was a meeting of the giants. And of course the 8th army, by the time Montgomery reshaped it was also a pretty formidable force.

04:30 **How was morale generally in the 9th Division at this point?**

I would think it was high, I think, for two reasons: one, I think we were so pleased to be doing something

05:00 after the months of boredom in Syria., I think there was a sense of well, now we came here to do what we came here to do. Probably a degree of apprehension too because we knew we were up against some pretty tough opposition, but I think on the whole there was a certain confidence about the way we felt

in about our leadership in particularly.

05:30 It was generally felt, I'm sure by all the troops that Montgomery was a pretty indomitable sort of character. There was a lot of confidence in our own divisional commander, Moreshead, he was also seen to be a very capable soldier and a very well liked one I think.

06:00 I think the thing that reassured both of us was that neither of these people were cowboys in the sense that some of the British generals, and one or two of our own perhaps were, with less than adequate regard for the lives of their troops. And Montgomery was certainly seen as being a conservative general who wouldn't do anything that was

06:30 foolish or reckless, and Moreshead also was seen in that light. I think we felt were being well looked after, I think we were prepared to follow these people because we thought they were not likely to get us into any more trouble than was inevitable, you know.

Can you tell me

07:00 **what happened while you were camped near Alamein?**

We were there for a long time of course before the big battle started. We were constantly under fire the minute we got up there. And, as I was saying the fact that we were a desirable target didn't help. Where the front line troops

07:30 were involved in reconnaissance and some sorties here and there the German philosophy I imagine would have been to try and get as much damage done to the supply route as they could. So we, I think probably copped more than our share at that stage, mainly from the air and

08:00 it was constant. It meant that we were under stress pretty well all the time, day and night, at night particularly. The Germans woke up to the fact that troops that troops that couldn't sleep were likely to be less competent than they should be, so they used to send round a big old aircraft

08:30 called a Dornier, which was a big old-fashioned bomber. And they used to circle them around the areas for hour after hour, and occasionally they'd drop a bomb just to remind us that they were bombers. But mostly it was to keep us awake and keep us alert. It was unnerving to be out on the perimeter picket at night

09:00 with these things hovering around was uncomfortable and you were constantly trying to make sure that there was no light around that they could pick on. I had a scary night one night when one of these bombers came over and he started circling quite small right around where we were, and I couldn't understand why he was so interested in us until

09:30 I discovered there was a row of sandbags with a rear vision mirror off a truck sitting on top of it. And the breeze was rocking this thing to the point where obviously the reflection from the moon was transmitting what looked like a visual signal. The fellow was back and back trying to find out what it was about. As soon as I turned the mirror over he went away.

10:00 It made me realize how vulnerable we were, you know. Of course every now and again they would send flares up and try and light the place up so they could see a little bit better what was going on, that was a good time to keep your head down. That all sounds pretty dramatic but really it was not all that, it was more of a nuisance, I think we were

10:30 irritated than frightened at that stage. Although the Stuka attacks were scary, they were very nasty, incredible noise. And they were in daylight only as I remember. But they used to come in off the sea and out of the sun with their engines off so the first thing you knew was when they

11:00 appeared almost on top of you and perhaps only a few hundred feet up. And they'd switch their motors on and go into a steep power dive, and they had whistles. I think they had whistles on the wings or something that made this screaming noise, it would go right through your head penetratingly. And then they'd drop a load of bombs and they'd have their machine guns

11:30 going flat out at the same time, that was very unnerving. That was quite scary. We were extraordinarily lucky that we didn't have very severe casualties from them. I don't know whether it was because they were bad shots or, to some extent I think we were saved by the sandy desert conditions and my theory is that bombs

12:00 on a hard surface tend to scatter more horizontally but when they land in sand they have a more elevated, sort of trajectory and the shrapnel goes up in the air rather than across the ground. And probably that saved many lives, I think.

12:30 **How were you living at this time?**

Just in a hole in the ground with a ground sheet over us. Mostly, as I was saying, we would dig, the deep trenches were frowned on so we used to dig fairly shallow trenches with things like sleeping ramps

13:00 on each side. Mostly we'd share a hole with another bloke and two-man sort of accommodation and

we'd have a sleeping bench on each side and then a deeper foot hole under the benches. And if it got really nasty, you'd tend to roll off your sleeping bunk into the hole at the bottom and keep your head down. And

13:30 for those of us who smoke, which was most of us I suppose, as long as you had a groundsheet over the top of the hole you could have a cigarette at night. I shared a hole for a long time with an old mate I was talking about, Jack Parker, who was thirty-nine. He had his thirty-ninth birthday at Alamein and consequently we always called him "Old

14:00 Jack." And he used to wake every hour for a cigarette through the night, and he'd roll his cigarettes and he'd wake me up every time he'd roll a cigarette, you know. And I remember we must have been getting a bit tense about things at one stage and I remember saying to him one night, "For Christ's

14:30 sake Jack stop crashing those bloody cigarette papers together!" It was just the last irritation, but we remained very good friends. In fact he was one of the very few people I kept in touch with for many years afterwards. He was a farmer, he had a property up in Moss Vale and I used to take my family up there to visit them quite often, he was a good bloke,

15:00 kind of big brother to me. Although I was big brother to everyone else, you know, at the age of twenty-one.

What was your job?

I was the kind of executive,

15:30 I'm not quite sure. It was fundamentally a supply job or a stock control and procurement. My job was to maintain levels of the items that we needed for the LADs and to make arrangements to procure them

16:00 when we needed them, which meant I sometimes had to go down to Alexandria and places like that to get supplies. So I moved up and down from the line quite a lot, and that was a fairly hairy sort of experience too because the roads were very narrow and we were driving on the wrong side of them.

16:30 But in British and Australian vehicles with the steering wheel on the wrong side to be on that side of the road. You know. And traffic coming the other way used to get awful close, and they used to have these big low loaders with big tanks on them and so forth, and they must have been ten or twelve feet wide or I think and it was a very unpleasant experience driving on those rides. Sand drifts and

17:00 we would get into a skid every now and again in the sand and if you went right off the road of course you would get bogged, not easy. But I was fortunate I suppose in that I was able to get away from the front from time to time, and occasionally I would be able to snatch a night's leave in Alexandria and I was a bit more lucky than

17:30 the other guys who were stuck there. We did get leave occasionally and for some reason I was always the guy who drove the leave truck, I think I was probably a better drinker than the rest of them or something. And we used to have some quite interesting leave times in Alexandria particularly. I loved Alex. It was a great town and there had been a lot written about it. You know,

18:00 fascinating place. It was very cosmopolitan. A lot of French people there and Italian, Greek. And it was interesting that when we first went up the Italians tended to treat us with great disdain because they were convinced that the Germans were going to

18:30 get to Alexandria before too long and then when they realized they weren't going to they suddenly got very friendly. The Greeks weren't, the Greeks were always good friends because of the Greek campaign they cemented huge friendships, I think, with the Australian troops. We tended to patronize the Greek restaurants and clubs and so forth, and they were always very friendly.

19:00 A play had just been on in Sydney called 'Sister Street'. I haven't seen it and I haven't read it but I would like to find out more about it because 'Sister Street' was the brothel area of Alexandria and it was

19:30 mercilessly bombed by the Germans. I don't know whether that episode is related in the play or not. It was a fact that Sister Street was very severely bombed, I suspect probably more by accident rather than design because they didn't waste much bombing or strafing on the

20:00 cities at all. I think it was possibly a pilot that had gone off track and thought "I might as well drop a few round here." And he may have known what Sister Street was. In fact they were said to have inflicted fairly heavy casualties, because it was one of the peak hour patronage periods and

20:30 a lot of troops could have been collected in a small space and somebody said, "It is a glorious way to go," but one of my blokes said he had a mate who had been wounded in Sister Street and a scurrilous sort of proposition,

21:00 he'd thought he had been hit by a flying douche can. It was nevertheless, there were a lot of jokes about it but it was fairly serious and quite an unpleasant little episode. I don't know whether they ever restored Sister Street, I in fact had only a couple of visits there collecting troops from, when I was

driving the leave truck. Very unpleasant place, sordid,

21:30 in the extreme. You have no idea how depressing they are. I could never understand how anybody could bring themselves to patronise them. You know, still every man to his taste.

Where was Sister Street in relation to the rest of the city?

I don't remember. It's a very, you know, it's a typical

22:00 Middle Eastern city with narrow lanes and cul-de-sacs and quite dangerous. Not quite as bad a Cairo but a bad place if you got into the wrong area you could end up not getting out of it. In fact I had a quite frightening experience, I think it was in Alexandria, getting into a cul-de-sac and

22:30 finding that I was locked off at the end of this passageway by a group of rather unpleasant looking, I'd say cutthroats or robbers something. And these guys moved in on me and I was on my own, which was unusual, and I was quite frightened that I was going to end up in the gutter,

23:00 and a couple of Indian, Sikh troops came in. And I greeted them like a long lost brother and the three of us advanced through this little group of wogs – was what they were called in those days – 'Western Oriental Gentlemen'. And

23:30 the Sikhs had a reputations for being very deadly, they were the only troops, I think, who were allowed on leave with arms and they used to wear this little knives. Kukris, I think they were. And they were very nice little blokes and they probably saved my life, I think. They had a great reputation

24:00 from the First War. I remember one of my father's jokes about a Sikh soldier who slashed with his kukri at a German soldier and he said, "Ah you missed." And he said, "Shake your head." And the German shook his head and it fell off. It's a tasteless World War I joke.

24:30 **What did Alexandria look like?**

Recollections are a little vague after about sixty years. But I remember it as a very pleasant city. It was on the waterfront, hugely historic and

25:00 we used to swim when we were on leave we would go for a swim in the Med [Mediterranean Sea], just off a wall somewhere, you know. And I remember swimming out to a wrecked aeroplane off Alexandria on one leave occasion and pulling some of the instruments out of the cockpit and bringing them home.

25:30 Souvenirs. Unfortunately, all my souvenirs got lost on the way home and I, we brought our trucks home when we returned to Australia, I'm getting out of context but it doesn't matter, does it? And I had mine loaded up with a whole lot of treasures,

26:00 including a couple of tins full of photographs and a short wave radio and you know goodies that had dropped off the back of a truck. When I arrived home to pick my vehicle up in Ryde I found it was absolutely intact, the padlocks were still on it.

26:30 The tarpaulin was lashed down the way I had left it, except that there was nothing inside. Nothing. Somebody had been into it and cleared the lot out and left it the way it should look, you know. I never knew who it was, it could have been on the ship coming back, sailors on the ship, could have been wharfies when we hit Sydney, anybody but it was a bit of a tragedy because I had a lot of

27:00 things including a manuscript for a novel and stuff like that. So the only photographs I've got left are the ones I sent home to my wife, which fortunately she treasured and I still have.

You mentioned your job was to make sure that supply lines were getting through. What did you do when you got to Alexandria?

27:30 I used to visit the British ordnance people, and I think I used to go to another place, the name of which I can't now recall where there was a huge British ordnance depot and it was like a wholesale establishment from which I used to draw material that I needed. And I

28:00 would take that back with me and would record it and make sure that we had the stock levels that we needed. It was quite tricky because we never knew what was going to blow up next. So it was a quite demanding sort of thing. It was a bit like the job I'd had before I enlisted with De Havilland, I had the same sort of

28:30 responsibility for making sure the bits were there, you know. No doubt the army found that experience pretty important to them, I can't really blame them for sidestepping me.

So were you looking after ammunition supply?

No, we didn't

29:00 do ammunition, mainly motor transport of one sort or another, tanks and trucks and so forth.

And how would you get those vehicles from the warehouse to the front line?

Well, we used to just take the pieces up and then we'd have them available to the LADs. That is light aid detachments.

29:30 They were actually like mechanics and they were the people who could come to us for the bits, take them out, and fit them and replace them and keep the vehicles on the road on the front, you know. So we had to be up pretty close so it was, we were up there alongside

30:00 the artillery more or less most of the time, it was close enough to be quite dangerous. Periodically there was the danger of somebody breaking through and cutting us off. It didn't actually happen, thank God, but there was a checkpoint not far from where we were camped most of the time at Alamein, on the road and they had military

30:30 police posted there to stop people from going any further. That was right alongside us and we used to feel sorry for these poor bloody MPs [Military Police] sitting up there on their bikes all day in the hot sun, and we'd invite them down every now and again for a cup of tea. So we got pretty friendly with them, which didn't do us any good as it turned out.

31:00 When we got back to Australia, I discovered that some of these fellows had been posted to the area where we were camped in Toowoomba, and I thought old friendships, old desert mates and all that sort of stuff will be no disadvantage to us around here. Unfortunately one of my blokes was looking at a

31:30 MG [Morris Garages] sports car and of course a rare commodity in those days, and like most young blokes we'd all wished we could have a sports car, which none of us had. And he was looking at this care and a couple of these MPs came up and arrested him and accused him of trying to steal it, and I knew perfectly well that he wasn't attempting to steal it. And I thought, "What,

32:00 that's not friendship?" This is not Australian mateship at its best by any means. They used to say, "Once a provo [Provosts – Military Police], always a provo," and that was the way they unfortunately were. I fortunately got them off, again with one of Dad's old mates who happened to be a brigadier in the area and I took the story to him and he had these fellows sent to New Guinea, actually, which was

32:30 a nice little postscript, it served them bloody right.

When you were travelling to and from the front line back to Alexandria, were you travelling by yourself?

Yes. But more often I suppose I would have somebody else with me. Probably somebody to

33:00 take some of the driving or, I can't remember exactly what it was like but I do remember going down on my own once or twice. I also had the task, on one occasion, of taking one of our reinforcement officers back to headquarters. Because I was probably better known at headquarters than most people because of the frequent

33:30 trips and I went down on one occasion and I saw the commanding officer down there and I said, "We have a new officer here who is I think going to be a very severe liability." And he said, "What's wrong?" And I said, "Well he freaks out every time there is a bit of action and I think he is worrying the blokes a bit."

34:00 He'd go to pieces every time an aeroplane flew over. I said, "I think he's going to get us into real trouble." So I was flattered that he listened to this and he said, "Oh maybe we had better do a switch. I'll bring him back here and I'll send up Mr so and so." A young lieutenant. So I took this other

34:30 bloke to headquarters on one of my trips and he stayed there and I bought the other bloke back. And he had been back at headquarters only a few days I think, they were so far behind the lines that they used to have lights on in their tents and there was no sort of camouflage or anything, and a German pilot who got off

35:00 track was lost or something, saw these lights and decided to drop his bombs on them and he made a hell of a mess, because he had a perfect target. And the CO and another two or three officers were all playing poker in this big tent with the lights on and he got the lot of them. Killed the CO and this

35:30 other fellow, who should be nameless of course, lost an arm and an eye and had quite severe other wounds, and was invalided at home and was welcomed as a great hero. The guys nearly went mad, somebody sent me a Women's Weekly with a story about this man

36:00 at a celebration with one of the great singers of the day. I've forgotten who it was, Gladys Moncrieff, probably. And she was there welcoming home this wounded hero, and I showed this to the troops and they nearly went berserk, they were furious. But that's the fortunes of war.

36:30 He was a nice bloke, we were quite good mates but he just didn't have that, whatever it was he needed. And I was worried about that because I thought it might be infectious and I thought it could be very bad for the morale of the rest of the people. Because, so far at that point nobody had shown any signs of freaking out about it, it was nasty but it was bearable.

37:00 **What about your own fear?**

Oh yea, I used to get very frightened, but I also had a great sense of self-preservation. I was a very fast runner so if anything nasty happened I would not hesitate to move as quickly as possible into some sort of shelter,

37:30 in a horizontal position. And in fact the guys reckoned if they could have got a Stuka over the Stawell Gift and entered me I would have romped in over the line in no time flat. But I didn't worry about that, I think my main concern was diving into a slit trench and finding something sharp at the bottom, which I frequently did.

38:00 A broken bottle or something, and I had scratches and cuts all over my legs from hitting the ground too fast. I remember telling my father about this, you know the Stawell Gift story, and he didn't think that was funny at all. "It wouldn't have done in my day, old boy. Officers ought to be showing some example to the troops." And I said, "Like you did. Had your

38:30 bloody legs blown off." And of course they did in that First War, apparently. I said, "How did you get blown up like that?" And he said, "Well I was walking with my sergeant across the ground and a bomber came over and" – bombers in those days were little biplanes with hand grenades or something, you know. He was there, an absolute standing shot, under, nobody would dream of

39:00 ducking for cover in those days – "set a bad example old boy," you know.

Why was it important not to show your own fear to others?

I don't think it was important. I think it was a question of being more frightened of losing face than

39:30 being frightened, you know. There was a sort of, yeah, kind of reluctance to look bad in the eyes of your comrades. I think it probably was important too, although that didn't motivate us, in so far that it was the thing that kept morale

40:00 together, I think it was what make people comfortable with the situation. You see one guy panicking badly and there's a sort of infectious contagion about it that can run through the troops. I think that was my motivation in having this other fellow sent home.

40:30 **We are approaching the end of our tape. Perhaps you could just wind up this story and tell us how long you were at Alamein?**

I think it was about four months maybe five months.

41:00 Most of the time we were in the same place, it was quite static. I suppose we had to be established where people knew how to find us easily, and we were not very far from Alamein station, which was a funny little railway station, of which I have a photograph, curiously enough. It was not unpleasant apart from the

41:30 bombing. I used to love the desert. There is a certain fascination about the western desert which was captured, curiously enough, by a film I saw called The English –

Patient?

Yeah. I think a lot of that must have been shot in that area. It was obviously

42:00 fair dinkum location shooting.

Tape 5

00:31 **Afternoon.**

Hi.

Today, I would like to take up your story about stumbling across or visiting a fig orchard near Alamein?

Yes, just before we went up to the front they stopped us in an area, I suppose s few miles back from the Alamein line and it was an amazing place because there was a fig orchard growing out of the sand.

01:00 You wouldn't think anything would grow there but there must have been some artesian water or something; it was beautiful. It must have been an acre or a couple of acres of fig trees in full fruit. We pitched tents underneath them and of course gorged ourselves on this wonderful fruit and of course the shade was very welcome and we thought

01:30 we hoped we would be there forever but unfortunately that wasn't to be. More unfortunately the Germans made sure we didn't get much enjoyment out of it because we'd been there about twenty-four hours and the Stukas came over and before they arrived we suddenly were confronted with a couple of

Arab kids, with a donkey and baskets on its side and they had obviously come up to harvest the fruit.

02:00 And a young boy and a little girl about eighteen, nineteen I suppose, who excited a lot of interest amongst the troops of course. And we talked to them and they went off with the donkey and started picking the fruit, and the Stukas came over and completely demolished the whole of the orchard; every tree was stripped of

02:30 every leaf and every piece of fruit. And somebody said, “What’s happened to the wog kids?” And we went and looked for them and we couldn’t find a trace, no donkey, no girl, no boy, no nothing. We could only assume they must have copped a direct hit and just disintegrated. It was a very sad little episode. Not only did we regret losing the orchard but we were sorry for the kids too.

03:00 And of course very shortly after that they moved us up further towards Alamein where there were no figs, no nothing, nothing growing, whatever.

Had the notion of fighting a war in someone else’s back yard occurred to you before?

No it hadn’t. Because of course most of the desert campaign was fought outside of civilization.

03:30 Apart from Tobruk and one or two other townships on the north, most of what we saw was in open country where you couldn’t do much harm to anybody. There had been a little mosque, not far from Alamein, which had been pretty badly damaged but it seemed to be in total isolation from any sort of civilisation. And the Germans had obviously used

04:00 it as an aiming mark for their artillery, they would take a sighting spy from the mosque and all the drop shots of course would knock the thing about and it was almost reduced to rubble by the time we got there. But I think it was one of the better aspects of that war that civilians weren’t exposed to a lot of danger. And even when there were townships I think

04:30 they were able to get out of the road until things were over. I don’t know about Tobruk, I don’t know what happened to the civilians there but I think they were pretty scarce by the time it got to be an unpleasant place.

What about in Alamein?

Alamein - there was nothing. I don’t know if there was a village even at any time. There was a railway station, which had been built by the

05:00 Italians prior to the war and I don’t really know what it served, I don’t know why they would have bothered to have a railway station with nothing around it. But there were railway stations all the way up and down the line, I presume they were built by the Italian troops to use for staging their supplies and so forth.

Did it seem of any strategic importance to you?

05:30 I suppose there must have been some concern for it because I believe neither side seemed to want to blow the railway line up, I don’t recall ever seeing a train on it mind you. But I assume that both sides thought it would be better to leave it intact in case they wanted to use it on the way home. And the same thing applied to the road too, which was largely left un-attacked.

06:00 **When you were in the fig orchard had you experienced the dive bombers before?**

Had we experienced?

Any attacks by the dive bombers before that?

I think that might have been our first raid actually, I believe it was. We were lucky, we had a bit of damage done to some of the vehicles but none of the blokes got hurt. They weren’t, as I was

06:30 saying before, I think they weren’t helped by the sandy conditions. As I said the bombs used to explode up rather than across and I think that probably kept our casualties down so low.

Other than physical wounding what other impressions did that attack have on you?

Frightened the shit out of us of course. For the first time it was pretty

07:00 terrifying, and the noise is the thing that is so shattering; it is just unbelievably loud and very sudden. There is no sort of warning that it is going to happen. I was saying that the planes used to come out of the sun with their motors off and switch them on a few hundred feet up and come down in a full power dive, very fast and very accurate

07:30 and very loud. Petrifying.

What was your reaction?

Self-preservation, number one. Dive for cover. It was over very quickly of course, I suppose only a matter of seconds really. As a rule there was only one wave, they never

08:00 seemed to come in with two lots. But you move quickly and kept your head down.

I'm interested in what happens to your perceptions at a moment like that: you've said it was probably over in a matter of seconds, what happens to time in that sort of instance?

I suppose you get a big adrenalin rush,

08:30 and my recollection and it is a hell of a long time ago now but my recollection is that most of us were fairly with it immediately after. We'd get up and dust ourselves off and run around seeing what damage was done and singing out to each other to see if anybody had been hurt and we all

09:00 seemed cheerful enough about it at the time. But I suspect that probably for most of us there was a reaction later on when the adrenalin dropped off and you suddenly though, "Christ, you know. I probably was a bit lucky that time." So probably you sort of had a delayed reaction, a secondary shock, you know.

You spoke of the sound of the dive bombers. Are there any other senses that get heaped by something like that?

09:30 I noticed often that there would be tremendous air turbulence, like an implosion, you know. And I suspect that that used to do quite a lot of damage to ears and I think in a confined space it was a very hazardous business. And in fact we found a big bunker, the Italians

10:00 had built a lot of concrete bunkers up and down the North African coast, and one bloke found this bunker not far from our camp and suggested that a few of us should move into it and live in a bit more comfort than we had in the holes. And I went down to have a look at it and when we walked down the steps into the interior,

10:30 which is a sizeable good living room, I suppose, the place was full of Italians: stone dead sitting round a table playing cards. They looked as though they were still alive, they were sitting up in the chairs and the conclusion we drew was that there had been an explosion outside the

11:00 mouth of the thing like a cave, you know and the implosion had sucked all the air out of the place and presumably out of their lungs, and they had just collapsed from lack of oxygen. It was a very weird sight. So we decided not to move in, left it to them.

11:30 **I've never heard a description like that before?**

It was uncanny. It was an uncanny thing to watch, we can only assume that that was what it was.

And the Italians were left just as they were?

Yep. I think we got, presumably the sappers came round and took care of the bodies but it was, that wasn't our problem. We wanted

12:00 out very fast.

Did you feel exposed being in, you were in slit trenches at the time?

Yeah, it was, well it was surprising how much comfort you got from being below the surface of the ground. Particularly after a few episodes when you realized that being below ground level was probably the safest thing you could do and

12:30 being in a building, obviously was not a smart thing, and being in a deep slit trench was also dangerous because of the danger of being buried by loose sand. So it was comforting, not as nice as being somewhere else all together but we did feel reasonably comfortable most of the time.

At the same time you are continuously exposed, or at least

13:00 **in the open air; I'm wondering if that does anything to your senses and perceptions? Is it, does it put your nerves on edge constantly?**

I don't remember being conscious of that. I think after a while we accepted that that was how it was going to be and I think the sense of vulnerability probably came with the strafing

13:30 raids more than with bombing because of course accurate machine guns could pick you off above or below ground, I think we were all pretty conscious of that. But most of the time we were subjected to bombing and some artillery.

Did going through a bombing raid ever get easier after that first time?

I think it did, yes, I think we became a little bit more

14:00 accustomed to it, too the fact that you had survived a few of them and you would probably go on surviving them with a bit of luck. And a bit of speed.

Was anyone ever blasé about that sort of attack?

No, I think it would be smart not to get blasé because that might induce carelessness.

14:30 Certainly you didn't want to be careless. It was always in the back of my mind to have a recollection of where the nearest funk hole might be and to make fast tracks to it if it seemed a smart idea to do so.

Was the discipline of keeping something like that in the back of your mind reinforced amongst all of your men?

15:00 Not as a formal thing. No, I think we worked it out for ourselves mainly and I think it was largely a matter of personal survival and personal instinct and we, a lot of it was very instinctual I'm sure. There was a certain amount of training that taught you how to dive quickly but

15:30 I think it was largely intuitive.

You mentioned yesterday that at times you were sort of an agony aunt for some of the other soldiers. They came to you for consultation?

Yeah.

Was that something that happened in the desert when men would succumb to concerns about their own safety?

I think

16:00 I was saying earlier that my education level was a lot higher than anybody else's there. I had actually done the leaving certificate, which was big time, and many of the guys had left school at eleven or twelve and were virtually illiterate, or were close to being illiterate. So they sort of focused on me as somebody who could

16:30 read and could articulate answers and probably examine problems, even though I was only twenty-one years old. And I think I, I never had a lot of youth before that because my father had been very ill for a lot of the time when I was growing up and I'd sort of been expected to take over the

17:00 male of the household activity, so I probably had a degree of maturity that was beyond my age, or at least had the manifestations of it. I'm not sure that I was all that smart. Consequently I used to cop it from all these fellows with problems. That particularly happened when Americans started to arrive and rumours

17:30 went around that the American troops were going through the Australian women like a holocaust and to some extent that was undoubtedly true. And then odd things would start coming through from personal letters. I remember one fellow, who got a letter from his mother, which he brought to me

18:00 partly for comfort and partly for help. And he was an older guy and had a couple of kids and they lived in a country town and apparently the Americans moved into the, had a base there. And this woman went off with an American or some Americans, they weren't quite sure, and left the kids with his mother and it was incredibly distressing,

18:30 from twelve thousand miles away to have to deal with that sort of situation. So I wrote letters for him, I wrote letters to his local parson and there weren't any welfare people in those days, I think the churches did all that. And we had an endless correspondence about what we were going to do with this little family of his, and

19:00 I'm not sure whether it was him or one of the other fellows who had similar problems actually did get compassionate leave and was sent home to try and deal with the situation. It happened occasionally but it had to be a pretty extreme case. There were a lot of those stories, unfortunately. It was a pretty distressing business really, for any of those fellows.

19:30 It was fairly commonplace I suspect, I knew three or four at fairly intimate levels where it happened. Now I remember my Dad writing to me saying, "The Americans are here, they're over paid, they are over sexed. And they're over here, God damn it."

20:00 It was not a popular move amongst a lot of circles, I can tell you. I suppose we should now be grateful that they did come and help.

What of your own concerns? You had a new bride that you had left behind?

Yes, I don't think I was ever concerned about that. She was living with my parents and I imagine would have been fairly

20:30 well chaperoned anyway, but I think she was a very sensible sort of girl. And I think, she was nursing as a VAD [Voluntary Aid Detachment] at that stage, she would have been under pretty solid discipline in that area too.

Did you frequently correspond home?

I used to write all the time, in fact

21:00 she used to write all the time too. But as I was saying we didn't get mail for about five months when the Japanese came into the war and stopped our transport, and that was pretty unhappy. Not hearing what was going on at home was a bit demoralizing actually. But all my letters fortunately seemed to get home, they were delayed sometimes but they all got there, I think with the exception of one.

21:30 Jenny used to keep them all and number them and I had this huge packet when I got home, which I always thought I would like to read again but they disappeared for reasons I never discovered.

Would concerns of yours or even just terms of loneliness creep into your letters?

22:00 No, I don't think so very much. I think the style of writing home was rather in the manner of the stiff upper lip syndrome. I think everything was great and you didn't talk about things that were not recognizably cheerful. I think most of the talk was about

22:30 other blokes and what they were doing and what they were saying, and experiences on leave. I remember an awful lot of letters about leave experiences in Jerusalem and Cairo and Alexandria and so forth, it was probably the most interesting thing we could talk about, in fact.

That's understandable. I suppose you wouldn't want to have family

23:00 **at home concerned, overly concerned about things that you might write home?**

Yes, you didn't want to do that, and it was extraordinary how concerned wives and mothers would get about small things like, "Have you got plenty of clean underwear and are you getting plenty to eat?" And of course it was not a smart thing to write home and say, "Well what's this

23:30 underwear talk? We haven't had any for a long time and it doesn't make much difference because we can't bathe anyway." We were getting a third of a bottle of water, you know the army water bottle? I think it held a pint or maybe two pints, I'm not sure. We used to get a third of a bottle per day, per man and we'd give half of that to the cook to make tea with,

24:00 so water was absolutely a precious commodity there. In fact we were encouraged not to drink too much water, just have a sip now and again. And of course dehydration was quite a problem. The food was pretty basic, mostly bully beef and dry stuff. Occasionally

24:30 a bit of New Zealand meat would turn up but that was pretty spasmodic. So conditions were not good and it would have been a real worry to write home and say, "Dear Mum. I haven't eaten for three days, I've had 'gyppo [Egyptian] guts' and wog sores." All those things which indeed we did have on a regular basis. We were not in good shape physically, most of the time.

25:00 **If that was the case and you wanted to shield people at home, who did you take your gripes and concerns to? Or did you to anyone?**

I suppose we'd whinge about it to each other. But there wasn't anybody you could take it to, there certainly wasn't the case for going on

25:30 sick parade or anything like that, because we all had problems and there was nothing we could do about it anyway. Hygiene was such that inevitably dysentery would rear its ugly head every now and again, and the wog sores thing was absolutely epidemic. It was, I think, a kind

26:00 of staff infection and of course we were constantly breaking skin. Every time you dived into a slit trench there would be something there to cut you or graze you and almost inevitably this would lead to one of these sores breaking out. I've still got big marks on my legs where these things bored into the flesh and

26:30 left nasty sort of craters. And there seemed nothing we could do about it until somebody came across one of the very early penicillin substances; a yellow powder. In fact I think it was called sulphanilamide, and it was intended, of course for use on major surgery cases and so forth but somebody managed to get hold of

27:00 some of this and we discovered that if you sprinkled some of this yellow powder onto the wog sores and then put a bandage around it and left it for a few days or a week or so, that when you took the bandage off there would be a nice clean wound underneath. So it was not unusual to see guys going around with bits of rag tied all over their bodies.

Why were they called wog sores?

27:30 I suppose they must have been associated with the local citizenry, who did have them. There was a lot of disease in Egypt. We always thought the whole nation was riddled with disease and in fact it was apparently, riddled with syphilis and other problems, and

28:00 the ground itself was said to be quite poisonous. You know if you had open skin and simply got dust in it, it was said that this would be enough to set off some sort of infection. Egypt, when we arrived there, had this extraordinary odour of decay, which you could smell before you even

28:30 got ashore. It was redolent of, a sort of decadence about it, it was the smell of death or disease or something and I was conscious of it the whole time I was in the Middle East. It was less noticeable when

you got up the east coast of the Mediterranean but certainly

29:00 in the North African area and particularly in Cairo and Alexandria and those areas it was quite persistent. And it wasn't until we were well at sea on the way home that somebody noticed that everything smelt good, you know. And arriving back in Sydney and smelling eucalypts, we were ecstatic about that. It was a wonderful smell.

29:30 I remember in some part of Southern Palestine, I can't remember now where it was but there had been a lot of eucalypts been imported, some sort of conservation work and I can remember the guys pulling the leaves off and sniffing them, you know; a breath from home.

That's a very

30:00 **vivid image, almost a sensual one. The desert to me doesn't strike me as an odorous place naturally?**

No its not.

What of other places that you were, like Alamein?

Alamein, I think was not such a problem because it was open and uninhabited.

30:30 And of course the sand blew around there a lot. We used to have severe dust storms and I think that probably had the effect of cleaning the place up a bit, you know. Burying all the shit and waste and rubbish that were lying about, probably got dumped into the waddies with the new sand dune that moved

31:00 over and it was, I found the desert a very refreshing place to live actually. A quite stimulating place. Clear air except when the dust storms were on, you know. Wonderful skies at night, millions of stars and so forth, and clean air and I think it would have been a healthy place if we were living in more healthy conditions.

31:30 **What of the condition of Alamein itself when you arrived?**

It was a huge area of course and I never saw very much of it other than our own particular sector, and the bit behind us on the way down to Alexandria, I'd go through some of the other areas.

32:00 But it was very well organized, we had well marked areas of landmines and tracks and wire and so forth. As long as you knew your way around it was a very well structured sort of environment, which was just as well. If it had been haphazard

32:30 we would have blown ourselves up, no doubt, with our own landmines, which I very nearly did on one occasion. I had a, it was a funny little episode at Alamein. I got something in my eye and it closed up, I couldn't see with my left eye at all and somebody said, "You'd better go and have somebody look at it, you know." And I said, I wouldn't go down

33:00 to the rear aid post which was the forward medical clearing. In fact I think it might have been a casualty clearing station that was not far from us. But they said, "You had better do it." and so I went down and there had been some very intense activity bringing guys in with arms and legs off and a very unpleasant sight, all these people coming in

33:30 from the front. And I thought "I can't go in here with something in my eye," you know it was a little bit much. And a young doctor got hold of me and had a look at this and said, "Oh I think you've got a bit of shrapnel in it." He got a magnet and put it on the eye and the piece of metal popped out and he put a patch on it and I got in the jeep to drive home,

34:00 and of course I had drops in my eyes and so forth and I could only just see and I took a wrong turn and the next thing was a guy screaming at me, "Get out of there you stupid bastard!" And I had driven right into a minefield and one of the guys came over and steered me out of this thing, I reversed out. I was only a few yards into it

34:30 but it was uncomfortable to say the least, yeah. That was my worst casualty, I was extremely lucky. Another sixteenth of an inch further up and I would have lost my sight in that eye, as I discovered curiously enough only very recently. I had an eye check and the optometrist showed me a picture that

35:00 she took of this eye and she said, "There's an extraordinary mark on your eye there, I'm puzzled. Have you had an operation?" I said, "No." She said, "Well, there's a mark there that looks exactly like an operation that they now do with laser to release the nerves in certain conditions so the eye functions better. It looks like you've had that operation except it wasn't very skilfully

35:30 done." And I said, "Well it was done by the Germans actually." And I told her the whole story and she was blown away by it, after all this time the scar is still there. And she was also saying how lucky I was that it hadn't gone a fraction one way or the other and I would have been without that eye.

How is your sight in that eye today?

Perfect. It's

36:00 improved, and she reckons it's because of the wound.

Can you describe for the sector that you talked or earlier, that you were familiar with at Alamein?

Which one?

The sector that you were part of outside Alamein?

I'm sorry, I am not following you.

You said you were only familiar with a certain sector, can you describe that for me?

36:30 Not in any sort of clarity, no. I suppose most of it was just desert and a lot of people, a lot of vehicles, artillery with camouflage over them. Like any other desert battlefield I suppose really and, you know, all the pictures we've seen of the North African campaigns look much like any other one. But

37:00 of course most of the time things were quite static: there was nothing going on, even in a forward area like that. It was not as dramatic as one would think from reading some of the literature. The infantry guys were out on patrols, particularly at night. But

37:30 they were confined to small areas and they were mostly investigative, I think they were looking for movement on the part of the Germans and so forth. And most of the time things just stayed put. And it wasn't until the big Battle of Alamein itself started that all hell broke loose, the night that happened was just

38:00 total pandemonium. It was just the most extraordinary sight I've ever seen, it was the biggest, from what I've read, it was the biggest artillery battle that had ever occurred in history at that stage. I think they had an artillery piece every four yards, eight yards or something on the front, so they were almost packed cheek by jowl along the whole front.

38:30 And they all opened up together and it was like the whole world had blown up, the sky lit up with exploding shells and so forth. It was a fabulous sight. It didn't affect us very much because we stayed where we were but the infantry and the artillery and all that all moved forward and you've probably read some of the stories of that battle, which

39:00 was supposed to have been one of the classic strategic battles of all time, and Montgomery's brainchild.

Before we go into the details of the battle can you tell me who else was stationed around you?

We had the New Zealanders on our right, or maybe just left of us.

39:30 I really meant to have a look at this in fact. But certainly the New Zealanders were alongside us. South Africans, the 51st Highland division were on one side of us. The South Africans, a bit south of that I think. An Indian division. I think Canadian, or a Canadian detachment of some sort,

40:00 maybe a couple of brigades or something. It was very much a Commonwealth thing at that point. And then there were Poles and I think there were some Foreign Legion people even at one point, and it was a huge army. It was a full, I think there were three corps in the 8th Army

40:30 all fully manned and equipped so it was a big team. And of course the Afrika Korps was pretty solid too. And well trained tough troops.

I know our tape is about to end so we will close at that point.

Tape 6

00:30 **Ian, you were going to tell me about the looming Battle of Alamein. From your perspective and your viewpoint how did it begin?**

It was, firstly I should say that one of Montgomery's featured styles of command was his capacity to communicate

01:00 and he often used to turn up, just driving round in a jeep, you know, and waving at people, there was a quite close personal relationship, you know, between Monty and the troops. And they all called him 'Monty', and the guys would chiack him when he came past and he would take it in good part. But I think it was his unique style of command that started communication at that sort of grass roots level

01:30 but it maintained itself right through all ranks. There was a system of what were called GROs, which used to come through to the troops and we'd all be able to access them. General routine orders, coming straight from Montgomery's headquarters. And one of the things that that did was to make us aware of what was going on, presumably within the constraints

02:00 of security. But at least we knew what was happening and it was a new and unique form of battle command, it was called the 'Alamein box formation', whereas previous armies had fought in straight lines and so forth Montgomery's theory was to

02:30 maintain the units in box formations which could be then moved and re-amalgamated with each other. And amongst those things that came through in the general routine orders was an awareness among us that when this thing happened it was going to be the biggest of all time, and I think we all had a sense of history in the making and being part of that history.

03:00 I think that was probably a very sound thing, from the point of morale and from the point of strategy I think it was a very unusual thing for a general to do but Montgomery was smart enough to realize that it was going to pay dividends, I am sure it did. In fact all of us knew broadly what the plan was. And it must have helped particularly for those people in the really far forward areas

03:30 to know that what they were doing was part of the overall plan. And the result of all this was that Alamein became not only the biggest artillery battle of the war or any war I think at that point, exceeded only perhaps later on by Stalingrad, but it was huge in physical terms but it was also huge in

04:00 terms of the result. Which was in fact, the first major victory in the allied campaign; it was the turning point of the war in the opinion of many people and I know several historians have sort of taken Alamein as the turning point where the possibility of the Axis over running us was eliminated for the first time. Or at least

04:30 alleviated. We still weren't out of the wood of course, but it was a huge victory and I think we were all pretty proud to have been part of it in our major or minor roles as they might be.

What was your role there?

Well as I say I was involved mainly with maintaining supplies of

05:00 bits for the LAD people to keep vehicles mainly in action and so it was not a direct combat role but a very necessary one. And I guess somebody has to do it, I was lumbered with it whether I liked it or not.

05:30 **You say you had a sense of the occasion. Did you have a sense of the enemy you were going up against?**

Oh yes. We knew they were, by reputation they were probably the finest army in the world at that stage. They'd proved themselves time and again up in those North African campaigns, they swung backwards and forwards and Rommel of course was seen as being one of the greatest generals

06:00 of all time. And he and Montgomery had enormous respect for each other as commanders; they probably would have liked each other if they hadn't been on the wrong sides. And I think it was a meeting of giants, intellectual giants in a sense, both of them fabulous strategists.

06:30 And both of them were fairly ruthless; Rommel was probably less caring about his troops than Montgomery but he was a very fine general and he had the respect of his troops, I'm told, in the same way as Monty did of his.

Did you feel confident?

Yes.

07:00 I think that was the general feeling, that it was going to work, it had been well planned. Montgomery never did anything precipitantly, you know, we had been sitting there in Alamein for a long time and I believe that Churchill was getting impatient with Montgomery for not moving and Monty dug his toes and said, "I'm not ready, I want to make sure I do this right. I need to do this and this and this before

07:30 I go." And of course Churchill apparently didn't like Montgomery at all although he had to admit his talent. And he was said to have described him at one stage as a 'Bumptious little man on the make'. Which may well have been true, of course but it was a bit of an unkind thing to say about one of your generals in the field, I thought. Still Churchill was prone to

08:00 do that; he carved up a few of his generals one way and another.

You said that you had been to a certain extent aware of the plans of battle, did you know what a box formation was and how it was going to be used?

I think most of us did, I can't remember now exactly what the process was but at the time it was quite revolutionary. I don't

08:30 think it had ever been tried before but it all made so much sense that I think we had confidence in it, I think the troops had confidence in it.

Can you explain it for me?

No, I don't think I can. I don't think I can. It's quite complex but it was largely, no, I don't think I can

describe it any better than I have. I'd like to read that again sometime, I must do so.

09:00 **Could you tell me what its effect was? The outcome of its use in the battle?**

The outcome of it was that there was a combination, as I recall, of infantry and armour. I can't now remember whether it was consistently

09:30 this way but I think in most cases the tanks broke through the line and then the infantry followed through behind them, and in others I think infantry broke through and opened gaps for the tanks. But I think one way or another, and I am a complete amateur at this area, I didn't reach that sort of rank where you get involved in strategy a lot, but it was very carefully planned and very

10:00 carefully timed and with the tank and infantry movements accompanied by artillery barrages which moved forwards in advance of those movement, and with immense air cover as well it must have been from people on the other side it must have been absolutely formidable. Even from standing behind it was scary,

10:30 you know. Just huge amounts of explosives and armour and stuff going through, in a big broad front. I forget how big the front was now but it stretched from the ocean in the north to an area in the south called the Qattara Depression, which was a deep trough in the desert which was almost impassable and it

11:00 in fact formed a barrier. Although there were some skirmishes down there too I believe. There was a fellow called Campbell who had a group of quite famous commandos who used to go down through the Qattara Depression and make a nuisance of himself with the German flanks. But it didn't last very long and of course the Germans, as we know, withdrew fairly rapidly.

11:30 They went back to a place called Tel el Eisa, The 'Hill of Jesus', as it translates and I went up onto the Hill of Jesus after the battle finished and I'd never seen such an incredibly desolate place, it had obviously been used for the heavy artillery. The Germans had an enormous

12:00 gun called the eighty-eight millimetre which had a very long barrel, and it was a very effective weapon apparently. And I remember going up onto the Hill of Jesus and I don't know how many of these guns there were there, but there seemed to be dozens of them. And some of them, the barrels had blown up and some of them had been bombed flat. And the whole of the ground was black.

12:30 It was so black that you couldn't see where the ground was and where the bodies were. It was almost inevitable that you would walk over German bodies inadvertently while you were moving around. But it was just absolute desolation, nothing left. Hundreds and hundreds of bodies. It was

13:00 pretty sobering and of course it could have gone the other way and we might have had the same sort of desolation at our end if it hadn't worked for us. Not a pretty sight.

How long after the battle was this?

Oh maybe forty-eight hours. And quite soon afterwards but of course decomposing

13:30 flesh in those sort of temperatures is pretty hard to deal with too, it was not pleasant. Makes you realize that wars are not good things to be in, useless waste.

I imagine this was another occasion when the smell of the desert might have made

14:00 **a mark?**

It did. It did. I remember coming down from the Hill of Jesus and I suddenly heard bagpipes and there was a piper up amongst all this ruin playing The Flowers of the Forest, which it really got to me. Pretty emotional.

14:30 **You've described a very, the coordination between the artillery and the infantry seems very precise, was that extending back to your work as well?**

Not really, no we remained static at that point, because there was nothing the LADs could be doing while the action was on. I imagine that they would have been up there

15:00 as soon as the withdrawal happened because there would have been a lot of damaged vehicles and stuff up there. I can't remember much now but I'm sure there was a lot of activity going on immediately afterwards. Particularly as we were supposed to be moving forward with the rest of the army and of course that didn't happen. Our prime minister of the day,

15:30 who was not a friend of Churchill, they had a very active enmity, and we were having a lot of problems in the Pacific, of course, at that stage. Churchill was given the message that the 9th Division was going to be pulled out and returned home, and apparently he was furious. The New Zealanders kept going

16:00 and I actually think they went through to the D-Day landings. Most of us I think felt a bit let down by this decision and although I think my own feeling was that as much as I'd like to go home we hadn't actually finished the job and that there would be some kudos in going through North Africa and

ultimately back to Europe.

16:30 And of course I was also hoping to go to England and hopefully Scotland and get some leave there, I hoped, so there might have been some ulterior motive in that regard. But it wasn't to be and we were pulled out and Churchill never forgave, it was Chifley, wasn't it?

Curtin?

Curtin, sorry, yeah,

17:00 Curtin was then the prime minister. He never forgave him or the Australians as far as that's concerned.

How far did you actually get in the advance following the battle?

Only as far as Tel el Eisa. I think we might have gone to El Daba, which was the next railway station along. Not very far and then we were turned

17:30 around so the rest of the mob went on and we went back. Which I suppose gave some of us a feeling of desertion it was almost like losing the plot. But soon as we knew we were going home, we no doubt felt a lot better about it and I think we were actually told that we were headed home. Because there had been a rumour that we

18:00 were going somewhere else, I forget now, another theatre of war but that was fortunately squashed. It still took us a while to get home. Some weeks, most of which I spent in Haifa in very happy circumstances.

The politics of the situation you've just described,

18:30 **were you aware of those at the time?**

Not fully, no, not fully aware of that and in fact we weren't even fully aware of the situation at home. We never knew about the bombing of Darwin for example, I think it probably wasn't until we got home that we became aware of that. There were rumours

19:00 about Sydney being shelled and I don't think we believed that. I think we thought it was too far-fetched to be possible. And there was an element of concealment of course. Censorship was obviously a necessary evil of war and it obtained certainly with things that were that far away. I think probably also that

19:30 they might have felt that it was not good for morale for the troops abroad to be concerned with the safety of their people at home as we might well have been., it was not critical but there was certainly a threat. Which, apparently caused huge pandemonium in Sydney. My dear little

20:00 wife had some friends living in Vaucluse and their neighbours packed up and left and went to live up in the mountains as soon as the shelling started and these people said to Jenny, "You could buy their house," I think for five-hundred pounds or something,

20:30 and she rattled around and dug. I'd been sending money home and I think she had a few quid in the bank and I think she thought my Dad and her Dad might lend us a few quid and we could have bought a house in Vaucluse for ridiculous money, you know, far below its real value at the time. And, being a dutiful wife she wrote to me to get my agreement and

21:00 that was unfortunately one of the letters that didn't get there, so the opportunity passed. It was the first of my real real-estate disasters, of which I've had many since.

Can you tell me how long your personal involvement in the battle at Alamein lasted?

I think we were in the Alamein

21:30 sector for four or five months all together and of course the battle lasted only for a few days, as I recall. But it was an ongoing thing, the actual assault was the culmination of a lot of planning and movement and a build up of troops and there was a sense of excitement, I think, in anticipation of Alamein.

22:00 That as we saw things changing and more material coming up and more activity from the air and all that sort of thing we figured that it was building up for something that was pretty exciting. The air activity was something that we'd been missing on for a long time and I think this is one of the things that Montgomery got very insistent

22:30 about, having proper air cover. Because when we first went up to Alamein there were no Spitfires and there were a few Kittyhawks and there were a lot of fighter aircraft that were basically, obsolete there was one aircraft called an Albacore which was almost First War vintage, you know. And we used to sit down in the sand and watch

23:00 the poor buggers go up with the Messerschmitts which were a very fast accurate aircraft. The Messerschmitts would come up and they would just blow these people out of the sky you know, you would see them coming out one after the other. We had a – somebody found me a short wave radio and

we used to pick up the signals from the aircraft up in the

23:30 dogfights. We had a sort of adopted squadron, which was a mixed British squadron led by a fellow whose codename was 'Dog's Body Yellow' and he was very British, terribly nice chap. And they had Australians, and South Africans Indians and all these funny accents would come across while they were sorting each other

24:00 out on the flight. I remember telling the story at home over diner one night when I came back, about listening in to Dog's Body Yellow and his crew one day and there was a hell of a skirmish going on upstairs and they all seemed to get lost but this South African come over and he said, "Calling Dog's Body Yellow. Where are you, man? Where the bloody hell are you

24:30 doing? Are you turning left? Are you turning right? Where the fuck are you turning?" I told this story over dinner at night and, this is an interesting observation of the morals of the day, but my father said, "I think you owe your mother an apology, old boy. I think you should leave the table." Here I was, a grown man, a returned soldier, being ordered to leave the table because of a terrible word. And now of course it's

25:00 okay for Rene Rivkin to use it fifteen times with Andrew Denton, things have changed.

I wonder how Dog's Body Yellow took it?

He would have understood, he was a very laid back fellow. He used to say, "I say Roger, you have a Heidi on your Jacksy, old chap." "Oh Shit." And there'd be a big burst of machine gun fire, they were marvellous fellows.

25:30 I actually met some of them when I was on leave. And one of them said, "We look at you blokes down there on the sand and we wouldn't swap with you for a million quid." And I said, "Yeah. We sit there in the sand and we look up at you guys and we wouldn't swap with you for five million quid." I wouldn't have had it for any sort of inducement. Very scary. But then before Alamein, that was a digression but

26:00 when the real Alamein started we got a lot of Spitfires up there and they seemed to make a huge difference to the way the dogfights went. They assisted the bombers quite substantially too.

You said that your unit earlier had been somewhat of a target for the enemy was this the case during

26:30 **the battle?**

No, I don't think it would have been during the battle. In fact, I don't think we were in any danger at all really. The possibility of being rearguard action if anything had gone wrong, then it would have been pretty bad. I mean we were armed and ready for hand to hand fighting if it came to that, and trained for it, but

27:00 in normal circumstances as long as the battle went the way it was supposed to go we were probably safer then than at other times because they were too damn busy on the other side looking after themselves.

Even so you had no awareness of the size and scope of this battle and the potential for an overturning of the armed forces?

Oh it could have happened. Yes.

You say you had been trained in hand to hand combat but

27:30 **can you be ready for the possibility of something like that?**

Oh yes, I suppose so. It's something you don't forget it's like riding a bike. If you've learned to use small arms and you've been properly trained then I think it's an automatic reaction. I mean I am sure could grab a .303 rifle now

28:00 and find it a useful weapon if I needed it, or even a Vickers machine gun.

Did you ever lay your hands on one?

Not in action, but in training with the 30th Battalion I was trained as a Vickers machine gunner.

Consequently after having that training did you, in the course of your service, ever

28:30 **have a time to use one?**

No, I didn't. But I think I was talking about my illicit anti-aircraft Breeder. And I suppose the Vickers training would have made it much easier to use that than otherwise, but the only time I actually saw a Vickers machine gun, this is a very funny little story:

29:00 I was in Haifa right towards the end of the stint in the Middle East and my little friend Zahaba was in a group of young women, eighteen, nineteen, twenty-year-old girls, who were training as soldiers, and as

far back as 1943 of course Israel was

29:30 working towards being Israel and they were training for what they saw was the inevitable conflict that would occur when the British pulled out, as they had indicated they would. And she came to me one night and said that the group had found a machine gun somebody had given them and did I know anybody who could teach them how to use it? And I

30:00 said, “Yeah, me.” So I used to go up ever Sunday up on the top of Mt Carmel, they have an old football field or something there that they used to practise on and I had these gorgeous little Jewish girls running around pulling machine guns to bits and putting them together again. And I often wondered, they probably did, when the six-day war came I imagine that those kids were

30:30 quite well trained and probably integrated into the Israeli army. Because there were a tremendous number of women soldiers in that army, they were very good. They were very well trained. The strange thing about the weapons that were falling into the hands of these Jewish people was they were all coming from the Arabs, and the Arabs were great thieves of course

31:00 and they used to pinch them from the troops. We had to be on constant guard with our own rifles and so forth that they didn’t get knocked off by the Arabs and the Arabs would steel them from the British and Australian troops and sell them to the Jews and probably ended up dying with their own weaponry

31:30 in due course you know. They were very good at it, there was a story about one of the people in a camp where we were in Barbara. And we were living in big tents at that stage, I think we were about a dozen or so men to a tent, they were what were called EPIP [English pattern, Indian product]. English Pattern, Indian something or other tent, Made

32:00 very heavy canvas. Quite large and they had two posts, one at either end of the tent, with a ridgepole and of course the guy ropes when they were tightened kept the whole thing stable and upright. And there was a story that a group of Arabs had broken into one of the tents while the guys were asleep

32:30 and they’d come and they’d loosened all the guy ropes, oh yes and we used to keep the rifles stacked against the poles and padlocked these guys they were said to have loosened all the guy ropes and picked the poles up, got the rifles out from underneath, scarpered with the rifles and then tightened the guy ropes up and when the fellows woke up in the morning all the rifles had gone. Whether it was true or apocryphal I don’t know, but it is probably true, they were smart people.

33:00 And that’s how the Israeli army came into being, I suspect.

I would like to take you to your time back in Palestine shortly but before we do I just want to get an impression of, you said before that you have come into the climactic Battle of Alamein with a lot of anticipation and yet forty-eight hours later you were standing on a hill with hundreds of German

33:30 **soldiers around you? You’d seen dead soldiers before, you talked of the Italians in the dug out, why did this scene make a bigger mark on you?**

I think it was the sheer destruction. I think the fact that these bodies were unrecognisable

34:00 as human, they had all been burned. It was almost like, that they were pretend bodies, you know. And then you suddenly realize that they were once, not long before active young, virile young men. And there were so many of them, it was such huge

34:30 devastation of life. Quite frightening, we used to find a lot of bodies in more isolated circumstances. In some of the flat areas where there had been more movement, presumably, I came across a body one occasion of an Italian Don-R. Despatch rider on a bike.

35:00 He was sitting there on his bike with his hands on the handlebars and the motor was still running, still ticking over, you know, idling. And he was dead as a dodo, he’d been shot. In fact I think I had his pistol. I souvenired something from him and I thought he is not going to need this any more.

35:30 And then I was told that this was rather a foolish thing to do because the Italians had been booby-trapping their own dead and we had a few casualties. The Italians had a very unpleasant little hand grenade it was, I think they called it ‘the red devil’. It was like a rattle it had a handle and a red bulb on the end and

36:00 they used to put these under the bodies of their dead comrades or sometimes under their tin hats and when the troops came to remove the bodies they’d move the hat or move the body and the next thing it would blow up. They weren’t terribly lethal but they were enough to lose an arm or get some fairly substantial damage and so

36:30 we were a bit more careful about souveniring after that.

Had that been a regular practise before then?

I think so, yeah, I had a camera, which I picked up from one of the German bodies and I had the film developed subsequently, which

37:00 was a fairly enlightening experience. In contrast with the Hill of Jesus episode, here were a lot of guys, I mean young fellows our own age having their hair cut and playing cards and writing letters. All the same things that we were doing and almost the same circumstances.

37:30 I think it made us realize how bloody stupid the whole thing was. They were probably quite nice blokes really if you got to know them, and why were we shooting the shit out of each other was the sort of question?

What, I won't say drove, but what lead you to develop that film?

38:00 Curiosity, for a start. Quite illegal of course, I should have handed it over to the field security people but the temptation to take it in to Alexandra, I think it was on the first leave we had. And I was delighted with them. I think I've still got the prints here, eight exposures of these things.

38:30 There was nothing of any significance from a security point of view. I don't think you could even identify where they were likely to be, but they just had a sort of personal interest for me and making me able to relate to these people who were so, otherwise anonymous, you know, they were just people.

39:00 **That's very interesting and curious that you would want to see into the eyes of the other side?**

Yeah, or is it? I don't know, I think it's understandable. I found it

39:30 humanising somehow that instead of looking across the desert at anonymous non persons, that I was actually able to see that they were real. And of course this used to happen. I remember stories of my Dad and his old mates, of course their war was so much closer in contact,

40:00 there were places in France I believe where there were only twenty yards between the German troops and the British. But apparently there were times when the two troops used to exchange greetings and throw cigarettes to each other and there was one famous story of the troops at Christmas time in one of the French battles all singing Silent Night.

40:30 I don't know whether it is a good thing to think of soldiers as human or whether it's better to think of them as totally inhuman but there must be some humanity. I was reminded of this, in fact, looking at some of the footage of the Iraqi War, the image that people would like us to have

41:00 is that Iraqis are a pretty evil lot of people was very much destroyed by some of the footage that was shot by embedded journalists and supposably trying to promote the American cause. I found that disturbing, but in a way reassuring too: there can be a level of humanity.

A very interesting thought and a very nice place to pause on, our tape has come to a close again.

Tape 7

00:30 **Ian, I would like to move on to post Battle of Alamein, is there anything that you would like to say to conclude that story?**

No, I don't think so. I think, as I probably intimated, I really don't think I'm highly qualified

01:00 to talk about Alamein as a battle. And in fact my knowledge of it really is from reading rather than from my presence there, apart from that feeling that I was talking of, of the immense feeling of connection with history and the knowledge that we were there witnessing probably one of the most extraordinary events of the century really. But

01:30 I think that wraps me really on Alamein.

While I was listening to your stories on Alamein I was wondering if you had to paint the desert how would you paint it?

Curiously enough I have and I painted it in the abstract, this is a

02:00 long time ago, and this was long before anyone had ever heard of Jackson Pollock. I was using that kind of technique with a lot of violent colour and violent movement and so forth. It was during a period when I think I was feeling pretty angry with life generally and it was a almost an

02:30 reversion to type, you know, and I was in there fighting battles with pain rather than weapons. But it didn't last long. I only have a few of those pictures left, I never exhibited them, I have them tucked away in somebody else's garage at the moment.

03:00 **You are quite a visual person and an aural person, do you recall sounds in particular from that time?**

I certainly recall the sounds of battle and I must say that the sound of aeroplane motors used to

03:30 disturb me for years after I came home and in fact on one occasion I jumped out of bed when an aircraft came over a bit lower than normal. It was as though it was going into a dive and in my sleep I rolled out of bed and frightened the life out of my partner as a result. Aeroplane noises,

04:00 in fact I believe many of us came back with that horror. And it was a quite formidable sound, particularly if you were listening to a number of bombers flying together because the revolutions of the motors would form a kind of pattern and after a while you could almost count how many aircraft there were.

04:30 Some of the experts claimed to be able to identify what kind of aircraft they were: they knew how fast they were flying and where they were coming from and where they were headed and, it was not good. I believe that this happened to people in Britain, probably to a greater extent than we ever had. Their recollection of aircraft noises is something that remains

05:00 a source of terror for them. Maybe for their whole lives, and of course they had it much worse than I think the troops in the desert ever did. In fact I remember meeting a couple of young British officers who had been home on leave and they admitted quite frankly that they were very glad to be back in the desert. They wouldn't swap with their own wives for a million quid, with these

05:30 bombing attacks in London., their wives both lived in London. They both said they couldn't understand how these women had maintained the courage they needed to go down to the shelter night after night after night, with this constant bombing. Every night. Much worse than anything that ever happened in the desert, they reckoned. So we stopped feeling sorry

06:00 for ourselves. But the other sounds I remember, and I was thinking the other night of the period we spend in Latakia, up near the Turkish border. I was walking around on the plateau one night and I heard this extraordinary sound of a pipe being played, like almost a

06:30 flute kind of sound. It was an Arab shepherd with a few sheep wondering around amongst the cactus plants and playing this extraordinary music. It was quite eerie and quite touching. In fact he stayed around for a while and we used to talk and I'd ask him about his music and he was, you know, a nice kid. Nice little Arab boy.

07:00 But otherwise I don't recall sound as being a predominant part of the Middle East, I didn't like their music particularly, it was not attractive to the western ear, most of it.

That actually leads me

07:30 **to my next question, I was going to ask you about music and songs. Do you have any recollections of songs that were sung?**

Oh my word, yes. Mostly ribald, and in fact one of the things we used to do in the desert to kill the night. You couldn't have

08:00 lights on and there was nothing you could do really apart from talk and swap yarns and sing and we used to sing a lot. A couple of us had good voices and we in fact formed a little unofficial barbershop quartet. One of the blokes had a very good voice and used to sing a lot of that barbershop sort of stuff and we developed a

08:30 routine, not for anybody else's benefit but our own. And there were endless Ribald songs like, well I don't think you'd have ever heard them, I hope. But there is a whole collection of ballads that are completely unprintable. And the famous one of course

09:00 was about the troop ship just leaving Bombay. "Cheer up my lads. Fuck them all. You'll get no promotion this side of the ocean, etc. etc." And that had endless verses that were invented and reinvented and altered and so forth as time went on. And I suppose it was a kind of early protest song in a way because most of us felt that way that

09:30 we would get no promotion that side of the ocean. It was a sort of protest against the whole establishment., that was one of many. But there were other traditional things we used to sing like the Ball of Kerry Moore was probably known to most people, certainly with Scottish origins but again unprintable.

10:00 So we used to enjoy that and it kept us alive and well but as far as real music's concerned I don't recall having heard any apart from nightclub singers in the cafés. There was a lot of activity in Alexandria particularly had a lot of that kind of entertainment. And Haifa of course was just wonderful for that. There were masses of refugee artists there,

10:30 singing for their supper basically, and people like Edith Piaf was there I think and others who would pop up unexpectedly and unannounced, that was interesting. But I missed good music, which I had been brought up with. I don't recall ever having gone to a concert the whole time I was there.

11:00 No, I can't think of any. Visually I think the Middle East is wonderful, I have got very clear recollections of that. I took quite a lot of photographs of places like Jerusalem and so forth and Syria was wonderful

scenically and I spent a bit of time up on the Cedars of Lebanon,

11:30 the famous Cedars of Lebanon. An amazing place. The road to the Cedars from Tripoli was said to be the steepest ascent in the world. And it was just a series of hairpin bends for hundreds and hundreds of feet up into the air and when you got to the top, well when we got to the top it was covered in snow and

12:00 the Cedars really were like the Bible said, these wonderful trees. And you look down over the city of Tripoli and there were people swimming in the Mediterranean down below it was an extraordinary contrast. Beautiful country. We actually had a battalion training in the Cedars s a ski battalion. I don't know what the hell they thought they were going to do with them but

12:30 they probably found a senior officer who likes skiing, I should imagine. The Nile was beautiful too. Parts of the Nile were just incredibly picturesque. I can remember my grandmother had some prints of fillackers on the Nile and camels and things. And date palms and that.

13:00 And I thought how unreal and grotesque the pictures were, and then when I went across there they were, large as life, grandma's pictures in the flesh.

Are you certain that, that some of your songs are too ribald to be printable? I would like to hear them?

Would you?

13:30 I'm not sure that I can remember all of them but the famous one of Fuck em All with it's multiple verses. And as I say we used to invent our own. And the other thing, digressing slightly, is that we used to

14:00 make up limericks, and we used to have a competition. If there was a bottle of beer around someone would be voted to win the bottle of beer with the best limerick of the night, and they also were scatological in the extreme. They were pretty nasty. As somebody said, "There's no such thing as a clean limerick. If it's clean, it's not a limerick." We used to sing those

14:30 and the chorus would come just at the end and say,

\n[Verse follows]\n"That was a nice little yarn.\n Sing us another one\n Just like the other one,\n Sing us another one, do."\n

And that would go on for hour after hour sometimes. And for the good ones there would be screams of laughter. I often wonder whether it kept the Germans awake at the other end of the road. But as for singing one I don't know about that.

15:00 Some of the isolated verses I remember were lovely. There was one that said,

\n[Verse follows]\n"Fuck all the sergeants and their bastard sons.\n Fuck all the corporals and their bastard sons.\n Fuck all the WOs [warrant officers] and the officers too –\n

15:30 With fucking great pockets with fuck all inside."\n

And they went on and on and on and on. And they alluded to all the terrible things they were going to do to these terrible people who had made life so difficult for them you know. And the chorus line was,

\n[Verse follows]\n"You'll get no promotion,\n This side of the ocean,\n So cheer up me lads,\n Fuck em all."\n

It just went on and on and on.

16:00 And The Ball of Kerry Moor everybody's heard I'm sure. And The Good Ship Venus. I'm sure Chris would have heard of some of these at scout camps even.

How does it go?

The?

The Kerry Moor?

The Ball of Kerry Moor that's quite an old Scottish traditional song of the scatological type

16:30 and it goes something like.

\n[Verse follows]\n"The ball, the ball, the ball, the ball, the ball of Kerry Moor,\n With four and twenty prostitutes a screwing on the floor.\n Singing who'll do them this time?\n Who'll do them now?\n The man that did 'em last time can a do 'em too.\n "

And all the individuals are brought in one after another, you know. Parson Brown was there

17:00 and all. And, "Wasn't a feeling will. Couldn't hold his water in the middle of the reel." It is terrible stuff but it entertained us and kept us alert. Yes, I don't know whether that's going to be broadminded stuff to be put to air but it's a bit of history, isn't it?

And I'm also wondering were some of the

17:30 **songs and ditties aimed at the enemy?**

No, I don't recall any. They were very, they were almost abstract, you know. They were funny little things like

\n[Verse follows]\n"The lady called Alice\n Who pee'd in the Episcopal chalice.\n It wasn't the mead\n That prompted the deed.\n

18:00 But sheer Presbyterian malice."\n

They were all sorts of funny little things with religious or political overtones sometimes. But more often than not just anything that came into your head, you know, that's called entertaining the troops. DIY [do it yourself].

18:30 **Well DIY is often the best.**

Yes, I think so.

On the subject of limericks and slang, did you have a nickname yourself?

No, I was mostly called 'Mac', I think. It was convenient if you've got a name like Macdonald, it keeps you away from those things but I was going through photographs the other day and I saw some

19:00 of these people and I tried to remember their names. And it was surprising how many I did remember. And one of these, one of our larrikin characters, he was called 'Curly' Collins because he had very straight hair and he was the Don-R. And we had another funny little fellow, totally illiterate, one of the country boys from the Mallee, and because he was illiterate and probably

19:30 inarticulate he was known as Silly 'Fucking' Rye because the word was used, not only between words but between syllables. And Silly would say things like, "Absi-fucking-lutely mate." You know. So consequently he got lumbered with Silly Fucking Rye and people would always refer to him as such. And there was a 'Bluey' and 'Curly'

20:00 Collins of course and 'Smoky' and 'Lofty' and they all had their nicknames. I was lucky I suppose, I was called Mac most of the time, or 'Corp' or 'Sarge' or whatever my rank happened to be at the time.

20:30 **Going back to the story, after Alamein I believe you went back to Palestine and to Haifa, can you tell me about your time there?**

I certainly can, that was the highlight of the war for me. I was seconded to

21:00 the British, which meant that I was working with them but I wasn't really subject to their discipline. I didn't really have to go to roll calls, I didn't have to take any guard duties or anything like that so I was virtually a free agent. Which meant that I could go into town on leave every night if I wanted to which I did.

21:30 And to really gild the lily they appointed me a Jewish girl as a secretary sort of person to help me with the clerical side of the business. My function was really returning material to the British that we didn't want to take home with us and recording those transactions and rounding the stuff up from different places and so forth. It was quite a complex

22:00 little operation, but it was most enjoyable and it was particularly so because of this little girl, who I not only got very friendly with but fell madly in love with. We had a, what should have been a very passionate love affair, in fact was at arms length and it remained that way all that way all the time we were there. That was in a way very sad but on the other hand of course

22:30 it meant that I went home with a clear conscience to my wife of a week. So I think I'm glad I did that, I'm not quite sure. But her name was Zuhaba. And Zuhaba and I kept in touch for a long time, and I told my wife about the meeting and we wrote to each other quite a lot for some couple of years after the war, and I often wondered

23:00 what happened to her and her family. Her sister was delightful and she was married to a Polish guy who was, and we became very good friends. He was a very nice man. He was, he had been a soldier in the British army in one of the North African campaigns and had been wounded and discharged to his practise as a lawyer in Haifa.

23:30 I think his father was a judge in the Haifa judiciary and they were a delightful family, they were really very nice. They were intellectuals and educated people, you know, cultured people. And it was the first really intimate clash with any sort of culture I'd had in a couple of

24:00 years. It was a most heart-warming experience, apart from the affection I had for this girl. We used to see a tremendous amount of each other, my recollection is that we must have spent almost every night as a foursome wondering around the night clubs and listening to music and drinking the local wine and so forth. It was a very pleasant experience.

24:30 Which I couldn't really afford on my modest salary but one of the things I discovered, thanks to the Brits who were paying me was that you can overdraw, which the Australian Army didn't allow of course. So by the time I got home I had a big overdraft in my pay book of fifty pounds or something or maybe it was more,

25:00 which I felt a bit ashamed about but I thought, "Oh bugger it." That lasted for some weeks, I'm not sure, I used to think it was three months but it may not have been quite that long. But it did take quite a long while to get all that wrapped up. Eventually, in fact I have to say that there was a plan that was endorsed by the family

25:30 that Zuhaba and I should go away for a holiday before I left to come back to Australia and she actually took me out to meet an uncle of hers who was the headman in a kibbutz, and we spent the day with this old chap. He was a lovely old man and he discussed the possibility of the two of us

26:00 coming out to stay and we'd be given quarters and so forth, and he quite accepted the fact that this was okay. If we really wanted to be with each other and this was all right with the family. And of course her sister Bella was encouraging the idea if anything, they all, the Jewish people over there I found incredibly romantic. Their moral stance was

26:30 quite rigid but different. And pre-marital sex was not frowned on by any means, provided it was based on genuine affection, you know. It was a rather novel sort of attitude and I've subsequently learned that in fact it still prevails today that because of the economics of the early Israeli

27:00 establishment it meant that most men couldn't afford a wife until they were probably fifty. There was so little money to support one until they had accumulated a bit. So it was not unusual for young women to have relationships with guys of their own age and then subsequently marry an older bloke in a more permanent relationship.

27:30 The temptation of course to adopt that was touch and go, I really was intending to do the kibbutz trip. This is all pretty personal stuff, isn't it? At the last minute I decided to take my leave in Cairo and I had to say goodbye to the Taskar family

28:00 with great reluctance. They all understood, they all accepted it quite without any rancour but I still have sort of feelings of, do you regret those things or do you pat yourself on the back for your resolute steadfast celibacy? I don't know. Probably I did the right thing, I don't stand in judgement on myself.

28:30 **What was it about Zuhaba that attracted you?**

She was very pretty, which undoubtedly had an effect. She was very warm and very funny, in fact the whole family had the most extraordinary sense of humour. I love Jewish humour anyway and I

29:00 think theirs was probably more developed than most, the girls were both Hungarian, and Ben was Polish. This was in itself a curious situation because amongst those early Israeli settlers the Poles were regarded as the bottom of the heap and a good Hungarian

29:30 Jewish girl wouldn't think about marrying a Pole, and apparently the family disapproved of Bella marrying Ben. But he was such an accomplished fellow and he was such a charming bloke and of course he had a record as a soldier with the Brits and he was also the lightweight amateur champion of Palestine and so he sort of restored the balance and

30:00 they had these wonderful little sort of sorties at each other. And they used to tear the other racial people apart. Quite a racist society incidentally, the amalgam of Judaism as amalgamating sort of glue in the society didn't really exist. Well, I never saw it, there were quite severe differences of attitude and

30:30 I found this particularly in the early days. I had friends in Kfar-Vitkin who were Russian and they were virtually isolated from the rest of society. They were frowned on and almost despised and in return they despised the rest of society, so it is extraordinary how Israel had become such a unified place. But I loved it. I loved the people and I

31:00 often wanted to go back and have another look at it, which I never did of course.

You've just answered my next question actually, I was wondering if you had ever returned?

No, I haven't. I had a good friend who is Jewish,

31:30 I think he is married to a cousin of mine, a man called Peter Bowen. I think he was in the Senate for many years. And Peter did a trip to Israel many years ago, it must have been sometime after the Six Day War had happened, and I gave him Zuhaba's name and the family name. Ben's name was Urman and

32:00 theirs was Taskar and I said, "While you are in Haifa can you see if you can track them down for me? Just say good day to them for me. And if they invite you to dinner go, because the food will be good and they are nice people." And Peter came back and he said, "I couldn't find any trace at all of either Taskars or Urmans in Haifa." And I just hope that they didn't get annihilated in the Six Day War.

32:30 Possibly, more optimistically they might have gone back to Hungary or something like that, but I often

wondered how they got on. I had other friends there too. You know acquaintances that it would have been nice to have caught up with again. It's funny when I came back I, its extraordinary how

33:00 more tolerant we are of race than was the case then. I remember coming back and a friend of mine made the comment that he thought the only good thing Hitler did do was wipe the Jews out and he wished he had done it properly and he said, "Oh Sorry. You're a Jew lover, aren't you?" Well I was furious, you know. I thought what a

33:30 crass thing to say. This man was Australian born of English parentage, in fact he inherited an English baronetcy later on. I thought, "How dare you?" In fact our friendship ceased almost at that moment. Of course at the same time there were these terrible rifts in society between Catholic and Protestant people, and

34:00 I look around now and I think, thank God, that's one positive thing that's happened with the change in our society here. I mean we might have a few racist attitudes here and there but not nearly as many as we used to have. That's one thing that's happened for the good, I wonder if wars do that.

34:30 **That's an interesting point and I was wondering earlier if you had, perhaps a recollection or a sense of thinking about when your enemy might not be your enemy? From your time in the Middle East, particularly, I was thinking that when you picked up the camera?**

35:00 I think, I'm not sure that this was a universal attitude but I'm sure my own view was that I couldn't accept the idea as my father's generation did, you know. And his mates used to say, "There's only one good German; it's a dead German." And even as a kid I remember finding that a bit offensive, I thought there must be some good Germans.

35:30 And I was at school, one of my particular mates at school was a Japanese kid and we used to play tennis together. And he was a very likable young bloke and it pained me to think I had to hate the Japanese, not withstanding the fact that I did hate what they did. You know, with our prisoners and so forth.

36:00 I had friends who were prisoners of the Japanese. But I found, subsequently found, particularly with Italians, and my recent visit to Italy confirmed that I think Italians are probably some of the most entertaining, warm, delightful people in the world. And I was a little concerned when

36:30 I went over, that living with an Italian family there might be some little embarrassment about "What did you do in the Great War?" And my daughter-in-law, over dinner one night said, "Tell Daddy about your capturing the Italian soldiers." And I thought, "Oh my God!" And this was an episode at Alamein or just after Alamein. And I was

37:00 up getting the water from the water point, on my own, driving a jeep with a little trailer on it and suddenly over a sand dune came a huge battalion truck full of soldiers. So full that they were all standing up on the back of this big truck. And it screamed to a halt and I grabbed my rifle, and I thought, "What the hell am I doing this for? I've got

37:30 no hope." A young Italian officer jumped out and said, "Excuse me, sergeant. Could you tell me the way to the prisoner of war cage?" And I saluted him and I said, "Yes, certainly, follow me." So I took them in and handed them over to the prisoner of war cage and

38:00 there were sixty of them and we all shook hands and carried on. I told this story to my daughter-in-law's father thinking, now the shit's going to hit the fan. And he thought it was wonderful. They thought it was a marvellous story, and it transpired that they had actually been in the resistance, acting on our side. He was too young to be in it himself but all his

38:30 friends were fighting in the resistance. He actually got fired on inadvertently because he was wearing a red shirt and some conscientious fascist thought he was a communist and had a shot at him. So it's made me realize that my instinctive judgement, even in those days, that

39:00 they couldn't all be bad and that they were there for the same sorts of reasons as we were, because they had been bloody well sent. None of us, I think it made it obvious what a stupid business the whole thing was that, I always used to think that it would have been a smart idea to send all the politicians out and do it with swords or pistols, you know.

39:30 Let them sort the whole thing out and leave the rest of us alone, instead of having to decimate whole communities, how ever many million we lost during that war. Far too many. And we're still doing it, aren't we? It's extraordinary, somebody quoted figures the other day of the various casualty levels in these recent Middle East conflicts and it

40:00 staggered me. Just the numbers of people who had been involved, civilians, just innocent civilians. We keep doing it and I suppose we will ever keep doing it.

I know our tape is coming to an end so I think I might just stop there.

Tape 8

00:30 **You just mentioned and told us a story with a personal encounter you had with Italian POWs, where did that take place?**

It must have been shortly after the Alamein push started. Of course a lot of the Italian troops were,

01:00 They were reluctant to be there anyway, they didn't regard it as their war. And it was said that many of the Italian units were in fact backed up by German officers who were presenting more danger to them than the enemy on the other side. And I don't know whether it actually happened but there were rumours that some of the troops were actually shot by the Germans if they

01:30 showed signs of being reluctant to go forward. And of course every now and then when Alamein started to break them up if a detachment of Italians found themselves independent of the Germans they'd make the break. And that's what these fellows had done, they had this young officer and I suppose what would have amounted to a couple of platoons of his troops just took off

02:00 headed for the Brits and I just happened to be in the road, pathfinder.

You concluded your Middle East

02:30 **campaign in Haifa?**

My work finished in Haifa. And I spent some leave in Cairo instead of going to the kibbutz as I was mentioning, and I had a good leave I think in Cairo. Probably rather

03:00 inebriated a lot of the time, and met some interesting people there. I remember running across some South African people and another group of Australians. And I remember having a chariot race down the main street on a couple of things that were called garries. They were horse drawn vehicles, a bit like a

03:30 broom and we pretended to be firemen; we were going to put a fire out in the main street. Eventually we found a fire, which was an old night watchman's brazier and the troops all jumped out and peed in the brazier and put it out. Extraordinary things we used to do. I was

04:00 never particularly partial to these things but if you got caught up in a group it was sometimes hard to pull out. And of course some of them were quite angry little episodes; I can remember on another occasion a couple of Australians were having a quarrel with one of the Greek restaurant proprietors, the food was bad or they were over charged or something, and one of these guys said, "I'm going to fix this bastard."

04:30 And he walked down the road and found an old-fashioned steamroller, one of those old fashioned things with the high chimney and steam driven. And this guy had been a council worker apparently and he knew how to drive one of these things, so he dumped the driver off and took charge of this great machine and drove it up and through the Greek's café, and demolished all the

05:00 tables and scattered the diners. They did some pretty nasty things, but apart from that I also met some delightful Greek people and I remember spending a couple of days with these people, one of whom had been a pilot in the British RAF [Royal Air Force]

05:30 and claimed to have been a great friend of Bert Hinkler, our relatively famous Australian pilot. And we spent, I think at least a couple of nights together, carousing round Cairo and singing Greek songs. And I can remember being absolutely astonished that I didn't

06:00 know any of the songs at all and of course I couldn't understand the words but I was able to harmonize with these people by virtue of the simplicity of the chord progressions, you knew what the next chord would be and you could harmonize with it. We had a marvellous time, I have a really clear recollection of that night. And there were about three or four blokes and just this one girl

06:30 who had a lovely voice, I remember. That is a funny sort of little episode, stuck in my mind as the last contact with Egypt and not unhappy to leave Egypt frankly, I would have rather go back to Palestine but that was not to be. And I'd even rather, as we did, come back to Australia, which was the next

07:00 move.

Before we do come back to Australia and your story there is something that I would like to ask you. It's something we touched on yesterday but never got around to talking about; you've just described a very romantic relationship that you had that was not consummated, how did the troops manage in the desert without

07:30 **sex?**

There is another ribald song about that too, which I won't repeat. I suppose you put up with it. No doubt masturbation was the primary answer. There were a significant number of guys who used brothels on leave

08:00 but that was a long time between drinks too because we didn't get leave all that often, and of course there was a fairly major deterrent to using the brothels; they were riddled with disease. We had a full sized army hospital called the 8th special, which was there for nothing else

08:30 other than sexually transmitted diseases, and it was said to be always full. The women in the brothels I found very unattractive, they were always stoned out of their heads with hashish and they chewed betel nut and they were a pretty sad little group. And they always looked scruffy and dirty and

09:00 I couldn't ever understand how anybody would be induced to actually touch them and I used to see a lot of them because the blokes who did frequent the brothels were always the ones who were late for the leave truck and I was always the bunny who drove the leave truck for some reason, so I'd round the blokes up. We'd have a meeting point and I'd say, "Where's so and so?"

09:30 "He's down in the Birka. The third one down on the left," or something. And I'd go down. Most of the brothels in Alexandria and Cairo were in old Victorian buildings, some of them quite palatial, you know, with arches and stone floors and stuff. And when you walked into them with army boots and metal heels on them was like a train going through a tunnel. It had this huge noise and there were

10:00 people milling around everywhere and trying to round up the blokes from these places was an absolute nightmare. But you had to do it, you couldn't go home without them and it was always dangerous to send somebody off to find somebody because they would probably get lost in the process. I remember one night one of the blokes was in one of these places and I said,

10:30 "Come on mate. It's time to go home." And he said, "I won't be a minute, Mac. I've just got a little bit of business to do with this delightful lady here." And the delightful lady was actually the madam, she was huge and she had this large bosom and he was exploring her bosom and she was getting quite giggly and carrying on about it. And all was revealed when she suddenly let out a great scream

11:00 and he took off with a roll of notes which she had secreted, his intentions were not sexual at all, they were clearly monetary. And we both left in a hurry and she had a whistle round her neck and she blew the whistle and the next thing I knew there was a possie of Red Caps [British military police] running up the stairs. And they said, "What's going on?"

11:30 and I said, "Quick up there. I think somebody's getting murdered." And we left in a hurry. Those sort of episodes used to happen every leave, they were quite odd. So no, I haven't really answer your question about what we did for sex, I think the answer is mainly nothing except for those few people who used the brothels.

12:00 And I was saying the other day that I think there was almost a total absence of any homosexual activity. I never heard of it apart from the incident which I related earlier and I don't know anybody else that did either. Whether it was just kept under wraps, I don't know, but my feeling is that it didn't exist to any significant degree.

12:30 Somebody challenged me on this when I was talking about it a little while ago. And they said, "Oh well it's traditional in armies. Go right back to the Greeks. What about the Spartans?" You know. I said, "Yeah. But Greeks are Greeks." I don't think Australia troops had the same philosophy at all, I'm sure they didn't. In fact I was resentful of a program recently

13:00 about Changi. I don't know whether you saw that series. Were you involved in it? I can speak safely then. I thought it was incredibly badly made and I thought the research was abysmally bad, there were so many glaring, stupid anomalies that should have been picked up like the soldiers saluting without their hats on, you know. Things that anybody who's been in the army should have known about.

13:30 But the other thing I found really distressing were the overtones of homosexual implication through it all the time, and I knew so many of those guys and I'm sure they would have been totally distressed by it too. Most of the poor buggers are dead now, they didn't live quite as long as they should have, in most cases.

14:00 That was a bad part of the war. I very nearly went there. I was originally scheduled to go to the 8th Division, which went to Malaya, and at the last minute I got pulled out to go into this ordnance group. So I should thank the army for that change of mind.

Given what you were earlier talking about

14:30 **in terms of your feelings towards war, did you think that the war in the Middle East was a just war?**

No war is just, but it was inevitable. And if you are attacked you have only got two options; you either lie down and let them run over you or you stand up and resist. And I

15:00 suppose in much the same way as we do in a more microcosmic way within our own local societies. To want peace is a natural thing for most of us but when you are confronted by something as inevitable as the axis juggernaut, what do you do about it? Certainly we couldn't have

15:30 backed away from it. Chamberlain tried to negotiate a peace, you know, and the bit of paper, "Peace in

our time." And as my old Dad said, "That stupid bastard Chamberlain, it's all his fault." Appeasement never works. It could never work. So it was inevitable there was no option other than to admit defeat before it started.

16:00 And I think that in itself was a huge matter of frustration for most of us, it was the inevitability of it that was so distressing, unlike the recent Iraqi thing which had no inevitability whatsoever about it in my belief.

16:30 **Can you tell me about your trip back to Australia from the Middle East?**

Yes, we came

17:00 back on a French ship which had been a luxury liner again but which had been converted to troop ships. She was called the Ile De France, and she had been the sort of flagship of the French Mercantile Marine. It had been a beautiful ship in its day but not only had it been converted to the most

17:30 spartan conditions but it had also been sabotaged. And funny things used to happen, you'd turn a tap on and get an electric shock or turn a light on and the toilet would flush, all sorts of odd things happened. And we were sent down to E deck as far forward

18:00 as you would go, right in the pointy end and I realized that we were actually below the water line in the area we had been allotted. And I'd seen pictures of a ship, before I'd left Australia called the Dominion Monarch which had hit a mine and it had had a huge bite taken out of the front end

18:30 exactly where we were and I drew the blokes a picture of this and I said, "If we should hit a mine I don't think we would want to be in our bunks because we wouldn't be for long." So we elected to sleep on deck, which we did for the whole trip back. Fortunately, the weather was reasonably good particularly through the Indian Ocean. And we never went below except for meals,

19:00 we just stayed up on deck and wrapped ourselves up in, some of the sailors found bits of tarpaulin for us and that sort of thing. We didn't hit anything, fortunately, but it was incredibly uncomfortable and smelt bad and there was no air circulation and there was shit and muck slopping around on the floor. It was really very primitive, very bad conditions. And we had six weeks of that, of course, on the way home and

19:30 it was very good to get off. Not a good ship, not a happy ship, as they say.

Do you recall arriving back in Sydney?

I do, very clearly. I remember the smell of the eucalypts, coming out, miles off shore we could smell

20:00 the smell and I've never ceased to be amazed how powerful it is. And I've noticed it at other times returning to Australia. It's a kind of beautiful clean smell that comes out even across the sea, and that was the best tonic we could have had. It was really the

20:30 defining moment of being home I think. And we came off the ship and we were immediately transported to Rutherford or somewhere out in that area into a camp in huts and we were kept there

21:00 for several day and the troops got a bit restless about this, I've never understood what the necessity was. It wasn't a quarantine thing, I think probably somebody buggered up the arrangements and didn't have it all working properly, so they kept us there. Reasonably comfortable conditions and the food wasn't bad and so forth but of course these guys

21:30 were desperate to be home and I can't remember whether we were even able to ring up at that stage. So what they used to do was to show films every nigh, in an open air, sort of impromptu theatre. And one night they showed a film called Desert Victory, which was an American film about the Americans winning

22:00 the battle of Alamein, and of course there hadn't been any Americans there. None, well they had a couple of observers. And the troops went berserk, they really went mad, they set fire to the screen and they rioted and they wanted the commanding officer to come out and apologise. They had a prelude to that, was another film about

22:30 the Americans in Okinawa, which of course they were. And it had this wonderful American voice over which said, "And the Americans Marines landed in their landing craft, advanced up the beach shouting their battle cry." And some larrikin in the back said, "Taxi!" It broke them up completely. It was the

23:00 most inept piece of troop handling I think I've ever seen in my life. They just dumped us there in a situation that could have caused a riot. It surprised me that we were so disciplined that we just didn't pack up and go home, break out of the place. They did let us out eventually and of course going home was just wonderful and we were there for, I think we got leave

23:30 called disembarkation leave. And it wasn't very long, I think it was only a week or something like that, and it wasn't very long. And I was back with my bride of a week and both of us were very apprehensive about how we'd feel about things after eighteen months and fortunately it was all wonderful, it was just like we'd been away for a week.

24:00 We just knew that it was just fine, back where we started. It was great. But I remember the taxi driver who took me home. He said, “You got a missus?” And I said, “Yes. But she won’t be home at the moment. She’s nursing and she won’t be able to get off until later in the day.” He said, “You’re lucky.” He said,

24:30 “I advise all the blokes I take home. When you get to the front door take your pack off and leave it at the door and run round the back. And when the Yank runs out the front door he’ll fall arse over head and break his neck.” And this was the standard taxi driver joke I discovered, of course I suppose in some cases it really happened. Yes. It was a great moment, a tremendous moment.

25:00 I remember it pretty clearly.

And can you tell me about the following couple of weeks? How did you adjust?

With huge difficulty, apart from the fact that Jenny and I amalgamated straight

25:30 away. We had no embarrassment or reticence about each other at all. It was wonderful, in fact I was extremely lucky because I know from talking to other blokes long afterwards that it wasn’t like that for all of them by any means. But I did find it very difficult talking to anybody else. My

26:00 parents thought it would be nice to have a return home party for me, and they invited a whole lot of friends and so forth and relatives and I was acutely conscious of being absolutely out of tune with the whole environment. I remember, quite clearly having to go out and sit in the garden

26:30 and have a smoke to sort of collect myself together, I was quite unable to identify with these people, many of whom I’d grown up with and all of them people that I was fond of. I was really quite distressed by it because I wondered whether it would ever change. Whether I’d ever be able to get back to that acceptance of the society that I had always known.

27:00 And then of course it didn’t help when my father said, “Where did you get that bloody awful Australian accent from?” I realized that I had made changes, I had changed. Not only my accent but probably a whole lot of attitudes too. And then of course being chastised for using a swear word in front of mother, that was the last straw.

27:30 But one survived and it was a very brief period that because we were sent off then to Toowoomba where, I suppose the whole division was up in Queensland and certainly there were a lot of troops in Toowoomba. Which is a lovely town and was then.

28:00 It is a very pleasant country town and tremendously hospitable. The local, I think it was the YMCA [Young Men’s Christian Association] ladies or something, organized a hospitality thing for the returned troops. And every one of us was allotted a host family and we could spend leave time in their homes and we could have dinner there whenever we liked if we were on leave. And they were very

28:30 very hospitable and it was my luck of course once again that the family I was allocated to had two of the most gorgeous daughters you’ve ever seen in your life. They were just drop dead beautiful. And I thought, oh God not again. We were there for three months from memory. We were refitting and retraining and getting ready to go to New Guinea.

29:00 And fortunately the temptation was once again removed, in those days you couldn’t travel anywhere in Australia without a special permit and I persuaded my father to use his influence. The old boy knew someone everywhere, mostly old army mates who had got

29:30 themselves into senior jobs and he talked to an old brigadier friend of his who was running the transit operation in Sydney. He said, “Could you get a travel warrant for my boy’s wife to go up to Toowoomba?” And he organized this and Jenny came up and stayed there for quite a long time. She had a friend in Brisbane,

30:00 and she stayed there at first and then we found a bed and breakfast for her to come out to Toowoomba. I used to go home every night, unofficially. Go AWL when I wasn’t on duty. So we had a lovely sort of second honeymoon and in fact my eldest son was conceived during that period and it was lovely.

30:30 And once again the temptation to stray was removed again.

You mention that your unit was preparing to go to New Guinea?

Yes.

31:00 **Did you actually go to New Guinea?**

I got within about two hours of getting on the ship to go to New Guinea in fact some of my gear actually went aboard, and a signal came up from Melbourne requesting me to report to LHQ

31:30 in Melbourne, which is Land Headquarters, to attend an officer training school. I’d had numerous recommendations for commission during the time we were away but it didn’t suit anybody to send me

off those times, you know, and at this point there was presumably no

32:00 excuse although it was cutting it awful fine. And I was pulled off virtually at the end of the gangplank almost. My 2IC [Second in Command] took the section over and a fellow called Battye, nice bloke, Noel Battye I think his name was

32:30 and he took the section over and the poor devil was shot by one of his own blokes while they were landing. They were landing up in New Guinea somewhere, and one of the new reinforcement kids had got scared or trigger happy or something and saw a movement and shot poor old Batty in the head and that was the end of his brief little war. So I suppose I

33:00 was rather fortunate that I didn't go, otherwise there, but for the grace of God. So I went back to Melbourne and once again the old man organized a travel permit for Jenny and she came down and lived with a couple of lovely old ladies,

33:30 we called them "The aunts." It was my first involvement with lesbians and these two ladies lived together as a unit. They were delightful people, they were the gentlest, nicest people. It must have been a long time because when Jenny came down she had a baby with her and the baby moved in

34:00 and the aunts just spoiled him rotten, you know, they used to call him "Little time waster." They were very kind, they were lovely people. In fact we were there when the Japanese war ended and we took part in the celebration in Swanston Street and walking over the bridge and everybody dancing in the streets and a very emotional time.

34:30 And the aunts looked after the little boy while we were out celebrating and I must have been at officer training at that point. Curiously enough my recollection of that is much vaguer than most of my recollection of the Middle East. I don't know why that is but certainly I was at officer school when the war ended,

35:00 the Japanese war ended and somebody came around from Land Headquarters and advised us that, "The fact that the war was over had put the government to a lot of expense that they wouldn't be able to recoup." And they told us how much it cost to train an officer and they wanted their money back. And it was

35:30 put to us that we would have to sign a further service agreement for another two years. And I had already had five years at that point, I had a little boy and I thought it's time I started getting a career started. Architecture had gone so I thought you know I'd better do something pretty quickly or I'll get left behind. So I

36:00 paraded myself to the chief instructor and I said, "I don't wish to sign the new agreement." He said, "That's tough. I'm afraid you're going to have to." I said, "No. I don't think you can compel me to do that. And I know there are some of the other troops who feel the same way." He said, "Well, they'll be asked to sign the agreement or they'll be shipped off to New Guinea anyway, with their present rank."

36:30 And I went back to the blokes and I said, "How do you feel about this?" And thirteen of us decided that we were going to jack up and refuse to sign. It was like a mutiny and the army had never encountered anything quite like this before. Nobody had ever, according to this bloke, nobody in the British service had ever resigned their commission before they got it.

37:00 So there was a 'Mexican stand off' and for about three weeks we were there. I was elected OC. 'OC Rebels', they called us. I used to call a parade every morning and we used to have a roll call and march around and I used to make sure everybody was spotlessly clean and shaven and boots clean and all that sort of stuff, so there was no way we could be crimed for anything other than

37:30 insubordination and that became a moot point because the army had no authority to request these signatures. And at that point a new general routine order came out about discharge of returned troops, and a points system was allocated which took into account the years of service or the months of service totally,

38:00 with double the marks for overseas service and additional points for troops who were married and additional points for troops with children and so forth., and when it reached a certain number of points those troops were to be automatically discharged as soon as possible. And all of us, with one exception, just made it with the number

38:30 of points. The poor bastard who didn't make it immediately got sent to New Guinea, and the rest of us, they didn't know what to do with us even then, they sort of hung us around. Eventually they sent me back to Sydney and I was allocated to a water transport group which was located in Sydney at

39:00 Clifton Gardens. And Jenny had found a flat by this stage at McMahon's Point and so the duty coxswain would drive me home in a boat to McMahon's Point and come and pick me up again in the morning. I had a couple of months of this until they finally got my papers worked out and

39:30 they threw me out with seven pounds to buy a new suit and hat of course.

I know that our tape is coming to the finish but I think there is more to tell on that story though so we might stop and change our tape, last tape.

Sure

Tape 9

00:30 **I'd like to take up your life post-Middle East again. You said that you were up in Toowoomba getting ready for the jungle in New Guinea can you tell me about what type of jungle training you were receiving?**

Well we were getting new equipment because the desert stuff wasn't appropriate for the jungle conditions. We were also

01:00 being prepared medically with regular Atebrin treatment. You could always tell the people who were headed for New Guinea by the colour of their skin we used to look like Asiatic people. You know, quite yellow tinge to the complexion. And I also have learned

01:30 only since then that Atebrin had a, well it was suspected of having an effect of causing impotence in the troops and certainly my own experience was, as I was saying, my son was conceived shortly after coming back from

02:00 the Middle East and we were anxious to have another child very soon and my elder daughter didn't arrive for another nine years. And we were getting quite desperate about the idea of not being able to have children, almost to the point of having all those terrible tests done and so forth. And all of a sudden it rectified itself, and I had a friend in

02:30 the air force who was a medical officer in the air force and he was getting reports from his people that they were trying to conceive and couldn't. He came to the conclusion that Atebrin was the problem and he did a lot of tests and had a colleague in Sydney do tests on

03:00 a control group and came to the conclusion, although he was a young and rather inexperienced medico, that Atebrin was the culprit. And he wrote a report for the air force or for headquarters somewhere and he was told to shut up and mind his own business, that they didn't want to know about it. And when he threatened to take it to the media they said, "Well you'll be court martialled."

03:30 It was a quite serious charge. So I'm quite certain that it was one of the things we had to contend with, and it was unpleasant stuff. I think there were other side effects too. I'm not sure that it did very much to control malaria when the chips were down, I think it was only partially effective.

04:00 **After your stint in the Middle East and encounter with action do you think you were have been aware at the time that you had been suffering any ill effects from that?**

04:30 From the experience generally? Yes, I think I was very aware very early, thinking about the family party, I think I was very aware that I had social problems if not emotional problems. But I think if it hadn't been for Jenny I think I would have had quite remarkable problems of social adjustment,

05:00 I think she was a stabilizing influence. Because we were so close and because we were so dependent on each other I think she probably did a lot to pull me through that period of adjustment. But it took quite a long time and in those days of course there was no counselling for returned people, again it was the DIY system.

05:30 And most of us, I think, looked on alcohol as the solution to those sorts of problems, and it was indeed a solution to a degree. Partly because of the fact that it was a stimulant and changed our attitude of mind. I suppose if there had been pot around in those days we would have probably smoked pot.

06:00 But it did also of course imply some sort of social contact with people that you could drink with and talk with and understand, people who still spoke the same language. And some of the guys of course ended up as alcoholics as a result of this. And I'm quite sure that it was

06:30 very much a war caused disability. I don't think it was ever accepted it as such but, you know, they say, "The guy's a drunk" or, "The guy's a piss pot" or whatever. He's an alcoholic, depending on the degree. But I think for most of us we'd go and give ourselves a bit of a blast on a Friday night and this was a habit that lasted for quite a long time.

07:00 I think it was the safety valve that kept us relatively sane, anyway. I often wonder about the difference between various theatres of war. My father's war, they used to talk about the guys coming back with shell shock,

07:30 some of them of course were right off their heads, they were completely loopy but most of them, I think, were much the same as we were except that we used to call it 'bomb-happy'. And later on the people coming back from New Guinea were described as 'troppo'. So what

08:00 was different for example with the Vietnam War? Why were those fellows so much more damaged emotionally than we were? Or were they? Are they just being treated with more understanding than we were and our fathers even less? I've asked a lot of people, I've had friends who were in Vietnam

08:30 and I've asked them what they feel about it, and I think it's probably a fact that they were more emotionally damaged than we were. For a couple of reasons and I think the first of them was that we were never asked to engage civilians. And in fact wherever we went, to the best of my knowledge, the civilians became

09:00 supportive and a very sobering influence, a very stabilizing influence on it. And talking to the guys who were in Greece where many lasting friendships were made and quite a lot of troops deserted in Greece and stayed there shacked up with their Greek partners rather than

09:30 come home to angry wives, so I'm told. And we found that wherever we went that friendships made with civilians were very important to us. Here of course in Vietnam they were actually blowing them up, women and children. This is not a natural thing for soldiers, no matter

10:00 how well trained and how well disciplined to do, and I think that was one of the most disturbing aspects of that war that made it different from the others. And of course the other thing was that we came back in the knowledge that we were seen as heroes and as saviours of the world, you could kid yourself about all sorts of things. And those poor buggers

10:30 came back as outcasts of society, they were described as "Paid killers" and jeered and despised for what they had done. Which was incredibly unfair given that they weren't even volunteers, they were conscripts and had been sent there. So I can understand that there may be a quite radical difference in our situation when we got back and theirs.

11:00 Most of us got through it, there were a few people who didn't, ended up as nutters or suicides. There were a few broken marriages but not that many. Not as many as one, certainly nothing like the statistics we have today. A lot of us stayed put for, and I'm sure if Jenny were alive now we'd still be stayed put. Enjoying our sixty-

11:30 second anniversary, shortly.

That is a very interesting comparison of the two wars, and now terms like post traumatic stress disorder are used, do you think

12:00 **that was relevant?**

Oh yes, we had post traumatic disorder. The name hadn't been invented at that stage that's all, we were bomb-happy, which is just as good a description, or troppo. There was no question we were emotionally damaged. Even people who didn't see action

12:30 were emotionally damaged. It was simply the disruption to normal social relationship, I think, as much as anything else. My personal belief is that the danger and the action, provided you survived it in one piece, were much less damaging than other aspects of soldiering, I think. Boredom was an incredibly eroding influence.

13:00 And I think the disassociation from family and other social environment over a long time was quite dangerous. I mean the very fact that I spoke differently at the end of eighteen months, was I think quite significant. One shouldn't have to change things as fundamental as your language.

13:30 It is damaging, whatever shape it takes, I think. And I believe, I was watching that nasty little man welcoming our troops home from Iraq and I thought now wait a minute, how long were they away? A couple of months in some cases.

14:00 It's you know, like an extended holiday and every one of them came home fit and well, so I imagine that there are not going to be too many problems with that lot. Even the lady, this I found quite shocking and it maybe indicates some sort of latent

14:30 chauvinism but I found quite shocking the young woman sailer saying goodbye to her two-year-old son as she left to go the Middle East. I thought, wait a minute. I don't think that's, I don't think that's kosher. And I caught a glimpse of her on the way home welcoming her little boys home again.

15:00 It was a very odd war.

And I understand you didn't end up going to New Guinea?

No.

And instead you went to officer training down in Melbourne and then returned to Sydney for a period of time before finally the

15:30 **war ended?**

Well the war had ended before I got my discharge, which I did quite unceremoniously. Marched in one day and got a piece of paper that said, “You’re out.” Here’s seven quid. Go and buy yourself a suit and good luck.” So I went to David Jones

16:00 and I bought a beautiful English tweed suit for five pounds and a hat and a pair of shoes. And the only trouble with the suit was it was on special because it was pink. And it was beautifully cut, beautiful Harris Tweed but it was kind of light brown, well it was close to being pink, you know.

16:30 When I finally started getting round the traps I got to be known as “The man in the pink suit.” It didn’t embarrass me because it was a very beautiful suit. And I had to have one and I couldn’t afford anything nearly as good with my seven quid.

And when did you find employment?

Well, I was offered a job

17:00 while I was looking around with, first of all I went to Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation because I had have experience with De Havilland before I enlisted, and they were quite big time in the aircraft industry. Even post war they were doing civilian work and I thought it would be interesting to see if there was anything there. And they

17:30 wouldn’t have a bar of me. They didn’t want to know me because I was on the wrong side of the camp and one of the guys that interviewed me actually said, “While you guys were out there playing soldiers we were back here working our arses off and I don’t think we need people like you in here.” And there was a quite extraordinary attitude on the part of those people who really felt that they had won the war by staying at home and doing the boring work, you know.

18:00 So I gave that one away fairly quickly and then I was invited to go to the repatriation department as it then was, now DVA [Department of Veterans’ Affairs] of course. And they had offices in York Street at that stage, and someone suggested that I could get myself a job there, which I did. And my main task there, it was the most incredibly boring job I’ve ever had in my life. I had to

18:30 retrieve and distribute files on various troops that were under investigation of one sort or another. And my boss thought I was good potential material. He said, “You know you could do quite well in this job and public service is the safe way to go, you’ll be able to work. You’ll have a job till sixty five and a pension and all that sort of stuff.” I said, “I don’t think I’ll make it till sixty-five.

19:00 I think I’ll die of bloody boredom.” And he said one other thing too, “With a name like Macdonald, I presume you’re not Catholic.” I said, “No.” He said, “Forget the public service, you’ll never do any good here as a Protestant.” And it was back to that old racist, you know, the old prejudicial thing.

19:30 Indeed I found that that department was, when I investigated it, run by a group of people who were staunch Catholics and although there were Protestant employees they were very much second rate citizens in that organization. It’s hard to believe that in these enlightened times. But there was a wonderful story around that time about Mark Foy’s, which was owned by a Catholic family and employed

20:00 Catholic sales assistants. There was apparently a, I don’t know whether this story is true or not but a Protestant girl working for them was sacked and she went to David Jones and told them the story that “She had been sacked by these terrible Catholics and could she have

20:30 a job?” And they said, “No, we’ll do better than that, we’ll get you reinstated.” So apparently one of the senior people at David Jones got on to one of the senior people at Mark Foy’s and he said, “If you don’t reinstate this girl without prejudice, we are going to fire all our Catholic employees and we have got two hundred and twenty-three,” or whatever it was. So there was a truce called and they did reinstate this girl, who I believe

21:00 left shortly afterwards and joined David Jones. Strange isn’t it that such things could really happen in Sydney and in the 1940s? So I didn’t work for repatriation for very long and I realized that I needed some sort

21:30 of skills that were going to make me a little more useful than being a clerk or something and I found a naval architect in Sydney, a gentleman called Barber. And at the time he was designing a little vessel which is still on the water here, it was then called the radar,

22:00 its name has changed since then. I told him my experience as an architectural draftsman and there was a system running at that stage where returned soldiers could be employed by professionals like him on a heavily subsidised salary and he was a mean little man and he thought this was a great idea. He could pay me peanuts to be a,

22:30 in no time flat I would have been a competent draftsman and the rest of my salary would be paid by the government. So he took me on for a short period of time, and then for some reason, I think he lost a contract or something and he panicked and told me, “I wasn’t needed any more.” And at that point I was getting a little worried and the

23:00 thing came up called the CRTS scheme. The Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme and that

was fully subsidised government training programme, and I went to the Julian Ashton school and I think I had two years there of full time training. And old Henry Gibbons who was a wonderful old teacher,

23:30 followed old Julian Ashton himself as the head teacher. And that was a delightful time, there were a lot of returned blokes at the time going through under the scheme and also, of course, a lot of young women, mostly from wealthy families. In those days if you had a daughter who didn't want to be a doctor you'd send her to art

24:00 school for a couple of years until she got married, you know. So the social aspects of this were extraordinary, there was the Artist's Ball every year and parties all the time and also a very steep thorough learning curve and quite good draftsman. Old Gibbons wanted me to keep going and wanted me to be a portrait artist and

24:30 I thought I don't think being a portrait artist is a very responsible thing for someone with a family. I think we've got to do something a little bit more practical, so I branched out while I was still at school and started studying more commercial aspects of the business. I got myself a couple of part time jobs and I worked

25:00 like a bloody drover's dog. I used to do huge hours. I'd be at school all day and sitting up all night working on assignments that frequently I wasn't doing very well. I sometimes had to do things twice because I didn't get it right the first time. And I learned very fast, I learned very quickly about commercial art and I became very good at it.

I might just interrupt, because this is our last

25:30 **tape and I know we are approaching the end and you went on to have a very vast and interesting professional career. But in order to finish up our session, I've just got one burning question that I would like to ask and then I'd like to throw it back to you to see if you would like to say any more. My question is, did you ever do any drawing**

26:00 **when you were at war?**

Yes I did, unfortunately they all got lost on the way home along with a lot of other memorabilia and the manuscript of an unfinished novel. It is probably good that that got lost, I think. It was a pretty crass, nasty piece of writing I suspect. I

26:30 really wasn't sorry to see that go but I would have liked the drawings to have been preserved, and huge number of photographs. The ones I've got are the ones I sent home to Jenny, that was the tip of the iceberg, I had a couple of biscuit tins full of prints and negatives. It was a shame to see them go. But on the other hand the ones I've got are interesting and good

27:00 memorabilia.

What do you think then is your strongest visual memory of your wartime?

I'm not sure that I have one. I think probably recollecting of people and going through old photographs I'm reminded of the features of some of these guys who I spent

27:30 such long periods of time with. And I think some of them I could probably draw portraits of now, from memory more of less. I haven't tried to do that but there is a very clear recollection of how they looked and how they acted and so forth. They wouldn't look like that now, obviously, sixty odd years later. But it would be interesting to do that and

28:00 rebuild them from memory and from photographs, I've actually been doing that lately, I'm digressing but that little portrait behind you is a portrait of my brother which I did from photographs, which I'm going to give to his son, he died quite young. And I've in fact been trying to get a couple of the galleries I work with interested in getting commissions for me to reconstruct

28:30 people from the past. And I haven't had any luck with it, it's surprising, I thought people would have been quite interested in that.

And do you have a proudest moment?

A?

A proudest moment?

Private?

Proudest. Do you ever have a memory that you are proud of?

29:00 No, I don't think so. Curiously enough I never felt like a real soldier, you know. I always felt a bit apologetic about my role in the greater scheme of things. I think the things that pleased me most were getting some of my own blokes out of trouble and

29:30 I think the regard and respect from your blokes is the most rewarding part of all that, and I had to work very hard at it because I really didn't fit the mould when I first started. I had to claw my way up, earned

my stripes like they say.

30:00 **And in closing then is there anything that you would like to add or you feel that we have not touched on?**

I'm sure there are scores of little anecdotes that will come to mind later on but no, I've done a lot of talking and I've discovered a few things myself, I think, that have got lost in the labyrinths of

30:30 my mind. It is interesting, I think I am going to enjoy making a few notes for this writing project I've got going and it'd be nice if I could get access to some of this later on, you know, for reminders. Even a sound tape would be an interesting thing to deal with.

The other thing that I've just

31:00 **thought of is I'm also wondering if there's things you've talked about with us that you haven't talked about with anyone else?**

There are, quite a lot of things, quite a lot of the personal things. I was thinking you know, talking about personal relationships especially with Jenny and other people. I've never even talked to my children about this, and it would be interesting

31:30 if they had access to this footage and said, "Well bugger me, I didn't know the old boy was – " and said whatever their reaction was. I've not revealed anything I'm ashamed of and I think it would be quite interesting to see their reaction to this. It's the sort of thing where you don't sit down with your kids and say "Now listen fellows, I just want to talk about how I felt about your Mum."

32:00 But to do it in a detached impersonal way like this could be very interesting for them. I think.

And finally, I keep saying last question and then I keep asking another question so I'm sorry about that.

If you've got tape, I've got time.

32:30 **What advice would you give to your children or grand children?**

In the context of war? It is an interesting question because my oldest son was of an age where he could have been drafted for Vietnam, Vietnam or Korea? It might have been Korea.

33:00 He was born in 1944. He was actually in South Africa in the 1960, when did Vietnam start? About then. It would have been the Vietnam draft that he would have been vulnerable in. And he was actually

33:30 staying with my sister-in-law in South Africa and ultimately stayed on there for a couple of years so he missed that. And was very grateful too and when he came home we talked about the army and soldiering and so forth and attitude was very dismissive. He didn't think much of it at all, I don't think we was a pacifist or anything

34:00 but he didn't want to know about it. It was something that was alien to him. And I remember saying to him at one stage, "Your grandfather would have been appalled to hear that. He was such an old warrior himself and he was such a loyalist and my country right or wrong. He would have been appalled to hear your attitude." And I said, "I'm not condemning it myself but – " And it is only recently that

34:30 we had a long chat here and he started asking questions about "What did you do in the Great War?" For the first time ever, now at the age of fifty-nine, he has become very interested in this. And it touched off, in fact I think it stimulated my interest in getting involved in this programme and I thought, here's a young man, or an old man now, suddenly become a

35:00 aware of our Anzac tradition and all that it implies. Why is this so? Why this sudden change of attitude? And maybe it is important that he understands more, and he asked innumerable questions, you know, some of which you've asked. And I find with my younger children,

35:30 no I don't. I find with my grandchildren an extraordinary interest in this and that started three or four years ago. My youngest son lives in Avalon and he's got a couple of daughters and they were quite small at that stage. And they rang me up one night and said, "We're having a school Anzac celebration and

36:00 we're wondering if you'd like to come up and be part of that." And I said, "I'd love to." So I went up and I put my gongs on, and they thought it was absolutely Christmas, you know, and it's been almost tradition ever since. They all say, "What are you doing on Anzac Day? Are you going to march? We will go and stand near the cenotaph or we'll do this or that." We have a bit of a party afterwards,

36:30 this last one we went and had lunch at the Royal Automobile Club after the march, and it's an event for them and in their minds it is very important part of history in which grandpa was involved. And for that reason I have painted a self portrait wearing gongs and so forth and I thought this is going to be a legacy for the

37:00 great, great grandchildren. I'm not going to give it to anybody at the moment or hang it anywhere but it's there and I thought it's a nice thing to have. And I feel so bereft of any legacy from my parents and

grandparents that I feel I don’t want to repeat the offence. I’d like them to have as much knowledge as they can about where we were and where we came from.

37:30 And what was important to us, you know.

I think that that’s probably a very good note to end on.

That sounds like a good note, yes.

Thank you very much for speaking with us.

My great pleasure.

You have been very enlightening.

I’ve enjoyed it. I think it’s been quite cathartic

38:00 for me too. As I say, I hope that a lot of this recall will end up on my computer in due course.

INTERVIEW ENDS