

Australians at War Film Archive

Rinaldo Fabbro - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1743>

Tape 1

00:57 **Could you please give us a summary of your life?**

I am Rinaldo Fabbro. I was born in northern Italy in the foothills of the Dolomites in a little town called Magnano in Riviera in the province of Udine.

01:00 I went to school in the same place, in the same town. I had been at elementary school in the same place. I had my preliminary studies in Gemona.

01:30 After a period of working, because I wasn't a very good student I wanted to work, I went to work with my father who was a wine merchant. Then I decided to go back to school in Venice to a technical school....to go into architecture. I wanted to be an architect.

02:00 Then there was the war and suddenly I decided to be a partisan. I was in the military with the aviation corps in Padua [in Italian Padova] and I escaped there and then I went up into the mountains.

02:30 I was on the border with Yugoslavia. I was not very happy there because things were tragic as the Italians were treated as more front line fellows, so I decided...and I was not a Communist, so I decided to move away and I went

03:00 to another area in Sardinia[?] where I formed a battalion of which I was the commander. We fought the war. A lot of British used to come down with Special Forces by parachute to teach us how to go about the war,

03:30 and of course they promised...they told me to talk to the Partisans, to fight for the war, it would have been a lot of good to be free from the Germans and Fascists and then there will be work for everybody and plenty of

04:00 goodwill for everyone. We fought. A lot of people died. Partisans. We finished the war and the promises of my commanders were not maintained. We came back to our homes.

04:30 Very soon my Partisans found out where I was living. I was at that time in Ticesimon[?]. They used to come to me from the mountains and say, "Otto," was my name of battle, "We have fought. You have promised us that there will be plenty of work, plenty of everything. Plenty of good life.

05:00 He was wrong. No work. Everybody has disappeared and there is no future for us. What will we do?" The partisans were not looking ...my commanders who were giving me orders to say this or that...but they were looking at me personally. They were people from the mountains; strong, solid people and then looking at me, my

05:30 credibility was gone. They used to come to me and say "My brother dead, my house burnt down, my cousin without a leg." So my heart was crying. I went back to school and I got a degree in architecture and I had a possibility of coming to Australia.

06:00 I had a second cousin in Adelaide who arranged with friends in Sydney for my landing permit. I came here with the intention to do something for my people, my partisans. Of course being an architect, I go to a place where it is all natural...free of any

06:30 competition. An architect in Italy has to compete with the big buildings of Michelangelo and all these people. I thought Australia may be the right place for me. An architect where it is all fresh and new. I can do what I like to. So I came here. I arrived here already with a job

07:00 with Mr Falady[?], who was the architect for Lord Narfield[?] who was in Victoria Park in Sydney building the factories for MG cars. I joined this office, but I was not very happy there. I was very welcome and very well considered there because my references when I left were great.

- 07:30 But for me I wanted to do more than that. The technical drawings were coming from England and the architect only had to do the windows and doors and the planning of the factory. It wasn't of much interest. So I decided to learn
- 08:00 something about domestic architecture and my intention was to go into housing. I joined the office of an Italian architect who was born here. Then I met a new colleague. At first I was not acting as an architect. I was only a draftsman because my degree was not valid in Australia at that time. But looking around I would
- 08:30 have had to sat some exams which for me would not have been difficult but my language was limited. I thought it would be better for me to be a builder, to be in the construction side and it would be a better opportunity for me to bring these people from Italy.
- 09:00 There was an occasion when a company, Clyde Industries, joined another company in Italy in 1949. The company was to build houses. Clyde Industries used to manufacture trains and locomotives but they wanted to diversify in their building.
- 09:30 They had been looking for a technical fellow in Sydney. Nobody was here. I find out myself. It was funny how I found out that I was the only architect. They went to their Ambassador in those days because the Consult was not yet here. They went to look for an Italian technical man
- 10:00 and they found me on the list. They found me at the end. Rinaldo Fabbro, Architect. So they came to me and they asked me if I would work for them for big schemes, to build houses for Cooma, for the people who were going to work at the Snowy River and
- 10:30 houses in various places in Australia, Brisbane and other parts. At that time the Australian people, the young people were not trained much in building. They were in the war. Brave people in the war. So the government decided to bring people from overseas like Italians. Pazotti [tile & stone manufacturer] came here. Like Lekoche, from France. Like
- 11:00 Civil and Civic are today. Holland and other people like that. To help Australia build these houses. So the proposition was to go to work for Clyde Industries because they were the agent of Pazotti.
- 11:30 I decided I wasn't interested. In the beginning I decided I was not interested to do so because I was thinking to do something on my own. In fact they gave me about two weeks to consider the situation because I refused to join them. During that period I thought maybe it would be better if I went with them because maybe it would be quicker to do what I wanted to do.
- 12:00 In fact I went back after two weeks and I went back with a map of the world. At the meeting, all the managers were there and I said, "Yes, I come with you on one condition." I opened the map I had with me and I showed them, that if they brought these people from this part
- 12:30 of the world, and I showed them my province, U-din-e, Italy. They didn't know very much about the situation there. After three weeks they said, come back. They made a search, they found out that these people were strong people, hard working people and they were all over the world with a great name. So they accepted my proposition
- 13:00 I arrived here in 1949 in a ship called the Toscana and 1952 and 53, my partisans arrived in Australia. They were accommodated in Cooma by Pazotti where they started building a satellite village outside Cooma for the people who were going to work on the Snowy River.
- 13:30 My job was completed at that moment. I was satisfied. I released my worries about my people. Since then of course I stayed in Australia. Again I thought of becoming an architect, but I saw around Sydney that the buildings were mainly done in sandstone
- 14:00 and concrete was very little used. It was used only for footpaths and footings. The structure of a building was in steel. So I looked around and I thought, maybe as I was trained in Italy in the concrete field and my grandfather in fact was a concrete specialist. My grandfather on the side of my mother was a concrete specialist. He did work in the Kremlin and he did work
- 14:30 in America. He had a team of people who specialised in concrete. When I was a young fellow he used to bring me to his works on my holidays to make concrete pipes and I remember how the cement smell was so good to me. I would help him vibrate the rods.
- 15:00 The vertical forms to make these forms. There came my feeling of concrete. So I decided that to build things in steel like in America, there were not...well for American conditions they were alright but for steel construction all in one go, you are still working at the ground floor for the finishes.
- 15:30 So I decided why not to introduce concrete in these buildings? I wanted to do this in housing before I went into the tall buildings. After some hard work I made some money and was able to buy a block of land, Sylvania Waters, in Lockland Avenue
- 16:00 where I designed and built a house with a Mediterranean feeling. I thought, Australia's position is on the sea and its climate is appropriate for this type of work. So I did this building and I cast it all on the site.

- 16:30 I didn't have a factory so I cast it all on the spot. The roof was a conventional roof in tiles. In fact in the centre of the roof there were two squares, one square outside and one square inside and in the square was a dining room.
- 17:00 In the dining room, on the roof, there were tiles and about five metres by five there was a sky light in fibreglass where the light could come in. And I put in a fountain. A pipe with special gadgets to form a fountain. If the climate was too hot inside, it wasn't air conditioned so I used to turn on the fountain.
- 17:30 And it would cool down the house. In fact I also didn't put in gutters. They were on the ground. They were concrete gutters. It was like being in a bowl of water. It was quite interesting and exciting.
- You're giving us just a bit too much detail now.**
- 18:00 **If you can summarise and we can talk about that stuff in more detail later.**
- Ok. So I was interested to go into housing because I thought it would be popular to use concrete.
- 18:30 I was talking to the builders.
- So you were telling us that you decided to focus on domestic construction...**
- Yes
- 19:00 I was focusing on domestic construction. When I finished this house at Sylvania Waters. I put a for sale notice on it and nobody wanted to buy it because it was in concrete. I lived in it myself for about eight years. Anyhow I decided then to go into tall buildings.
- 19:30 I used to go around and make samples for concrete finishes. I couldn't build the structures so I made a name
- 20:00 by using fibreglass also washed concrete. I used to go with samples to meet architects. In the beginning they didn't know me and my English was very poor and I was not very well accepted. They would tell the typist to send that Italian away. I insisted. And suddenly I had the occasion to do a building
- 20:30 and I proved with that that I had some substance. Everybody was thinking that the structure would fall down. But after then years when they wanted to pull it down they didn't know how to pull it down. So they decided I had some quality and was able to do something in concrete.
- 21:00 So I was welcomed with the architects. The architects were calling me continually. Every time they had to do something, like [Harry] Seidler, like other architects in the city to do with tall buildings they would call me before to start to put the facade on. In fact it was myself that told Seidler is better is going to meet Pier Ridgonerri[?], the great engineer in concrete in Rome.
- 21:30 He became the consultant with Civil and Civic. And I made him on various occasions. So from there I bought some land in Darling Point and I had a factory for cast concrete and concrete finishes. At that stage I was taking the men at Cooma who were working there for the schemes
- 22:00 building houses. Some of them were losing their jobs because the work was finished so I employed them myself. We did some great work in the city of Sydney. They say that sixty-five per cent of the finishes and facades in Sydney were done by Fabbro Stone.
- 22:30 Which I'm proud of. Since then, after 20 years when I was working on my own, the big firm Boral came to me to see if I would join forces with them. They were in building and building products. In the beginning I was undecided.
- 23:00 But in the end, being on my own and employing about 600 people. I worked all overseas, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Singapore and Borneo and look after Australia...it was not possible for one man. I joined them, so I became a director with them for new development. I stayed with them
- 23:30 for about ten years. Now I am on my own looking after my properties. In fact what I did...the properties were in Canberra and Sydney and Melbourne and New Zealand where I used to have the Fabbro Stone factories for architectural precast concrete.
- 24:00 I decided to look after Dad and to retire. But before retiring and when I was on my own, I decided also to become an architect and to take the exams. So after thirty five years working, first like a labourer, and second a manager and third a director, I went to the Institute of Architects and did the exam.
- 24:30 In fact the commission at the time they were asking me how things were done. It was very nice to do my exam in this situation. Because the people,
- 25:00 All the architects in Sydney knew me. They knew my work. In fact some Americans wanted me to go over there to progress with the work I was doing in Australia. I refused because my people were here. In the mean time of course I married an Australian girl from Inverell. A bushwhacker she says and

- 25:30 that was a great success. Today I have five children and the components of my family, they are all grown up, they are counting are about eighteen of them between all the family. I'm very proud to have achieved all this. My name and my type of work has been an example for all who see that I continue my work
- 26:00 and there are people even today in this type of work who say it was me who set up the basis for this trade.
- 26:30 **Now I'll take you all the way back to the beginning. First of all I want to talk about your parents. If you can tell me about your father. What sort of a man was he?**
- Yes. My father.
- 27:00 My father came from a very interesting family. A very strong family. In fact my great grandfather was the first...the noted people we were, we were migrating because we were a poor country and we were farmers. In the winter you couldn't do farming, so in the winter
- 27:30 we used to go outside the area, mainly in Germany, Hungary, Austria. My great grandfather went to Debrosi from Artania. He saw there that the pigs when
- 28:00 they were killed were put directly into the fire like a barbecue and the people were eating it that way. They were not making salami. He was a butcher so he thought it would be an idea to build something in this line. So from nothing he went there and he started to make salami and he was the first fellow to make Hungarian salami.
- 28:30 They are very well known today in the world. Today it is pig salami. He had three sons and a few daughters. So he brought his sons into the operation and he brought his cousin. He kept his sons in northern Italy and he made a fortune. He went back to Italy too and teach them a trade.
- 29:00 My grandfather was a shoemaker. The other one was a carpenter, and another might be a [UNCLEAR], but nothing in business. My father when he came back to Italy and he had enough money to buy a property called Contegrillo. This was the house where I was born. It was a big house.
- 29:30 More or less a castle and with property around. It was where my grandfather and father were working. My father was not happy to do that type of work. They were also wine making so he went to be employed by a gentleman who had cellars
- 30:00 in Magnano in Riviera . This is where he met my mother and he went into the wine business. He started with the help of my grandfather, the father of my mother. So with his help he was able to start in the wine business. He has been very successful. Not in a big way in the beginning but he made the best wine
- 30:30 in the locality. My house was built on a hill on a riveria. In fact Magnano in Riviera where it was not too cold in the winter. He was pretty hard because he came up hard himself. When I was a student I wanted to go to work for him. I didn't want to study. So I suddenly decided that maybe if I go to work for my father it's a [UNCLEAR] wage.
- 31:00 If I went to work for my father I could escape from the college. And he would put me second in charge. And being second in charge for my father would be an ideal thing to continue his business in the future. My father, good enough, intelligent enough, things that do not come from the sky, he put me when I joined him,
- 31:30 "Yes." he said, "You are no good at study, come to work for me." Finally decided to do so. He made me to be the worker, the labour to the labourer. I was keeping those days, for the war, and must not use petrol because not existing much petrol, we were using carsegeno. The material used while the gas, used with chalk, made
- 32:00 up in the mountains. And of course used to come in the trucks to bring this chalk and I had to bag it and that was my job and I was all day black. But in the beginning it was quite interesting and something different to being at school. We used to leave the wines up in the mountains.
- 32:30 I was able to do this for a year or a year and a half. After I that I look at me and I said, "I've grown up a bit in my mentality, look if I continue to do this, it's be crazy, I can't do it, my life is not like this." Because my father insisted that I have to learn the trade before. So I decided to go to school. But my father decided, "No, you have to stay here and learn the wine business. You are a[n] ass, you are not able to learn anything,
- 33:00 you have to stay with me." No money, no motive to go back to school. I met on the mountains a fellow who was a merchant. A wood timber merchant. He used to cut the big trunks of timber and leaving the small timber on the ground. I asked him,
- 33:30 "Excuse me, is it possible to have this, what is left over?" And he said, 'Oh yes you can take them, no problem." So when we were going up with the demijohns [large glass bottle used for transport or storage of liquids] up in the mountains full of wine, we were turning back empty more or less, you see demijohns were their name, empty demijohns there were not so much weight . .

34:00 So I was carrying the wood down in the planes, and I started to be a merchant myself selling for fire wood.

Rinaldo, before we go any further there, I want to ask some questions about your younger years. What are your first memories?

What about going into business?

No, I still want to get a bit more information about what it was like growing up in your area. More about your family

34:30 **and what you were like as a young boy? Your very earliest days.**

The early days as a young man, a kid, say about eight or nine years of age...

35:00 My family were living in this beautiful home because it was bought by this Count. It was a big house, very comfortable. In those days all the members of the family were living in the same house.

How many would there be in the house?

About fifteen, eighteen, twenty.

How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Myself, there would have been about five kids. But the

35:30 other members too were married and they had some kids there, plus the house was divided in two. The cousin Bonadala, the boss houses we would say and the other house was for the workers in the fields. Because it was quite a large area of land.

36:00 We were living in harmony, having stables and having horses. I remember very well having not only horses but we had cows. So we were milking them and it was a very simple life making wine and killing a pig every year. You see we bought it up, the young people we used to keep the tail of the pig

36:30 That was an exciting day and a very important day of festivity.

When would you have had the pig? What day would that have been?

It would be in the winter around Christmas. You would eat the parts you couldn't preserve and the rest was made into salami and sausages and things that were going to last.

37:00 **So it was a big celebration?**

A big celebration. Christmas was a big celebration. Since then I used to make a presepio [a nativity scene]. Being a Catholic we have a presepio. At Christmas was able at that time to make drawing and to build little houses with my own hands and everybody was very impressed with these houses made of chalk.

37:30 I would paint it after.

So you showed your flair for building and architecture?

Yes. Life was serene and I was very interested to catch birds. I was a bird catcher. I used to go to the back of the houses where there were these beautiful vineyards and birds. Beautiful birds, I was living with nature.

38:00 I used to go to school.

How would you catch the birds?

This is very tricky way to explain. Unfortunately it was not very nice, thinking back. But it was permissible because some of the birds were eaten after. Not mine because I was keeping them in cage. So the idea to catch a bird was to make a false tree

38:30 with a plant. In the false tree a sort of a stick so when the bird sits on it, it would fall down. On that stick there was a sort of whisky it's called a sort of a glue, a natural glue, and the bird used to fall down on the ground. And fortunately we were able to catch it.

39:00 So that was exciting every time and this was only permitted during the period of the transaction of the birds' passage, they were going from one area to another one before the Winter. So that was interesting.

Did you used to help out with chores?

I used to but not very much.

39:30 There was another big occasion when we were making bedatakio[?], squeezing the wine everything was done by hand. My grandfather used to be a specialist in wine making. There used to be this big sort of

container, put the grapes in and squeeze it by hand, you see there would be a couple of men squeezing down until next to nothing leaving only the wine used come out and

- 40:00 put it in vats for fermenting. And leaving the residual, the grape itself and that was used to make grappa. So everything was used. And that was another great occasion when I was a kid. It was good to grow up that way in a beautiful home in the middle
- 40:30 of, contadino we called it, farmers. But I wanted to do something different. In my family there were not many technical people, so this was the sight of my father, he ended up being after wine merchant in the end.

Tape 2

- 00:34 **So Rinaldo, you were going to tell us about going to school as a little boy in the village. What do you remember about that?**

Going to school. The house was about half a kilometre, 500 metres from the school and I used to walk from the house, a nice house, to the school.

- 01:00 I remember very well the winter. We used to use special clogs, special shoes made of timber, those days, so keep warm. We were walking by foot and coming home by foot. Half a kilometre four times a day because at lunch time we would also go home.

- 01:30 At school I wasn't a great genius. I remember all my professors and all my teachers, you are very believing when you are a kid with a young mind. I was not a very intelligent, clever fellow. But next to me, a very good hat, a very big hat in fact, Gino Evaland [?] was clever. He used to know very well mathematics and I would copy him all the time what he was doing. This man is now a great friend of mine in Cooma. He worked and he succeeded there just like me.

- 02:00 Elementary school was quite interesting.

- 02:30 Just to mention something in this case. After a couple of weeks at school elementary, when I arrived there I was about six years of age and then they gave me a uniform of a Fascist. They gave me a black hat, blue scarf, black shirt

- 03:00 and I very young and strong and I felt very Mussolini like. So what I did, I went down to a house where there were some of my relations. It was where my uncles were living, that my Grandfather Roberio has built in concrete, cement. I went

- 03:30 marching down the street feeling like a hero and I went in to the corridor, a long corridor and I saw my uncle at the end. He saw me in that uniform and he looked at me and he looked at me again and he sent me marching and waiting for approval, and he said,

- 04:00 "Out of here." I was a kid and I didn't know anything. Suddenly everything dropped. All my hopes to be a great man, to be fighting and this sort of thing. And then I went down to my mother, crying continually, as I say before, beautiful woman. And my mother abused me, asked me what was the problem and I told her that my uncle kicked me away, doesn't want to see me..

- 04:30 She explained to me, "He doesn't want to see you because you have that uniform. That uniform is the uniform of a Fascist and your uncle, my brother has been killed by the Fascist." Since then I didn't want to have anything to do with the uniform and anything to do with the Fascist.

- 05:00 Because my family were against the Fascists, not only because of the death of my uncle but because they were anti Fascists at that time.

So as a little boy going to that elementary school, you were given that uniform by the state?

By the state yes. With a big veyeyello [?] on the front here, shining. So you can imagine a young boy... and that was a great

- 05:30 thing for me in my life. Not understanding, for a boy it was very crucial. That has stayed as a sore thing all the rest of my life, against the Fascists. I created my life in that direction in the end. And I should say that because we had victory in the end.

- 06:00 **The village where you grew up, how much contact did it have with the outside world and politics?**

Yes, politics were very well, we were under the regime of the Fascists. You couldn't talk freely. You could only talk in your family sometimes. And be very careful there too. My family,

- 06:30 because of my grandfather on the side of my mother wanted his sons always present at lunch time. Everyone was away during the week for jobs but at lunch time on Sundays there were discussions. And

I was young and I would listen to these discussions. They were quiet interesting, against the Fascists. So everybody made sure

07:00 that no other members were present, only the anti fascists. And my family type you see.

So in the village there were pro and anti fascists?

Yes, there were pro and anti fascists and that was a very crucial situation. And I was very cranky with my father sometimes because he had friends who were fascists, but he had to be, other wise he couldn't do any business. He couldn't have work.

07:30 Even though he was not a fascist he had to know them.

Had any of your male relatives fought in the First World War?

Yes. My father was at Top-or-etto, which was not far from where I am from and the Germans were able to succeed and break the front, the Allied front there. And they came up to the river where the Italians were able to stop them.

08:00 I was very interested when I was young to go around in this area and pick up the stories. When I was young and my people had to escape as refugees down to south Italy. That was very, very, my mother when I was young used to tell me the stories.

08:30 In fact the command of all that was in the house of my grandfather, Robero. It was a mansion built by him in concrete so it was more secure than any other building. So that was the area command for Cadondarea [?].

Did your father tell you stories about his fighting?

Oh yes, but not very much. I had pictures...he never mentioned very much but he used to tell me about moments and difficulties. He had been wounded too.

09:00 Of course we were not very far from the front. I remember the stories of my aunties telling me when they were hostages about what the Germans used to do while they were there. They had been there for about a year and a half at the time, until the retreat.

So in your region there was not much love for the Germans?

Unfortunately that part of the world, being Austria, Germany, Yugoslavia...it was a wonderful place because everybody had to come through there to anywhere. Attila was the first, second was the Romans had been there. In fact my father's house, Grillo, we mention Grillo there from Congrillo, we call it Grillo.

10:00 there were evidence of the Romans....from there you can see the flats down the hill...there was evidence of Roman soldiers. My sister and myself...I can remember paintings that there were on the wall. They had been destroyed and pulled down. But unfortunately in the earthquake of 1976,

10:30 all these buildings were destroyed. I was in Australia. I wanted to rebuild it but instead I did something else.

Why had the Fascists killed your uncle?

For the simple thing because he was against the Fascists. He was preaching against the Fascists When the Fascists used to kill some people they didn't go with bullets.

11:00 There were other techniques. They used to take them into the bush. They would pick them up in the night and give them a lot of oil. Oil greasino we call it. And after a while you disappear. In fact he died after two weeks.

11:30 Maybe if they started to use bullets it would have been a different sort of war.

So that man, your relative had just disappeared?

Just disappeared like that. He died after a while after his treatment and all his brothers and my mother were always against them, any Fascist proposition.

12:00 But they had to stay in business and it was very hard. They had to be careful.

So in the village it seems like there was an atmosphere where you couldn't trust everybody?

You couldn't trust each other. It was very difficult. Of course we used to participate. We had to participate at these conventions. Marches, meetings and parties that the Fascists were organising.

12:30 And my father being an Alpino and being in the First War, he was a personality. In fact there is a fontana in the centre of this little town and on the occasion of the Feast of the Alpini...the mountain. We were apolitical. So every year there was a feast and a collection of all the little towns around would come to

13:00 Magnano in Riviera for a feast and in the front there was running wine. Wine was the drink of the

Alpini. We didn't drink water or Coca Cola like they do today...

Can you just explain to us what an Alpino is and why it is significant in your part of Italy?

We

- 13:30 in the north of Italy we are Alpine people. We have to deal with mountains and with skiing. With rocks, with stalinpini [?pines] and with the flood that comes. I have a photograph of that myself. It comes in the cracks of the rocks and very high.
- 14:00 Over a hundred, thousand metres, 50,000 feet say. They have these ...and when I was young I would collect this you see. We are Alpine people, strong and hard working people. In fact when the earthquake in 1976 came in my region and killed a thousand people, we were the first to do, without the help of governments, we were not waiting for help or anyone. We rebuilt
- 14:30 everything. After two or three years it had been rebuilt. Without the help of anyone, our people without needing wages, everything was done as it is today.

So the Alpini in the military sense are the soldiers...

In the military...the Alpini. There are two types of Alpini. There are the front Alpini with light arms, with the assault bayonet. The other side, they are in the back with the cannons.

- 15:00 The cannon is very heavy. They used to carry it on their shoulders. It would weigh a ton or a ton and a half. So that's why...like you, a strong man.

So to be an Alpini...

You had to be physically right for the mountains, strong and able to do

- 15:30 what was required at any moment in a war.

And it's quite a high status?

It is a high status. It is the top status in Italy, the corps in Italy. We had the sea people, the air people and the frontier, people who go by foot. A different story. These people all come from the south. But in Italy the Alpini come only from Fre-oli

- 16:00 or maybe the part north of Italy...Freoli Bemonte, and Apunse. And we have much affinity together. And they do this every year and all these groups come together and the make festivity and they make consigna and be together.
- 16:30 In fact if you are interested I have with me, a film about the Alpini and I was in it too. It was made about these marches.

When you were younger there were fascist rallies and demonstrations in the village that you had to go to?

As boys, as figli della lupa or balilla [Fascist youth groups], figli della lupa is the son of the wolf. The ballila is a bit other in great and then you became avanguardisti, another great idol as you grow up.

- 17:00 **So these were like youth organisations in the Fascist movement?**

Yes. I had to go. I had to participate but it was not my field.

So it was compulsory?

Yes it was compulsory for boys to be there, to march and salute.

- 17:30 Singing the song. And it was a continuous way to do things.

And there was indoctrination of the Fascist ideology?

Yes of course and the school there was indoctrination. Like we had the commissee, with the communists. They used to tell you the reasons

- 18:00 why and so on. It was the sort of life that was existing at that time.

But even though you were getting all this indoctrination at school and these movements you were anti Fascist?

Yes all the time. In fact when I was called to be in the army,

- 18:30 in Padua. Because I was a student of architecture I was called to be on garra on a construction site. On the garra to build anchors. When I was there in the beginning, marching, I used to go in for training for this and that. I used to go this fusiel and I had been
- 19:00 in gaol for a couple of days. One day I would do this presentata and ...they would insist that all together to have one great big bong. I used to do it and break the fusiel. I used to do it so hard, that's what they

wanted. I had to eliminate that, I started from there.

Up in the village in your childhood, what role

19:30 **did the church play in the village life?**

The church had to be part of it. There has been the conciliation in 1938 with the Fascists and their priests. They should have been unpolitical, but some of them in some areas were political.

20:00 But they tried, only some of them. But most of the priests were against it. Of course it was underground.

You said you left school for a bit to go and work for your father and then you were starting to tell a story about taking fire wood back down the mountain?

20:30 I would do this and I started to have a good business. I wanted to make money so I could go back to school.

How old were you at this point?

I would have been sixteen. And I wanted to make up the years that I had lost. My mother used to give me some money but it was only a little, mothers always help. So suddenly I started to make some business.

21:00 Everybody wanted this wood for their fires. I provided for the winter. Somebody spied to my father about what I was doing. They told him, "Look, he does this your son, he is a good brave fellow, look what he does, he's doing business." He called me one day into the office and he made me sit down like we are here now.

21:30 He said, "Son, you go up in the mountains," those days nobody was paying for me, it was only a plate of soup and food and clothing. "You go up in the mountains to deliver the wine and you in the mountains when you come back you get some wood and you transport the wood in the flats, you

22:00 sell it and you make profit. How are you going to pay for the transport?" Gosh I got a shock "Yes" I said, "How much is it?" "Eight lire per tonne." Anyhow I did it and he let me continue. I had to pay him the transport and I went back to school after. Of my own will, I had to buy my own books.

22:30 I had to go back to school in Venice. I wanted to regain that time lost and pass the exams which would allow me to go into artistic for four years before I could go into architecture.

How did you live and where did you live in Venice?

Well in Venice I used to go by train.

23:00 I used to have a room with an elderly woman. I would rent this room. And there I used to work, study. I was studying very hard because I had to pass a year, a year and a half. In the end I passed. The first exams I passed which allowed me to go to the university of architecture.

23:30 I was working so hard and my mother was helping me. I used to take in one valise for books and one valise on the train for wood because it was cold, I was cold so I would take the wood to warm me up when I was study. I couldn't carry very much and wood was very rare. So when there was no wood, I was cold.

And how often would you go home?

Every two weeks.

24:00 In the beginning I used to get private lessons. I used to employ my own with my own money which I had made. I would employ a teacher. I would go to his place to learn. He was coaching me in that way. And after a year I passed the exams.

24:30 So I gain half a year.

Venice these days is of course very famous as a beautiful tourist city, what was Venice like when you were there as a student?

That was the war. It is different to what it is today. There were a lot of Germans around. They were sending them there for a holiday more or less. It was frigid.

25:00 It was not as spectacular. Well of course the buildings there always but not as spectacular as today without the war. But then after when I joined, suddenly I finished, I passed the exams and they allowed me to go to the university. And my father called me again into his office. "Well my son it's good now you've passed this."

25:30 I had the title of Professor in Design for having that diploma, that academia belli arti. He told me that if I wanted to continue to be an architect you can go or if you want to prefer to stay with me you will be welcome. So I said I would go to be an architect. And so I continued my work.

- 26:00 Then the war came and I was late. I lost three years in the war. But I did the work. I was just in time. I did two years university by going to school, coaching and this and that, and again I gained the three years, so when I went for the six I was just like an equal of anyone who had done it.
- 26:30 So I became astute. I must have become a bit clever and intelligent. I was able to stand on my own foot.
- What were your feelings and your family's feelings when Italy declared war and joined the Germans against the Allies?**
- That was tragic. We Italians and particularly we north Italians, particularly in our part of the world, being invaded always by the Germans
- 27:00 in the First World War even before, being invaded, all these people, like the Nordics, we were always vulnerable because they had to come in that way. When they were coming the first time, you can see it even today, the castle. They used to destroy everything, no question. They would pass and destroy and rape and do anything.
- 27:30 We were against all the Germans particularly, the German race some how. We didn't like them. My people have been treated bad. My aunties who stayed there didn't want to go away, and to listen to their stories when I was a kid.
- 28:00 They were trembling.
- So your family and you were horrified when Mussolini joined Hitler?**
- Yes we were very unhappy. Not only my family but most of the people.
- What did you think of Mussolini? What were your impressions of him?**
- Well when I was young or now?
- When you were young?**
- At the time I never thought he was a great man.
- 28:30 I was frightened that he was not able to run the country in the proper manner. He was more interested in his ego than the country. He wanted to be the great emperor; you know the story of Abyssinia. The same thing. In fact...better not tell this story.
- Is it part of your story?**
- I know this...
- 29:00 Anyhow, there were some people during the war...
- What are you worried about Rinaldo?**
- The organisation Pazotti, what they were doing...during the war
- 29:30 in Abyssinia they were building barracks, Pazotti. They specialised in building barracks and houses like we did in Cooma. Prefabricated, pre-cut. They use to bring these barracks. We go back a minute. When I was with Pazotti in Australia, there were
- 30:00 indentured, a Scotchman who was the manager in England and because he was speaking English and he knew about Pazotti, they sent him to Australia and he was manager here. There was a fellow by the name of Chokki. He was having the people there in Cooma. He was an engineer. But Pazotti was not very happy with this
- 30:30 because he knew too many things about the Fascists. He was a Fascist and he didn't want to disclose things. They sent him to Australia in charge here. One day these two guys, they came to see me in my little room where I was living....Elizabeth Bay. And they gave me a proposition.
- 31:00 "We need you Fabbro, an architect because we can't find anyone else. When they send the ship of houses to Australia why don't we take two or three houses or five and buy some land and we build a nice house and we sell it?" And we start to make money.
- 31:30 "What you are talking about?" I said "You are the managers of this organisation." I told them I would never do this. And I told Pazotti and he said I didn't understand. He didn't believe me. But I started to be worried about this moment. And I found
- 32:00 out that in Abyssinia, these fellows told me, they knew Pazotti, because he is the boss, we know this Pazotti organisation used to build the barracks and then used to call the aeroplanes to bomb it and get paid from Rome so they could rebuild it. The tricks in life, in wars and things like that.
- 32:30 **So they were building barracks for the Italians and then calling the Allies to bomb...**
- No, the Italian people themselves were coming to destroy them. I don't know the truth of that. To convince me to go with them, forget about your boss, your Pazotti.

33:00 **So you didn't think very much of Mussolini as a man?**

No, definitely not.

What did you think then of Italy's or Mussolini's imperial ambitions of a new Roman Empire in the Mediterranean?

Apparently he was convinced by somebody, but

33:30 it was impossible. In the Roman days and if you were living in our century then it would be a different type of living, a different type of life, nothing to do with what was at the time. In fact that is why he failed. He had wrong ideas.

What was the system of conscription

34:00 **then in your time? How was it you came to be conscripted into the air force?**

I was lucky too that I was a student at the University of Architecture. At that time I was postponed one year. Because of the rules. And then I was declared to go to conscript

34:30 and go angur and to Padua and into the air force.

What year are we talking about Rinaldo?

Now we are talking 1942.

So at this stage, in 1942, things were still looking optimistic for the Germans?

Yes that's correct, but in my heart it was always that they would never win.

35:00 That's why I was on the other side. Not only for that but for my principals.

And the military service was compulsory?

The military service was compulsory. And I was there, we were the people who, the garda it's called, in the corps that builds things for the airport until we were invaded. 8th of September 1943 the Germans came down and took us over. Because [UNCLEAR] came in before and

35:30 Mussolini's government disintegrated and the Germans took over, invaded us. And I was in camp at that moment.

So you went into the air force in '42, is that correct?

That's right.

So you spent a year more or less working there?

That's right. And in 1943 I escaped. And I'd like to tell you the story of how I did it.

36:00 **We're coming towards the end of this tape but I would just like to ask you some questions about...in the air force, what training did you have to be part of the Italian Air Force?**

36:30 It was military sort of training. Mainly marches, mainly instruction about...well there was not much training about how to build things. I think there were some difficult moments

37:00 for the Fascists too. They were not going to build things because they were very quickly bombed all down. So the training was marching and lecturing and teaching us the doctrine of the Fascists and things like that. And waiting in that way. In fact it was not very exciting that period of my

37:30 life.

Was there also in the Italian Fascist doctrine an anti Jewish element?

Yes, but not so active and not so hard as Hitler. No it was not so. But during my life as a partisan I saved quite a lot of Jewish. I saw them after the war too

38:00 but without many thanks.

And where were you stationed with the air force?

In Padua. Padua is a military airport, I think even today. That was our station. As I said it was there that I was trying to sabotage myself, starting. But we didn't get

38:30 much training and in fact there weren't many aeroplanes left. In some parts of Italy they were built in wood just to show at the airports that there were aeroplanes but they were just fake aeroplanes.

Were you an officer?

No I was to be trained to become an officer.

- 39:00 **So you were like a trainee cadet?**
Yes.
And this was some sort of engineer corps?
Yes the engineer corps. Dealing with building mainly or bridges.
So your unit specialised in hangars?
Yes they were training us for that reason and to do this type of work.
- 39:30 We were not part of the war. We were being trained to be in the war in that case. They would have sent us maybe to south Italy or Africa to build something.
Other young men from your village, had they been sent away overseas?
By whom?
Other young men, when they joined the Fascist armies, had they been sent to North Africa or Russia?
Oh yes.
- 40:00 Oh yes a lot of them. The Alpini went to Russia. Only a quarter came back, all remained there. They all died there in the cold. You know that story. Albania, Greece...they were sending them to there all the time. They were sending them to Spain. Franco had problems with the Communists there and Mussolini was helping Franco
- 40:30 to do that...you know that story.

Tape 3

- 00:30 **Alright Rinaldo. You were in a situation where you were part of the air force and involved in the construction of the air hangars and then in October 1943 the Germans occupied Italy.**
- 01:00 **How did you first get that news that change had come to your country?**
We were at the premises at Padua. We were not given any news. We started to hear the rumble of tanks. Tanks everywhere.
- 01:30 They were coming into the airport. They took over the airport and everywhere.
So you realised that you were invaded?
Yes. It was frenetic, the moment.
- 02:00 I was there with my colleagues. There would have been about four hundred of us in this area. Suddenly the Germans arrived. They took all our drivers. Before the Germans arrived, before the invasion, we were ordered to put everything in order in the camp.
- 02:30 And the drivers took all the trucks in line in the main square. Fiat trucks. The Germans came in and very quickly
- 03:00 they started to take away with their own trucks, take away furniture, not losing time, from the airport for their offices, they took it somewhere else where it was needed..
Did the officers talk to the Italian officers? Was there any communication?
No. We just stood there. Suddenly, late in the afternoon the same day, the commander of the tanks,
- 03:30 goes on the balcony of the barracks and we were, all in the area, in the square and he started to talk to us. He told us to be calm, that nothing would happen and they would send us home.
- 04:00 "In a couple of weeks we will send you home." Suddenly, the tanks went away and he dissolved the meeting. The tanks and the trucks left there.
- 04:30 Suddenly came an officer ordering, "Where are the drivers of these trucks?" There would have been about fifteen trucks there. He insisted, "Where are they!" Nobody went.
Why do you think the drivers didn't respond?
- 05:00 Because they didn't want to go because they knew if they presented themselves they would have to go into the service of the German forces. Instead, if they didn't present themselves they could go home. I was suspicious myself. They were talking home but ...

So you didn't believe them?

I never believed them. Suddenly they decided...this commandant started to talk,

05:30 "If you do not come out," the drivers, "We take one of you from every truck and shoot you on the spot. We'll take any of you at random." So I said to the others, 'Hey come, this is a good moment to go, a good moment to escape. Come with me.' I went up to the dormitory. And I called, "Come, come." But nobody... "No, no I do not come. No, no they will let us go home."

06:00 Only one came. So me and the other one, "We are the truck drivers."

Who was the other one?

A solicitor. He was studying as a solicitor. He was studying in Padua and he knew Padua well.

Did you know him very well?

06:30 No, he was not a dear friend. The real friend of mine, he's crying now every time I see him in Italy because he didn't follow my advice. He was a prisoner for two years with them. So he came with me and so we presented as the drivers. So we got up on the truck. And that saved the thinking about shooting some of us at random.

07:00 So they were waiting for others to come but nobody came. But we had the truck and we started to put it in motion and we waited. Myself, I had only the khaki shorts. Nothing on. It was warm

07:30 It was September in fact, summer. We saw some German trucks. We were waiting there for them to tell us what to do. We saw these trucks going out with furniture in line. So I took one of the trucks myself and I followed just behind the last truck.

08:00 I was able to go through because the Germans at the gate thought we were part of the convoy. We were out. Free, outside of the camp.

What was the other guy wearing?

A uniform. A complete uniform, cap and everything. The uniform of an Italian.

08:30 **They looked at you...**

They looked at me driving and thought, maybe yes. Suddenly my friend...he knew Padua whereas I was a student in Venice. He said to me, "Now we wait..." Because there was a motorbike...like a tricycle.

09:00 It was going up and down to check the twenty trucks. There were about twenty trucks. And we were the last on the column. We waited for the last moment and my friend, knowing the area turned to the right in a small way. So we disappeared. He said to me, "We have to go to the convent, where I know the priest in the convent where I was at school."

09:30 He told me where it was. He said, "It's the other side of a big square." I don't remember now the name...Piazza de la Val [?]. Suddenly, we go up this small lane, we arrive bang at the Piazza de la Val.

10:00 We looked around and I got confused because there were about thirty or twenty-five tanks. It was about lunch time, about one o'clock. The Germans were on the tanks having lunch. But we had to go right through. We couldn't escape, we couldn't go back.

10:30 I talked to my friend. I said, "Take quickly the wheel." I jumped out on the truck step and I started to go straight to the other side. And I started to salute the Germans. They started to salute me. The Germans are thinking that I got prisoner this fellow.

11:00 because these tanks were there to get escaped soldiers all over city.

How many tanks do you think were there?

About twenty, the others were around in Padua, because that was the bigger square... So we passed through and arrived at the back. We arrived at the college and we went in. We left the truck in a small lane.

11:30 The priest very quickly said "OK come with us." He took us up stairs to the attic. They gave us their uniform and we were part of the monastery.

It was very courageous action that you took.

12:00 Oh yes. Oh yes.

How did you feel when you made that decision that you just had to go across?

The decisions all the time in war are always like that. They're immediate decisions. And you can't be frightened. If you're frightened then you are finito [finished] for sure.. Anyhow we went there and my friend was able to contact his people in Venice. He lived in Venice this fellow was studying in Padua.

- 12:30 They arranged to pick him up. So one night, two days after we had been in the monastery, the mother came and I went with him. We went to take the train. On the train going to Venice there were guards going continuously up and down with torches to check, it was in the night. When they came to me and my friend
- 13:00 My friend was alright, he was dressed up, he was the legitimate son of this lady.
- And he was wearing civilian clothes then?**
- Yes civilian clothes. Yes the mother came bought them to him at Padua. But about me, I had a cover, a blanket on me. She said to the lookers, "This is my other son and he can't speak. He's deaf and dumb."
- 13:30 We arrived in Mestre. In Mestre, they were going to Venice. I couldn't get out in Mestre. So I had to get out because the train was stopping then. It was going to Venice but I got out in Mestre and I was waiting for a train that was going, Udine, my town. Then a goods train arrived, so I jumped in
- 14:00 this goods train. There were other people there. I jumped into the wagon and before I arrived in Udine, I wanted to go home. I jumped out while the train was running, because at the station would have been the Germans and they would have got me. But I jumped out before. I was able to roll out onto the gravel there
- 14:30 I walked home. All the night walking.
- How far was that journey?**
- About ten kilometres. In the night. I was lucky because I went on the outskirts of Udine. I wasn't walking on the road, but on the white surface. You can
- 15:00 see the dark and the light. Suddenly I see a light where the Germans were guarding the road. The fellow was lighting a cigarette. So at the moment, luckily, I deviate.
- 15:30 And I arrived home about five o'clock in the morning. I locked the door. I was all shaved from the army. I see my mother, I was in civilian clothes. She started to cry. My father came down and said, "Come away quick." So he brought me up and they hid me away. I couldn't stay there because
- 16:00 next door there were Fascist friends of my father, and they used to come often to visit my father. If they found me there they would start to question. So my father decided the day after to take me up into Proso-nic-o. Prosonico is on the border of Yugoslavia.
- 16:30 Where he was serving wine in the hotel there. In the inn you see. He took me up there in the bencar with a friend, in a small car to Polino to hide up there. A lot of people there in Terico town there. There were a lot of people up hiding away. There were other people from the Italian Army yes, mainly officers
- 17:00 So I was friendly with the people up there and I was accepted in their living room where a bit of warmth from the fire, nobody was allowed to leave.
- So this was a living room in the hotel was it?**
- The hotel with a fire and a bit of comfort. The others had to stay in the fienli, where the hay is..
- 17:30 Anyhow. We had the meals there...
- So your dad left you there and he went back home?**
- Yes he went back home. So I was there and made some friends and I see what to do and what not to do. After a couple of days, three days say. In the morning about ten o'clock, arrive there Partisans from Tito [Yugoslav partisan general] the nonno colpus.
- 18:00 There were five of them. They opened the door, give a kick to the door, push it open. They look and say, "You all have to come with us." Some of them, these officers, had just fought against Tito, up to the day before. They were fighting against the Communists, against Tito.
- 18:30 One of them said, "No, we are bandits, we will not come with you." Crazy. He was supposed to be an officer commanding his people. They took him to the little square and two shots and he was dead. So of course I was happy to go with them.
- 19:00 **Did you know much about Tito's partisans at that time?**
- Not very much at that point no. After I knew. Because somebody came up in Gartia, where we went
- And in those three days before they arrived, did you have a plan of what you were going to do to survive?**
- No. Just to escape from everywhere. But I was trying all the time to organise and form some groups
- 19:30 against the Fascists because they had joined the Germans. Mussolini went and formed a new

government. But at the moment I went with the...they gave me a big fuiseen, a gun. They gave me a hat with a red star and they taught me salute and they taught me how to say "Schmed da fisto, dopra farnardo"[phonetic] "Die the Fascists and hooray liberty."

20:00 **So how many of you joined that day?**

All of them, more or less

Roughly how many Italians do you think?

About twenty.

Do you think you would have joined up if they hadn't shot that other man?

I would have, yes I would have gone. Yes you go with them or otherwise you have no chance.

20:30 And they gave me the duty of looking after the mill. They knew already the area you see. They planned before; they knew the miller used to bring the maize from the country, from the town. So I was in charge of the mill.

Their base was quite close to that hotel was it?

21:00 Yes close in that area. Down in the river. The mill was run by water, no electricity. So I used to be in charge there. One day there comes a bombardment on the town down towards Pozei, rostray no mento we call it. A fight and the Germans bombarded this area.

So they had finally made their way to your area?

Yes in that town.

21:30 The order came for me to go to the town...there was a group of Yugoslavs with a commandant. They came and said, "You have to come with us to see if we can find any food down there." Down there may be some cows and animals dead. And we were living like that you see,

22:00 if the meat is fresh we could make soup, you are living like that. So I went down there. The group was about twelve of us with one Yugoslav partisan in charge with a permit. We had no documents, nothing. And when I arrived in this little town, I was more interested to look around. To look at what had happened to the buildings, this bombardment.

22:30 In the meantime they had to go to their Yugoslav command to present themselves and get orders. I lost myself. I was on my own in the rubble of things there. Suddenly I saw a Yugoslav come to me and, "Speak to me I Yugoslav." I was all dressed up as Yugoslav, I couldn't answer. He held a gun at me to shoot me. Just to find out it was me, unusual, it wasn't formal speak. My luck in life has always been able to convince people. To look them in the eye and be able to convince them to follow what I say. Without talking

23:00 I told him that I was part of the group. He took me there to check. The same day in the fight, after the bombardment, they came again. The Germans started to fight to get over us. Suddenly I see a fellow wounded on the ground beneath the rocks there, wounded. I pull him and try to help him but he couldn't walk. He had a bullet in the leg. There were bullets coming from all over the place.

23:30 I asked him "What is your name? Who are you? Where do you come from?" He said, "My name is Otto. I can't come with you." I don't know if he is half English, or half Italian. The day before the Tito guys asked me to choose a name, a battle name, and I was selecting, deciding on a name. So I left him and went. He was a German too. But he was a deserter. He was with Tito. Because I saw his gun, saw that he was wounded and his beret with the red star like me. So I took my name Otto from him, and

24:00 we went back.

So everyone had to have a battle name?

Yes.

Had the partisans given you any training at that stage, or was it just, "off we go"?

That's it. No. At that stage there was no training at all. No time.

How did you feel about the whole Communist side of things?

We were Italians. First of all, they were sending us to the first line all the time. I was there all the time in the middle of the bombing; I thought 'You will not last very long there.' So I decided to escape. I had to have a place to stay.

24:30 And plus, I was not a Communist. I didn't want to have a red star on my head. So I decided...I contacted my people, my mother in Italy. Some people from the hotel were able to travel there.

25:00 I said I wanted to escape and to meet me at a certain point down at the beginning of the mountain, on the foot of the mountain. So that was arranged and done. My mother was already there working there in

the evening. And me across on the fields of the maize, it is high so you can walk in there. She was there with a pushbike walking, in the corn fields.

25:30 **So you would just walk down to meet her?**

Yes. She wheeled the pushbike following me and me in the bushes, going down like that until we arrived at home in the morning.. After five hours we walked like that. Every time you saw a truck or something you stop and lie down.

Why did your mum meet you rather than your father?

Because my mother was easier to go through. A woman was not so search. When they saw a man they ask questions.

26:00 Anyway I arrived there and straight away my father said again, "Look you can't stay here, you have to go." So the day after he took me up to Brotiniccio. Say about 100 kilometres away. From the border of Yugoslavia he took me through the intoglarazi, an area in Incardia. He took me there because a priest there was a relation of my father. So he took me there because he was relation, it was arranged I could stay there.

26:30 So the priest said, "Alright you can stay here, but you have to say that you are the sacrestano, you are the teaching religion here for the kids, you will be the fellow looking after the church."

27:00 So I became the second in charge of the town. The priest is always the first; it was a little village you see. And I was presented like that. I was very happy in the beginning.

The priest knew obviously that you had left the Italian Army but he had no idea about what you had been doing in the meantime?

27:30 No idea I was partisan, yes that's right. I never said I was with the Yugoslavs, I kept it to myself.

So what were the jobs you had to do for him? You had to teach the children and be the caretaker for the church?

28:00 I had to pull the bells. That was a great thing for me. The greatest amusement was to pull the bells. Because the tower was made of wood. Because me being a technical type of fellow,

28:30 Saturday was a great day for me. I was there to pull all three bells. The other days you pull only one. In the morning when they were to get up and in the evening when they were to go to sleep, the villages. But on Saturday it was the big day for the feast so I could ring the three. I would pull them and then I would run off to see how the bell was resisting the stresses on the weight of the bells you see.

29:00 And then I would run back again, very strongly and pull them again and come out and see again. That was my job. And I was also teaching the kids religion.

Did you have to wear a special cloak?

No just normal clothes. One Saturday, after a couple of weeks,

29:30 I was organised

30:00 and was friendly with the people, one of the partisans with his red star, a Yugoslav arrived there and found me. He recognised me that I was there, in the other area. So he started to talk with me and all the village start to see, looked, that's the first time they see a partisan, a Yugoslav like that. Oh gosh the priest came straight away to me after he left.

30:30 He was trying to convince me to go back to their forces because they were trying to form forces there in the area. I didn't want to go with them of course I want to be sacrestano.

Did he get upset, the partisan?

No. There was going to be questions about me. So suddenly the priest came to me, "You must escape, you must go away from the town

31:00 You must escape, you have to go up."

Why was he concerned?

Because they would burn the town. The Germans when they know the people were connected to partisans they would burn the town. They would burn the sacristy, whatever they think here. So I went off and I went up about a kilometre up in the mountain. In the snow and trees, and I went into a stable, in the place where they kept the hay.

31:30 And from there I started to contact a few people I knew in the area. Because of the connections before with my father when I was delivering wine. So I went there and I started talking to one, so they start to find out that I wanted to form a group of partisans to fight the Fascists. A fellow would come and then another one.

32:00 In these situations you do not go to an academy for training or anything. You become an officer or a commandant only if you are able to collect people by yourself you see. So I would take people and people would talk to other people around the mountains there, dispersed like I was. So people used to come to me.

32:30 Slowly, slowly and I found out that they had already formed some partisans called de division of Zoppo And they were wearing a green scarf and a hat of a Alpino, Alpine hat.

So no connection to Communism?

No connection whatever. We were fighting for the liberty of Italy, while the other one's intention was indoctrinated in Communism and part of local Italy, right up to the Italian mountains. So I had about ten or fifteen of them and the when I found out there was a group already formed, and well organised I joined them. I got in contact with them. And my group became part of theirs.

So you were now officially a commandant?

33:00 A commandant yes, of the Battalione Monte Canino. I have the book of the history of all this. So I was a commandant. Now, we started to fight and with us in the meantime there were also Communists.

33:30 Or garabaldini or so called. They were wearing not a red star but they had a red scarf. Sometimes those that were Communists were wearing a red star.

So they were Italian Communists. They had the Communist doctrine?

Yes. When the Fascists came a lot of them escaped to Yugoslavia, and when the war finished they came

34:00 back. They indoctrinated the garabaldini to stay with them, to continue. They had different teachings than we had.

But you worked together?

Yes we were working together. Different ideas but we were working together and very well in the beginning.

34:30 In the beginning. Now everything was ok. Fighting and this and that.

Did you start to train your men?

Oh yes. Then I was the first fellow to have one commander come down with a parachute.

35:00 That corps that I had already joined, they already had contact. And I was in the little town and it was decided that we were going to collect this fellow who was coming down in the parachute.

When would that have been?

About 1943. Towards the end of 1943. So we collected him and brought him down. The aeroplane came and we had a lot of trouble there for a moment because the plane came and

35:30 we were not very well trained for signs. But fires are very hard because Germans could see it too. But anyhow we used to fires, but the position of the fires in the little town, just outside the town were not correct. So the plane had to come back again. But we got better instructions so we put the fires correctly. But to do fire was a problem

36:00 because we had to find the wood. You see was ability, then there was fagioli, beans, and they had a lot of fagioli, these beans for cooking. They used to have a stick. So we took away all these sticks and made the fire.

36:30 The aeroplane came, the second plane; they understand that we are there. They drop things and after we have been standing on top of the mountain the day after because we had to move the gang over there. They drop things first

Supplies?

Supplies and we had to go a week later to take this, manfretti, fellow who was parachuting.

So first of all it was just supplies dropped and then after that the man came down?

37:00 But there was a problem with the people you see because I had to train the people. It was open that I was a partisan because their own sons used to join me. It was a little town. I was preaching to conventions.

37:30 They were making the cheese. It was a big room there and I used to go on the top of their vats where they were making the cheese to speak to these partisans, to recruit. And to tell them they had to fight. So the town became partisan more or less with the green scarf, not so much the red. But the problem was, when we put out the fires the first time, we destroyed all the fagioli and they were big capital. Because nothing to eat, big problem.

38:00 And the people came against us. So anyhow ...

What sort of aeroplane was the supplies dropped from?

I still listen for years and years I remembered the noise. It was a DC3. The first DC3s. It used to come and do these operations.

And what sort of things did they drop you?

They

38:30 used to have containers, cylinders. Ammunition, guns and food. It came on a parachute. It was army rations. Cigarettes. Only the salt came down by parachute and when the salt was coming down you can whistle it. You had to be careful of bags of salt.

39:00 Then a fellow by the name of Milko came to where I was. We made friends with each other. We used to sit on the top of a little mountain and look down on towns across the valley and talk about things. He was trying to convince me to join my partisans with him.

He was a commandant from the other group?

39:30 Yes. But with very straight instructions from the Communists. We were talking to each other. He was very famous. When he was moving his pistol like that,

40:00 like a cowboy, he shoot and the bullet come to you. Somebody was just pinching something, grappa or something like that. He would get furious and shoot them.

So he was known as a dangerous man?

Yes. One day in Villa Santina, some of our group

40:30 went into this factory and they took away from this factory some supplies, some food which belonged to the workers in the factory. And they pinched some of that. Milko came to me with a car and said, "You people have been taking our food.

41:00 That food was arranged for us." Suddenly he went down; he wanted to take me down to the factory. And on the way he stopped. There was nobody in the street, nothing, he stopped. He took his gun out and he started to say, "You doing wrong things." He cocked the pistol. I remembered somebody tell me that when he start to, I should run like a good boy, because he had bullets inside. I look him in the eye, I convinced him not to do it. In fact he let me go. He said, "Next time don't do it because you will be in trouble."

Tape 4

00:30 **Rinaldo as I said, I would like to ask you things about your time with Tito's Communist partisans. How organised do you think they were? How formal was their structure?**

Well, the Yugoslavs were under Tito and Tito had an army.

01:00 And he declared war on Italy. They were quite well organised. When the fact, when they became partisans they maintained the same formation, the same technical organisation as they would have been fighting as soldiers as a regular army.

01:30 The only thing was they had to be out of the way, they had to be underground somehow and they were very capable for that.

So the ones you fought with, they had quite a strong structure?

Strong structure and very capable. They used to know very well their own situation.

02:00 Used to know very well the terrain particularly there, that is very important for a partisan, to know their situation. They were very well organised. We, more or less, Italians were just starting. We were more and more disorganised some how, in that fact, as an army. But slowly, slowly we were able to become more competent in time.

02:30 **And with the Yugoslavs, was it only men who were fighting as partisans?**

No, there were women too. In fact this Milko that I mentioned before, he had a girlfriend who was a partisan. And Milko in the end, as I said, he was a very hard sort of a fellow; he was executed by his own men in the end. He was really a rebel and a bandit with his girlfriend.

03:00 **The Yugoslavian partisans also had a reputation for having no mercy against the Germans. Did you see that?**

Yes as fact. Not only against Germans but against anyone. I mean it was war. As I mentioned before, just

to pinch a bottle of grappa, which is an alcoholic drink in Italy, to prepare yourself from the cold, you would have gone with Milko. No mercy. Anyway he had his lesson in the end.

03:30 **And when you were with the Yugoslavian partisans what sort of operations did you do against the Germans?**

I spent very little time there because I found out very quickly, well they used to call us, when the Germans used to come up they would bombard first the town and then they would come up in force.

04:00 And the Italians, as they was before, we, the groups, were sent to be in front with very little ammunition, very little army. We had only fusiels. They weren't granting us, I don't know for which reason, army equipment which we could use against them at a certain moment,

04:30 because we had a running war against them not far before.

So they were not giving you the best weapons?

No. We used to have in the end, because we were [UNCLEAR] themselves and because the British. In fact this is an important thing. It ended up that the British forces used to help us.

05:00 The British only. All our commanders were British, but the Yugoslavs were with the Americans who dropped things and helped them in the war. That is a fact.

When you were staying in the monastery as a teacher and hiding for that period. Was there a big risk that someone in the village would betray you?

05:30 Yes, it was big. In fact we had a spy with us in the middle. I didn't know how but we as liberators of Italy, fighting for liberty, before we could kill anyone we had to have a process, you can't just shoot him like that, while the Communist was free. This fellow wasn't with us, but he was intending to come in with us.

06:00 He was a spy and he was taken, not by me, by somebody else to the higher command. They had a process and he was executed. Myself on another occasion, it was part of the story when I was in this little town, when I started to recruit people, I used to recruit anyone.

06:30 I was needing people. Suddenly two fellows came up. I saw them with my binoculars, come up on the mountain. They said they were from Venice. One was a fellow, the two fellows escaped from a train, jumped out of the train before it arrived at the border of Germany, Austria and they came with us.

07:00 So I took them with me. One was alright but he didn't stay long with us. He went somewhere else. But one stayed with me, with us, in Cludidico [?], in the town. Suddenly a note came to me from the Communist party, the Baldino Communists, came to me, a commandant, "Look that fellow Mario, he's doing something wrong. Either you look after him or we will look after you."

07:30 I asked, what is he doing? He was going to [UNCLEAR], a town, throughout the night. He was going with a pistol to do violence on a woman. He was a criminal. In fact I looked around, I start to get a bit more information and found out more information and

08:00 found out that he was a criminal in a prison and when they took him to Germany he jumped out. He came with us. So in this case I went to him, I had to do something. I said to him, "Look, you have to come with me to my commandant, to my superiors." That would have been on the other side of the mountain.

08:30 In the beginning he was unsure, because we were friends. But I noted that before he did something wrong with my partisans because I used to send them to collect money. We had an office down on the plains, people were willing to help us and give us money, and the other, honest partisan told me that Mario didn't give him all the money.

09:00 He didn't give all he had collected, so I already had suspicion. So when this other matter came up I said we had to do something. I took him. He was armed but I had nothing on me to show him my goodwill, that I was not going to do anything wrong. So he came in the car with me, coming with his pistol. And we went up in the mountains, to go to the other side of the mountains, to the command. I was going to give him to the command because

09:30 at that time they knew what it was all about. So we started to go up in the car and then the car started to go a bit slow. The water was boiling. So we got out and at that moment he starts to think, "Where is he taking me?" and he starts asking me questions. But again, I was able to take him there.

10:00 He was processed and he was executed. Now after the war, suddenly I was at home and my mother called me, "Look there is a lady downstairs, screaming and crying like mad." She came after the war. My mother called me, "Look, this woman is crying,

10:30 she wants to know if Mario the partisan used to be with you, she is mad, ecstatic." I said, "I don't know Mario." But I remembered what happened to him. So I told them, "Take her up to my office." where I had my studio. She came up screaming and crying and she said

- 11:00 "Only you ought to know what has happened to my husband. Only you know, you must tell me what has happened to him." So I make her sit down and I tell her the story of what happened. Clearly. As soon as I tell her that he had been executed she got up and she embraced me. "Oh, finally he die." He must have been really a criminal.
- 11:30 **So there was some justice. Now when you decided to become a commandant, can you explain to us the status of being a commandant and what it means and about having to gather your own men?**
- 12:00 Yes. It's not easy. You have to have some courage and stamina and direction. I was always a sort of leader, somehow in various occasions. After this experience being a commandant of the Battalione Monte Canino. You have to collect, convince the people to come first.
- 12:30 You have to find them and convince them and sometimes you find credible, ready to come. Like I was in the train. I was on a train from Venice. I had been sent to Venice, to a tailor because he was collecting, in that place, in his work. He had been collecting all the messages that the Souk Marie used to come from the south of Italy
- 13:00 to deliver to us. Not by cable but by walking, by manpower. So the Souk Marie used to come by the waters, a fishing boat would collect the orders and what the bosses had said.
- 13:30 **So you were saying that you were going to a tailor in Venice and you were on a train?**
- Yes. I was going to collect messages from the army. And Souk Marie would deliver these orders and messages to this tailor. I returned back up to the mountain
- 14:00 by train and I found a lady, a young lady on the train.. She was looking at me and then she started to talk with me. And I find she was against Fascists and I said to her, "Why don't you join us as a partisan?" So she went away. I gave her the address and suddenly after a couple of days I looked down the mountain and she
- 14:30 had mentioned the day that maybe she would arrive, I look down the mountain and there she is. This lady was coming out from the back. Down there was a bus station. So I went down to see her. We needed ladies to look after the wounded people sometimes. She told me she was a, infermier, a nurse.
- 15:00 So I went down and saw her and unfortunately she was wearing sandals on the rocks. But she was able to come up anyhow, in bare foot more or less. We looked after and she became a very good nurse.
- So when you form your own band it's a like a private army?**
- Yes, in the beginning yes.
- 15:30 But then when I find the group, the proper organisation, it was then a different story. We had to arrange for ourselves to provide the food, to grow it. But this lasted only for a couple of months, then I joined the proper, I was one of the first to be in the mountains.
- So at the end of that first couple of months, how many recruits did you have?**
- 16:00 It would have been about twenty or fifteen. Altogether fifteen formed a company as we called it. Three companies formed a battalion. And so we make a brigade and then a division. We called a division asopa.
- 16:30 It was called asopa because during the war in that area is a town and a fortification there that resisted the Germans for a long time and won. They were surrounded.
- Now, the men and women who were with you, would you live together in the mountains, or did they live in their own houses?**
- No we were separate.
- 17:00 No, they couldn't live with us. Only helpers of that kind, no old women could live with us the women. Our orders were also that we couldn't talk with the women. A partisan never talked to a woman because it was a good opportunity for spying.
- So the partisan men did you live in a camp or did you live in your own houses and only come together when you had an operation?**
- 17:30 No, we were living in a camp. In fact we were living in Pradalava for along time and Dremonte. We had an area which was quite flat in the middle of the mountains, in the valley and we had an opportunity to make a small airport there where a Lancaster could land.
- So you had a couple of months when it was just more or less you bringing together the men?**
- 18:00 **And then how did you come to be in contact with the more formal organisation?**
- I knew because we used to move all the time. We weren't stationary all the time, you had to move around. And you start to find another fellow, "Where do you come from." "In the middle of the

mountain." "Oh, come with me, I belong to this part here, I belong to this organisation."

18:30 And when I found out that there was this group of partisans there, already organised and fighting for the proper cause. I went to them and presented myself. "Here I am." We join, and I became part of their organisation. In fact I became, because I was the first, the Battalion Monte Canino Divisionali. In the beginning we used to wear the green scarf.

19:00 The three colours, the flag. It was because we were the commandos protecting the commandants of the division. You understand what I mean? My group.

You were like a bodyguard?

A bodyguard. And then we joined, in the middle of the war we agreed to become all the same. The scarf was a very important emblem because

19:30 it was a way to be recognised whether you were victory baldino or not..

So the organisation that you then joined with in contact with Britain and the Allies?

Yes. And they parachuted with us. He came down, up on the mountains, we collected him and there he had the equipment for air contact.

20:00 The radios?

Yes. Everything that was needed. And then others came, about twenty of them between us in all the area. Because suddenly an area like five thousand kilometres square would be all under our control in the mountains, in Cardia. They were all under our control. No Germans

20:30 And the Germans had to come up there to fight. We liberated that area up there.

So you said you were being dropped weapons, sten guns, bren guns?

Ammunition, food. Yes, we were living like that. Explosive yes. There was a special explosive they sent to us.

21:00 Eight oh eighty. In fact my battalion in the end became a sabotage battalion. Eight oh eighty. And we had an officer, Pat, who used to teach us how to use it. To train us for every occasion. We would be able to...suddenly; we were near a passage of trains,

21:30 a train line connected to Germany and the only one allowed at the time. The mountains were very close you see and there was a bridge. And they ordered us to blow up this bridge. My battalion got the order. In charge was a British commander by the name of Pat. We went there for two weeks in figure out how to get to it.

22:00 How to blow it up. We had already blown up ourselves without advice from the English, a pass del amore it's called, it was blown up also in the First World War. It was the only connection by road. I can stop a minute here and tell you how we did that.

22:30 Every bridge or every tunnel is provided for in case of a war, to where to put the munitions to blow it up. These were four holes down about 40 metres below in the rock where you can deposit the explosive

23:00 and use it to blow it. So ok. The orders came from the Communists this time, from nono compus, from Tito. To blow up this area, this mountain, from the road. It came to me direct. My commandant gave it to me, "You have to do this." and they provided kegs of

23:30 explosive. They went into a mine to get away from the Germans. Sometimes you have to go in and fight until you get them. So they came with these four kegs. We went in with six partisans. We left one partisan here and then two, three

24:00 and four. Then you go down with him in this hole and put this keg of explosives. Then you put a Mitchell, in those days was no, we had only at that time, a Mitchell, it was not a beng cell [?] which we used to use very often. It was just a primer cord, it got shorter and shorter and shorter. So we go back and do the other one,

24:30 with another partisan go down. In the fourth, we went down and my partisan said he would give fire now, the Mitchell, with the match.

25:00 He used to keep the matches in his wallet. Suddenly he did it and we ran away. Suddenly we were out and running away because we knew it would blow up, all the rock, and he had forgotten his wallet. He went back and we yelled,

25:30 "No, no what are you doing! No. No." But he went. He came back. He got out and we were about half a kilometre away and half of the mountain came down, this was the road. Now the other occasion was this bridge because of the railway. The aeroplanes were not able to get it so

26:00 the order came to us to blow it up. But there were the Germans, there were guards of Germans. In the

big pillars, about 30 or 40 or 50 metres high is a hole where we had to put the explosive in again. So we took this eight oh eight, it was special from the British.

- 26:30 We had to take it down and blow it up. We used to use it for the transmission lines too. We would mix it together and it would give us a lot of headaches when we used to do this operation. We would touch it to the steel, in the transmission line. And then with a pencil, was according to conditions, an hour, half an hour or three hours you would squeeze it and a chemical sort of thing
- 27:00 used to corrode the line and blow it up. In this case we would take it down there. But there were the Germans, so the idea was to illuminate the Germans, go down with a bag of this eight oh eight over your shoulder of course the chance of it coming away were minimal. Because you blow it up you see and maybe you have to go with it.
- 27:30 Now. All the trees were cut around there, around the bridge so we could see the movement. There were only about six or seven guards there all the time. And we had the instructions from Captain Pat how to do the operation. Suddenly, during this period a fellow came to me.
- 28:00 They were all volunteers. When I used to say we had to do something, everybody wanted to go. Occasionally we needed only about six and still everybody wanted to go, and I selected the best ones. Suddenly one of the six said, "Otto, I'm a father of three kids. I don't want to go."
- 28:30 The chance of coming back alive were very minimal. I said, "I will take your place." But Captain Pat said, "You are too good, you must stay alive." Anyhow, the thing was we were waiting and it wasn't done because of a spy. There must have been a spy between us, the partisans. Just a day before there were
- 29:00 200, maybe 500 Germans there on the bridge, so we couldn't do that. So the bridge was never destroyed, instead we destroyed a line with the eight oh eight. And me once again the same, to go along the river
- 29:30 because usually you select the transmission line. And at the river there were these big pillars in concrete. The idea was to go up with a partisan. Take four pillars for instance. Take one partisan go up, quickly and take off the pin. Do it with a pin. And in that case the pin didn't come out.
- 30:00 Again, somebody must have done something, somehow. So the pin wouldn't come out so me, with a tooth I pulled it out. One, second and third and the fourth. And then we'd go up in the hill and then suddenly, boom! In the middle of the Germans. They were along the river with their lights.
- 30:30 Searchlights. When the light was coming we'd stop. So we used to do this type of things.

And you were trained in these demolitions by the English commandos?

Yes. How to use it, how much to use and what to do and what not to do. Yes.

It sounds like the Englishman was a good soldier.

Oh yes, very professional.

- 31:00 A lot of times there were always problems. In the case of the transmission lines, again we were ordered to do that because we were not able to blow up the bridge because it would have cut off their electricity. The electricity near Trieste was supply the train. There was another occasion too.
- 31:30 When I started the partisans, there was a coal mine. So I joined him. I had the documents with me. They were forged documents, so I could get in, I was a worker there, and I used to take this eight oh eight explosive and put it in the coal. So when the coal used to go in the trains or to Germany for the factories, it would blow up.
- 32:00 That was very risky.

How did it work with local support for your battalion? What relationship did you have with the local people?

All the area was willing and supportive. In the area that was liberated, they were with us. They were

- 32:30 telling us if anyone spy. Because very often used to be coming in spies to prepare for the aerostrelomen [?] we called it. for the Germans or Fascists to come up and surround us. Which had been done. It's been done in a big battle in Bucharest. Once again I was in command there myself when my partisans as I mentioned before you couldn't take the grenade off,
- 33:00 he would just blow up with it.

You also mentioned before that local people would give you money?

Yes money, goods and maybe farina, maize and things. Sometimes the women would go down by foot to collect them carry it on their backs. In containers on their back in the mountains.

- 33:30 Very competitive. Very compete, because they wanted away the Germans. This area where we were we had never been friends with the Germans, because we were invaded and we didn't like it. So everybody

was cooperating during occasions like this that kept arising

This area where you were operating, you said it was liberated, but there were obviously Germans still there?

34:00 Oh yes. The area we had was about five thousand square kilometres and it would have been free. Unless they come up.

If you or any of your men had been captured by the Germans, what would have happened to you?

I know what would have happened to me. I had five thousand lira

34:30 in my hat and they would have shot me straight away. No chance.

So you had a price on your head?

Yes, they were looking for Otto of course. But not only me. All the partisans too. While they were taking them, prisoners were very few. But they would put you in ordinary prison and then they would take you to Germany.

35:00 You went into a concentration. When you were in situations like up in the mountains, you used to find away to eliminate you before hand.

How could you trust anyone in this environment?

That was another thing. You had to be sure and take risks.

35:30 We weren't concerned about it. We knew about it. We had a system. For instance in my battalion there was a few who had been an old carabinieri, old policeman with us. He was checking people to make sure they weren't spies. He was worried about spies. Because they were organising all the Germans to come up, the Fascists

36:00 **So with five thousand lira on your head it must have been a big temptation for some people?**

Oh yes. But I was able to survive.

How would you deal with spies?

We, well in these few occasions I know what happened in my battalion is that if we thought

36:30 anyone was a spy they were executed and the other fellow, I took it as being executed too. But it was not very often. Sometimes when we used to get Germans we used to take them as prisoners only the difficult was where to put them. In the forces,

37:00 somebody adapted for the executions only.

So there was an official executioner?

Yes. They use to take them in the cemetery usually, or outside the cemetery. The Fascists used to do the same thing. I was asleep at my home one night and my brother was

37:30 asleep and suddenly at six o'clock we heard, bang, bang, bang, bang and my brother who was younger than me says, there was somebody down there and they were making practice. "No," I said, "look this is not practice; I think somebody is being killed now. . And there were about eight people there and there's a monument now, a plaque where these people were shot.

38:00 The same thing and maybe worst than that. The Germans used to torture us very badly to find out where we were and who we were.

So you were aware that German prisoners were shot by the partisans?

Oh yes.

But there was no mercy on either side?

Oh no. We knew because they would tell us, plus they used to do it to us.

38:30 **How much tension was there between the different Italian, political, partisan groups?**

The tension was not too bad, apart from some areas. Some areas

39:00 like where I was before near Trieste, was a great danger because there my friends, Italians, Yugoslav when they were under my command, they shot the commandant, they shot forty of them down in the forest, and they were Italians,

39:30 because they thought that we were supporters of Fascists, and the Communists And the political and practical part was because they were Communists; Tito wanted to come up to the Italian mento about 80 kilometres inside Italy, to take in my town

So sometimes Italians were killing Italians?

Unfortunately yes in that case, yes.

40:00 **What about the Italian fascist groups, did you have any contact against them?**

Oh yes. All the time. Mixed with the Germans. In fact we were looking for them. We used to take prisoners. A lot of people used to travel on

40:30 trucks. Goods trucks. Fascists used to take the truck and make prisoners of the people up on the top you see.

Tape 5

00:33 **Rinaldo at the end of the last tape you were about to tell the story of, Ovaru was it?**

Yes.

Is it the right time to tell that story.

I think so. It's part of the partisan life.

Ok, so take us through that story. When did it happen?

01:00 This happened at the end of the war. April 1945.

Maybe we should talk about some other things before we get to that. Alright, I wanted to talk a bit more about how you

01:30 **communicated with the British commandoes who would come and spend time with you. Did they speak Italian to you?**

Yes, some a little bit of Italian. I was not speaking much English at all.

So was there ever any problems communicating with the British?

Not really. No.

02:00 They were speaking a bit of Italian and Italians as you know move themselves in a way with their hands. They can express themselves. No, it was no problem.

So what were some of the things that they taught you? Obviously as you explained, they showed you how to deal with some of the explosives, what other things did they train you in?

How to use the bren [gun] and to practice with that

02:30 .And to use the mortar. But the mortar came only at the last. At one stage the containers were about, a foot, 30 centimetres around and all the arms and goods were vertical.

03:00 Sometimes they went astray on the parachute. They would go astray with the wind. And you could see them around because they were different colours. You would see them around the mountains. We would have to go and pick them up. They would be on the trees sometimes and the rocks and the worry was that the Germans would detect them.

03:30 Sometimes the Germans and the Cossack, we will talk about the Cossacks later on. They were able to detect our signals. And sometimes they would drop them in the wrong territory. Or sometimes they would come up and fight and take the goods that were sent to us.

04:00 **So sometimes you missed out on getting what was dropped?**

Yes of course. Sometimes they would send money. In fact I have some money myself, sterling pounds, but they are forged. I brought them to Australia. My father gave them to me. I tried to change them in Australia but they were not real. Anyhow...

04:30 **So you mentioned the way you used to signal the aeroplanes. So obviously you've explained that initially you did it with fires and then you moved on to a different system. How did you signal to the aeroplanes later?**

We would make an X, dots and lines. It was according to the directions from the operator on the other side. It was not the same all the time.

05:00 **How would you make an X?**

By telegraph.

So you'd find out what the latest code was and then you'd have to make a shape on the ground. What would you use to make that shape?

Material which I carried with me. There were strips, different colours and the shapes. That was detected from the...

05:30 **So they were strips of material...**

Canvas especially made of different colours.

And how long would those pieces be?

Be about three or four metres long and about forty centimetre width. We would regulate them according to the received message by telegraph.

06:00 **So they would change those shapes each time, so they could be sure they weren't being tricked?**

Yes. It was good too. The fires too. But the fires we had different positions. Some would be squares. Have a point in the square or a triangle. It was more difficult. It was not as easy as the canvas because you had to find the wood,

06:30 make a fire. If it was raining, this and that. Difficult.

How often would you have a British commando parachute down to you? Was it a regular thing?

Not really. We would have had about six or seven, to us, in that area. But always British. Never American.

07:00 When we were in a position on the border of Germany, of Austria, the Liberators used to go up and bombard Munich, Cologne and those places up there. They used to come back and they would fly over our mountains. They used to take the opportunity to parachute

07:30 if the aeroplanes were shot, to parachute over us where we were. They knew the position. They would use the signs.

So they knew it was a safe place to parachute into?

Yes and there were many Americans that I saved in that way.

So you would often go to their rescue?

Yes we would pick them up. They used to come down in that area because it was known by them. It was a valley that was safe.

08:00 So they used to parachute there. Unfortunately you would see them wounded, or fired, or burnt and we used to look after them as possible as it was. But the healthy ones and a lot were Australians and New Zealanders; we used to take them back into the mountains back to Yugoslavia.

08:30 We used to go down by foot. All the way down through Albania and across to Italy.

So you would encounter Australians would you?

Oh yes. In fact at one stage there was a camp of concentration at Udine and we used to go there to open the gates, but they were frightened to go away.

09:00 They were not so sure, but some came and I myself personally took some New Zealanders over the mountains and gave them to the Yugoslavs on the other side. And they continued on their own.

So the Australians and New Zealanders that you encountered, were they all POWs or were they some of the pilots?

There were pilots who had baled out

09:30 and some prisoners, people who were escaping from camps. But we would look after them. They were very brave people too. It was not easy in their situation.

What gave you an impression of what Australians were like? Or did they just seem like Americans to you?

They used to say they were Australians or New Zealanders and we were not very interested in the conditions, what Australia was

10:00 or New Zealand were like. We were not talking. We were just talking about how to save our lives at that moment. There was not much comment. But some Americans would speak Italian, being American, there were Italians in America and so it was easy to communicate. But with the others it was difficult. But we had of course the British commandoes with us.

10:30 They would tell us what to do and where to take them. We were in continuous contact with the south. Telegraph, the Souk Marie and on the waters in Venice and then the fish boats would pick up the messages. And I went two or three times to collect the messages myself

11:00 at that point, at that tailor's. If they find you there they would know I was a partisan and I would have been dead.

So you would be involved in sabotage missions?

Yes mainly sabotage and we were there as I said before as the particular guard for the division.

11:30 And as I said we had the Italian flag as our scarf. The colours of the Italian flag.

Did you find yourself in many difficult situations where you were often under fire? Was it a frequent thing for you to have your life threatened on a regular basis?

Not very

12:00 regular but it was some occasions, yes.

What were some of the more dangerous situations?

Well dangerous. It was always dangerous. We knew before any of them coming up. We used to know they were detected coming towards us. It wasn't just bang, we knew.

12:30 **So you would be warned that your position had been picked up?**

Yes. About these dangerous moments. It was so much so that I used to know the distance of a bullet. When the bullet goes past it whistles, no worry. But when the bullet makes the noise, it's not very far away. And they're aiming at you.

13:00 So that was a moment that I had in Polaro. Suddenly we found ourselves, we had to take off from a bunker, the ammunition, we find the bunker and we take all the ammunition that the Germans left there and the Fascists. And suddenly the other side was a hill and there were the Cossacks and

13:30 Germans waiting for us to take all of their ammunition. They started to aim at the ammunition which was outside the bunker. Suddenly, I told my men, "Take it away! Throw it away down the other side of the hill!" It's easy to push these boxes down. So we started to do that, to push them away and the bullets were coming. They were aiming at

14:00 me at the time because I was on the top. Suddenly I saw a fellow, just a bit further down and he was standing there with his hands in his pocket and I point the gun, "You do it, you work, you help." He was still there. He was waiting for the bullets. So

14:30 I pushed him down. He was stunned. Shock. Anyone else would have gone. And that was a moment.

Did you ever get hit?

Yes I did and I will tell you that story. When I went into the bush,

15:00 to make friendly with the Cossacks. They liked to make friendly with us. They wanted to know what kind of people we were. And suddenly when we were nearby they threw me a grenade. I had my clothes torn here. Just as well it was an Italian grenade; it makes a lot of noise and not much effect.

15:30 Just as well. So I was strapped up here and then I was looked after.

So was that the first time you attempted to make contact with the Cossacks.

No, no. With the Cossacks I was always in contact. The story of the Cossacks is quiet evident in our area. The Cossacks had come from Ukrainia and they were against Hitler.

16:00 They were loyal to the Tsar. When Hitler moved in to Ukrainia they caught them and were taken prisoner. They took them to a Germany concentration camp. Then they came to agreement that if they fight for us, you will get this part of Italy

16:30 as Ukrainia. New Kraine.. New Cossackia it was going to be called. That was where I was. There were more than 10,000 Cossacks fighting against us in that area. And I was always in the middle dealing with them. It was amazing. The only time I went on a horse.

17:00 Not like you Australians, you use them very easy. But my only time was a Cossack horse. Thank God, because we used to get them prisoners, we used to get the horses. The horse was so hungry and so skinny he could barely move. When we used to get the Cossack prisoners they would have onions in their pockets to eat like apples. Poor people, fantastic people in peace but terrible in war, I can tell you.

17:30 They used to have caravans, like you see in the films. With a family and kids, with everybody like that, moving around, and I've been through that type of fighting against them unfortunately. And that will come at the end of my talk here because I would like to leave that to the end of this story.

No problem. So why do you say they were terrible in war, the Cossacks?

- 18:00 Well, the population there were quite friendly somehow. They were human sort of people. The Russians, even today, they are human people as are anybody. They are not really warriors and things like that at all. But when you are attacking them,
- 18:30 somehow the personality used to change. They would slaughter everything. They would take the sheep from houses and put them on their back and slaughter them on their back for instance. They would take a person the same way. He would go mad. Maybe I don't know. Maybe they were drinking the vodka. But there was something. They were really, really fighting. They would fight in a bad way.

So they were a formidable enemy?

- 19:00 Oh yes. They had a very bad [UNCLEAR] of Italy. I was in that area when I came up to Ovaro. There were about six thousand Cossacks who came up from [UNCLEAR] and retreated and then they had to come to Passalmanreese [?], in Cardina to go to Austria.
- 19:30 The Germans promised them that after the war they could have this land, but in the end they were losing. And the only escape was to go across the interior and go up. And the Germans up at the top of the hills there, on the top of the mountains with machine guns, shot them down. It was a disaster. Families, people and everything.
- 20:00 Those who were able to go to the other side, Tito wanted them said, "I want them." and the British and the Russians. Tito got only the soldiers, but the officers went to Russia and that was the end of them. You understand. Stalin brought them there and killed them. It was a terrible end for these poor people.
- 20:30 **When you started fighting against the Cossacks, did you find they were all loyal to Germany?**
- Yes at the end, but the Cossacks were quite loyal. There were Armenian soldiers mixed up with them. And the Armenians were not loyal to the Germans.
- 21:00 The Cossacks yes more. And the Georgians were not loyal because some of them came with me. And the Armenians saved my life. I will tell you later that story.

So some of your sabotage missions, would they involve you pretending to be German?

- 21:30 **What, a German uniform? I tell you a story now. Not German but Fascist. At one stage we arranged to hide a group of my partisans on the flats. Not on the mountain. Their commission was, their duties to collect guns and things,**
- 22:00 **steal them from Fascists, Germans and collect them and to go there in that spot in Zoppo, the town, and to collect them now and then and take them up onto the mountains. We used to have the parachute ones but we also had our own supplies too. At one stage,**
- 22:30 **from Volaro which is about 30 kilometres or 40 to that place, maybe more, fifty say, in the night I walked with a group of my fellows, partisans. The idea was to go down passed the river and go to the other side and pick up this armoury.**
- 23:00 **We walked all night. I gave a command. The last command of Osoppo, my green scarf people. They gave me the orders what to do. And I had to change myself in the uniform because I was going to be inside with them in the middle of the Germans and the Fascists. So I had to dress myself up in a Fascist uniform.**
- 23:30 **So I told my men, about six or seven men who were there with me, I told them to go down and wait for me down there on the edge of the river. A big river. So I dressed up and I started to go down. Suddenly after half an hour of walking down or running down more or less this mountain, with the rocks.**
- 24:00 **I find a Garabaldini. The red star fellows. They look at me and they find me, they grab me and they're happy. There is festivity. I am a Fascist. I had no documents only the uniform. So they take me to their command which wasn't far away and the fellow in charge was a Sicilian.**
- 24:30 **He must have been a very bad man. He looked at me; all these other partisans around. He looked at me. And they started to interrogate me but not many answers were coming from me. I tried to explain to them. I have an order to go. I am not Fascist. I am a partisan.**
- 25:00 **Suddenly this fellow, this commandant, I don't know the name, decided to shoot me. So usually what they did was to give you a pick and a shovel so you could dig your own grave. He gave me a pick and shovel and start to dig, but me again with my strength**
- 25:30 **I continue to say, "If you kill me it's not important to me to die but what will happen with my partisans, they will come down and fight with you, it will be a disaster. Look it's true I'm not a Fascist. Take me up there; take me up to my commandant." And calmly, calmly I convinced him.**

- 26:00 So he locked me in a pig's stable inside, and suddenly a partisan of theirs came and offered me a plate of soup. I couldn't eat of course. I was so upset and in a bad state. Suddenly two fellows came and they agreed to take me up to the commandant. So two fellows came. I knew that mountain very well
- 26:30 because I used to go up and down all day. I knew very well all the tracks and everything. When I was away about a kilometre or two away from the scene where I was, I saw that straight away they were pushing me towards another track where there were more trees. So suddenly
- 27:00 I turned myself like that because both of them had a gun like that. I turned back, I said, "If you're going to shoot me, shoot me now!" And they got a bit frightened. They didn't want to make all that long trek up, maybe an hour, an hour and half, so they were going to get me on the spot there. So they got frightened and they took me up there. So they realised,
- 27:30 from the commandant that I was a partisan it was plain in writing. So they released me. So I came down again on my own. I left them there and down like hell, I arrived down there with my men because they were waiting for me to go into action. And the others ones were in the middle of the Germans, in Osoppo, waiting for me to arrive, to pick up the things. "What's all this delay?"
- 28:00 and the thing started to lose tempo. So I arrived down there and told now we can't do anything because it was about two hours lost in this matter. We can't do the action, because we can't go in. So I said I would go. I will go across to advise the other people that the thing is off, that the action is off. I had to go across for about 700 metres
- 28:30 across the river, because the gravel rivers that we have in Italy, from the Alps are wide. And there was on the river, an airport on the other side. A military, German airport. I had to go across and there was one of these searching lights, all the time going. But he was going quite slow. So I started to move in. My men stayed there.
- 29:00 I started to move in and went through on the gravel. The water was not very deep, but very current. And every time the search light was coming, I used to lay down like a log, on the water. I arrived at the airport.
- 29:30 I had to go across the fence into the airport. I crossed that one, I went underneath. And I arrived on the street on the other side that takes up to Osoppo. Again. The airport was very well guarded and I go up to go towards Osoppo, never walking on the white street because it was guarded, I always walked on the ridge off the street.
- 30:00 Suddenly after half a kilometre, I was far away from the airport, safe. I find myself again a fellow with a cigarette. I saw the light of the cigarette and that save myself. I had to turn around like that and I arrived back to my people, just in time. Otherwise we would have been all caught.
- 30:30 So we took all the armoury away. So that is a bit of a story this one.
- And when you crossed the airstrip you didn't see anyone?**
- No I was towards the end. The airstrip was at the end, with the airport in the middle. But I had to go underneath.
- 31:00 I had never been through before but I knew, we had detected that it was easy to go underneath there. The electricity was only at the top but not on the fence. So the people wouldn't touch it. So we were informed that this was possible and I did it.
- You mentioned that one of the other things you used to do was**
- 31:30 **to go to POW camps and open the gate and try and help people escape?**
- Oh yes.
- How often would you do that?**
- That has been done once, not by ourselves by my friends. Part of my department. It was done once. In Porodarmo only one time and they didn't come out but after
- 32:00 some escaped themselves and we find them in the mountains because they didn't know where to go. They were worried that if they went out they wouldn't know what they find. Find Germans, they would put us back or maybe they shoot us It was silly to open the gates. Because it was too dangerous. Unless they would have been guided.
- 32:30 **Were there any other types of missions that you helped in, where you had a different goal or a different type of thing to do? Apart from the sabotage jobs?**
- No the sabotage, all the important jobs, important actions that had to be done, we did ourselves. Myself and my men, Monte Canino. All

33:00 the orders were coming usually from Yugoslavia. Nonus colpus. The people we were in contact with. They used to give us orders what to do.

So you would get orders from both organisations?

Yes and from the Garibaldi Division in Italy. If it was something important, like the mountain that had to be blown up.

33:30 **How many men did you have under you at that stage?**

Maybe eighty or ninety. I could have reached a hundred; they were tough days during the war. But I ended up at the end of the war, I had only about two or three hundred and everybody wanted to join then when it was finished.

34:00 And the dead were about eighty. We had a lot of Monte Canino on the list, on the statistics there are about twenty five of them gone.

So within your group, how did you have it organised? Did you have officers below you?

Yes.

So what was the whole

34:30 **structure of your group? How did it go down from you at the top to people at the bottom?**

There was myself and I had a vice commandant. Then I had the suci stenter, the provider. The fellow who provided the food come after. And then I used to have the company. Commandant of company. Three companies of about thirty men each usually.

35:00 But we had half of that, fifteen each, fifteen men. They were very small groups so they could move easier. But like in the normal army way more or less only in a reduced system because when you have a big company, say thirty, it is very difficult to manoeuvre. But fifteen was much better for that commandant of that company.

35:30 **And did you appoint those people to those positions?**

Yes I used to appoint. It was my job to do that. I was selecting them but they were all brave people, no question. And they've been brave down here too. They've all done very well, all of them.

Did you become particularly close with

36:00 **some of those men?**

Oh yes. I was in Italy the other day and they put me on television. The local television. It was very emotional. Everybody wanted me to talk to them. They still call me Otto there. "Otto come to see us. Here's my telephone number I want to see you."

36:30 I had thirty or forty calls after the television. Once they knew that I was there. It was because I did the right thing. I maintained my promise. When I used to go back to Italy. It is fifty years that I have been in Australia...twenty or thirty years ago, I used to go up in the mountains and they would play the bells when Otto arrived there. The town wanted to meet me.

37:00 That was a great sensation because I did the right thing. And I maintained my promise. I maintained the promise that I said at the time for everybody.

Did you lose many good friends while you were fighting?

Oh yes. Some in Germany as prisoners. Fogolo Dat [?], he was a very close friend, he was a commandant of a company.

37:30 He tried to take all their grenades and instead blew up. And lately, they are all of a certain age and now when I go back to Italy it's a bit of a desperation for me because I find myself with less and less friends. They are all going to heaven.

You obviously had a lot of responsibility

38:00 **with that group. Do you think you were a natural leader? Did it come easy to you?**

Yes. I always used my sense. I never did silly things to put my men in danger. Never. Those deaths would have been accidental, like in this case or in camp of concentration

38:30 or in case of Ovaro, of which we will talk a bit later. Being trapped, victims, all of us there, in the middle of the Cossacks and the Germans. When you're ready I will talk about that point.

It sounds like your men were very loyal to you.

39:00 Oh yes, no question. Not only to me but loyal to the country. I was the commandant. I was a man like I've been here in Australia with my work. A leader but a worker too. I use to learn first myself how to do

things and then teach it to my men. That is important thing. I was a leader there in the war

39:30 and I would try myself first to get out of trouble, and then I would tell my men how to do it, when I knew. Because my work here, I used to mix the mortar. I used to take the cement. Architect! Me! From the University of Venice! University most recognised in the world, but it was not valued, my degree, here But I used to go myself when I realised that things were difficult.

40:00 If I'm to start a new life. I had to think about. I had to be like an Italian you see. These people aren't intelligent enough and we have to change that. You never change them it was better that I joined them which I did. So in the beginning I had a truck instead of a car. So I would take the cement to my men. Be the labourer to my workers.

How many different commandants were working with

40:30 **their own battalions in your area?**

About six in all that area. At the beginning, six, in the rough time, in the war. In the end they were like mushrooms. Everybody was a commandant. Everybody wanted to be. I was at the beginning, not at the end.

Tape 6

00:36 **You mentioned once before in a tape, about some Italian villagers being executed by the Germans when you were sleeping in the bedroom with your brother, and you heard some people being shot. Were there a lot of reprisals against the villagers that the Germans did against the peasants?**

01:00 Oh yes. They burnt completely the towns, villages, killed people. But in this case they were prisoners and they were executed.

But sometimes people in the villages were punished because they supported you and the other partisans?

Yes, because of us they were punished.

01:30 Because we were partisans in the family, or we were partisans acting and the Germans used to punish them by burning the houses and killing the people sometimes.

How did that make you feel? That people were dying because of you?

That is a part of war. They used to go into the towns

02:00 if a German had been shot, a special commandant or somebody, straight away they would act in a different way, and in a very ugly way. No compassion. That was how the war was in those days. And we were not soldiers, we were bandits, we were traitors, without law. We used to call it, out of law. So no deal. No respect

02:30 No courts, nothing.

No Geneva Convention?

No Geneva Convention, nothing. This was the times.

03:00 I don't know what is happening unfortunately now.

Did your parents ever have problems because of you?

No. My sister was part of this too, and my cousin. I used to collect arms. My cousin was a jordano-pevori. He was a director of a film, cinema theatre.

03:30 He used to collect the arms, pozieles and pistols and things and take them on the roof of the cinema and I used to go there through the night and with him we used to tie around the pushbike in bags, the pozieles and take them away. We are thinking that maybe

04:00 a German would just stop us and ask, "What is inside there?". We had that sort of stupidity. It was enthusiasm. It was a war and we had to win it. There are moments in your life that you're not interested in, so long as you achieve the objective. In fact it was a fact that you would get up sometimes in the morning and somebody was missing or

04:30 he was dead down there. But if it would happen now at my age it would be a different story because my brain is [UNCLEAR] when you're young, nineteen or twenty years of age you are immortal.

So nobody discovered that you were a commandant

05:00 **and punished your parents. The pro Fascists didn't punish your parents?**

No. It could be that somebody, the Fascists would have known. They would have been aware somehow. But they kept it for themselves. That was happening, that's what used to happen. In fact across the road of my house were two fellows who were

05:30 Fascists living. And they suspected that I was something in the mountains. And they never searched. There was that sort of understanding. If they had wanted to find me they would have. They would have followed me and found me many times. So even the Fascists, not a clue, if he had been German they would have gone straight with no pardon.

06:00 **So sometimes it was easier to survive by not telling what you knew and just keeping quiet?**

Yes. And maybe sometimes because they were worried too.

Nobody trusted anybody.

No.

06:30 **The area you controlled in the mountains, you said that if the Germans were going to come up you were warned ahead. So what would you do if you knew the Germans were coming?**

Sometimes if the force was great, like hundreds and thousands, you just run away. In fact once we moved away together from Tramonti to the other side of the mountain.

07:00 I was in charge of the operation. I had myself, Towle, my vice commandant. All my people, about fifty or sixty of us to cross and we went the other way. The Germans found out where we were in the rocks so they started to bombard the rocks but we were very well protected in the crevices. In the night we continued our trip. I used to have a partisan

07:30 from Trieste. He had very thick glasses. He was always in trouble, he always lies, this and that, and I was always cranky with him because he was not much to do, he was always trouble. Suddenly, when we went to cross this mountain, I was guiding the line.

08:00 I was in the front, because there was snow, you couldn't see where, but I had a feeling of where to go, how to move, myself in the snow. Suddenly this fellow at the end, my vice commandant, told me that he had lost his glasses and went digging in the snow. He couldn't see. The law of the partisan is to shoot him

08:30 because if he gets, he maybe tell where we went, which direction, he tell somebody because he is tortured. So I said, "What to do?" I will not do this, I do not feel to do this I will not do it." I went back and put my vice commandant in front and I told him to put his hand on my shoulder and

09:00 I took him all over to the other side. When we got down to the other side, we were in the middle of the Germans. And suddenly we saw a little light in a stable, a hut. I sent somebody; we had an Englishman, Trian, with us too. Suddenly we saw there were Germans inside about to play cards, they were playing cards inside. They were happy; it was a big valley in the mountains

09:30 so who was to think that partisans might arrive. So what to do? Should we go in and shoot them? Maybe that was a good idea. I thought it over again. No. I spoke with the English fellow. He wanted me to shoot them.

10:00 I said to Rual, the policeman who was in charge. I said, "You do this, you go in and push the door. Open the door and see what happens to their reaction." So he goes there and opens the first door. That was easy but there was another door inside. He pushed it and they wake up. They started to search for their pistols, their

10:30 arms. In the meantime I ordered my men to escape. It was too late for us to shoot. Trian started to shoot back with his sten but it didn't work. So things like that, to take out people like that, I never did it unless they were aiming at me or trying to shoot me.

11:00 **Trian, his sten didn't work. Was it common that the sten guns didn't work?**

Common, yes. They were a trouble machine. A lot of times when you used would jump down from the truck, you had the sten there, they would go off at the bounce. Only keeping like that, they were very fragile. I've never trusted them. The German machine gun was a different story.

11:30 Some partisans died jumping off the truck.

So it was an accidental firing of the sten gun?

Yes. The machine gun used to go off, it's alright when you are vertical but when you are like that...

I don't suppose the sten guns were very good in the mountains with the long distances?

No, the Bren gun was a good one.

12:00 **And would you use captured German weapons?**

Oh yes. We used to do that. But the ammunition was very hard to get. You could get a machine guns but no ammunition.

So you could capture larger machine guns and things like that?

No not really. Just the small ones.

12:30 Not the big stuff. We didn't know how to operate them. Instead we had a lot of grenades with us. The English grenades.

Not the German stick?

Yes we had those too. We used to pinch those. We used to go in places where we find them, they used to escape so we had those too.

13:00 **So how would you get the German equipment?**

We would go into a barrack and start to shoot. Even not killing. They would run away by surprise and then we would go in and grab as many as we could. We would have a little utility full. Like they do even today.

13:30 That was how we got them. All the English Army things would come by parachute for us.

How did you cope with the stress with living up there in the mountains and not knowing who to trust and where the danger was coming from?

It was dangerous just that type of life.

14:00 It was simple. We were never worried. We might be worried to find a German there in front of you any minute, but in that situation you were free. You weren't under pressure. You weren't frightened and when you're not frightened you're not under pressure. We were ready for the job

14:30 **Australians, their idea of Italian soldiers is not a very good one. They feel they are not very brave, not very organised. What's your response to that?**

It's a fact. That's quite clear. Because Italians, they are lucky people and lucky people don't like to fight. They're more benign than the Anglo Saxons or other nations. Like our friends the Japs and so forth.

15:00 Italians they like love, not war. We seem to be disorganised because we want to be disorganised. But if needed we are very well organised. You can see the results in the important things in life. You can see it in art, in music, in clothing. You can see our intelligence there.

15:30 And they're enough intelligent not to want war.

But you were very successful at it?

Because that was my duty at that moment. As I said in my story here. Many times I did not kill. I had the opportunity to. I put at risk my life instead of killing somebody...unless the fellow was really going to kill me.

16:00 **Do you think that the difference in culture between the Germans and the Italians was a factor in your success? The Germans were very organised, very orthodox. They wanted to fight a proper battle with you but you guys were able to say, not today?**

We used to know how to do it. How to escape. We used to know how to contradict that attitude.

16:30 That has been many times even with me. Yes you can say we are not good soldiers or something like that. But you can see in history that we are a great people, in command in battles. Garibaldi and people like that. Even this last war. Even with me.

17:00 People resisted. The Yugoslavs had been shot by their friends. The Yugoslavs were fighting with us. And we were able to save Italy, north of Italy. If you don't mind we go about finishing this now.

I just wanted to ask you

17:30 **something else. Being in the north of Italy, how did the weather and the seasons effect what you did as the year went on? When the winter came would it make a difference in what you were doing?**

Oh yes. It made a lot of difference. It made the difference in fact that when winter was coming it was very hard to fight because of the snow and the cold and the living conditions.

18:00 If you were not healthy enough, thank God I've been always healthy, then you would get pneumonia and things like that. In the winter we used to dissolve, we used to separate. We used to know where to go and stay. Not home. Never home. We'd stay in various places, aunties and so forth, in the mountains if you had some connections. In fact at one stage,

- 18:30 there was a winter coming and I started to feel my back, terrible back pain. Just after, when we went I told you the story of opening the door where these people were playing cards. So we continued and we were without food. It snowed that night and we slept on the other hill on the snow, without food, nothing. And sometimes we would dig under the snow and look for some grass. So
- 19:00 we went. Fortunately we found a hut there and somebody stole their food, people from the town. So that was a victory. We were able to maintain ourselves. But we couldn't cook it. We couldn't put fire on it because the fire would be seen by the Germans down in the town. Anyhow we ate what we could.
- 19:30 There I decided all my partisans were to disperse and meet again at that spot in April or March. And I went down in the town. I had this back condition. So I went, where my father he used to supply wine in a hotel. So
- 20:00 I went in and they had a fire. The woman there used to know me. She welcomed me and took me up into their attic and I waited there sick. The day after I arrived there arrived the Cossacks. Cadets, young Cossacks.
- 20:30 And they stayed in the hotel. Just to eat. They used to go back to their own barracks. But in that hotel was their training for the Cossack cadets the young people. After a few days I started to feel better and I thought I would go down stairs. I went down and the woman said, "This is my son, he is not very well, he is sick," and some excuse.
- 21:00 So they accepted me without many questions because they knew the woman. So we became friends. I was sitting there by the fire and suddenly two of them started with their swords.
- 21:30 They started to play like young people and had a sword fight. So this and that and this and that. They used to sing in the Cossack way. Suddenly one saw me and looked at me and asked, "Will you fight with me?". He throw me a sword. And me, golly, I didn't know what to do.
- 22:00 I had to do it. I was glad to [UNCLEAR] but not to play. But I went there even with my back and I started to wave the sword around. And suddenly I cut a bit of finger and the blood started to come out. Everybody was cranky with me
- 22:30 because I was the winner according to them. And they were not looking at me so well And they wanted me to do something. So they put another one to me so he would cut not only the finger, he would cut me. Thank God that that Cossack was a young fellow from France. He was born in France and he joined the Cossack Army after, to go with Hitler.
- 23:00 He said, "No, leave him alone because it was my fault." He saved my life.
- So in the winter for some months...**
- Yes, for some months we were quiet.
- What about your back?**
- Oh my back came good. I am good now.
- 23:30 That must have been some thing because we used to walk day and night. It's amazing. I was in Italy about three months ago and I used to run like a little goat on these steep rocks. At one stage we were surrounded by Germans with dogs. Three of us, my commandant, we were on this peak.
- 24:00 They didn't dare to come up. The dogs couldn't come up. We were up there waiting.
- So tell us about the adventure at Varo?**
- Varo. That is an occasion of my life. This was about the end of the war. We were about at the beginning of April.
- 24:30 Middle March, beginning of April. The Allies used to come up in Italy and push him back, the Germans.
- So you knew the Germans were on the run?**
- Yes. Up there where we were. We were in the
- 25:00 middle of fighting still. Suddenly the Cossacks, there would have been about 40,000 Cossacks altogether in Italy. There must have been. There were two passes only to go through. One was Tra Visione that went towards Yugoslavia and the other one, Monte cloture to go towards Germany. At that stage I was myself
- 25:30 in Ovaro, in Carnia. My command was up in Grigolato up in the mountains. Some of these Romanians came with us. It was a group of say ten of them. They used to help us. Later on Georgians came with us. With their own arms.
- 26:00 Because you see the war was ending and they were taking refuge somewhere. But the Germans and the Cossacks were looking for me. They knew I was in Grigolato. One of these Romanians went to a meeting

and he knew I was going to be caught because the Germans found out where I was, and the place where I was and the room where I was.

- 26:30 So the Romanian, he had a lump in the back. He came to me and said, "Otto, hide away straight away, they're after you. They will catch you tonight." So I had to go underneath a bridge and I had to stay a week there.
- 27:00 He saved my life. Then suddenly the war was coming closer and closer with battles. Suddenly I get an order to go down towards Ovaro and my commandant of my brigade came
- 27:30 personally to me to tell me what was happening. It was an agreement reached when I was in Comelliance [?], near Ovaro. Because Ovaro was the command of the Cossacks. In Ovaro were the Cossacks and the Cossacks would have given us,
- 28:00 an agreement was reached that the Cossacks were going to give us their army, their armoury We would finish the war friendly. If we mixed with them. They were thinking that we were bandits and they wanted to see us face to face. To see it was true we were not bandits.
- 28:30 So my commandant ordered me to go with my partisans, my group, my battalion into town. So I was the first on the big truck and some other ones were on foot, at the back, coming to the town. Me and the truck stopped in the centre of the town. Suddenly I decided to get out from the truck and walk down and all of us mixing with the Cossacks. They had guns
- 29:00 and grenades and we were with guns and grenades. The general said that if we came in like that he would understand that we were not bandits and we were true. So
- 29:30 we all agreed and signed up and so on. Suddenly I continue on the street. I go to the end. A bit further down, suddenly I see a group of Cossacks there and there were houses on the side. I went down to meet them. As
- 30:00 I was walking with about three or four or five of my partisans on the side, the middle of the street in a line. I started to see them aiming at me. I thought, "Gosh, what's this?" I didn't stop. I continued to walk. If I had stopped they would have shot me. So I continued to walk and I went there. I saw them and they retreated into the houses. I went into the
- 30:30 houses and saluted them. "Harashaw, harashaw [phonetic]. Amigo amigo, friends, here we are." But I was trembling. But slowly, slowly I got my partisans and went back. In the meantime in the centre of the hotel was the general to give the laraiser, to finish war. He was locked up himself in this hotel. All the shutters were closed up
- 31:00 He didn't want to come out. My commandant was there asking, "Come out, come out, you saw us, we are friendly." and so on. He wouldn't come out. After an hour at least, one grenade came from one of the windows of that hotel. Hand grenade. The Cossacks were all on the houses on top and they started to shoot us
- 31:30 in the street. By gosh. Do you understand. Terrible. It was a terrible time. A lot of death. A lot of blood. I was there with my men. My men were around me, we had to cross the river. We went down. Just as well I had one of my commandants with me. I slipped on the rocks and the
- 32:00 water was up to here. He grabbed me. If he hadn't grabbed me I would have gone with the water. So we were able to go to the other side. So I saved the partisans who went with me. We were alright. But those who stayed inside there, I didn't see them. Tired, no food, rain,
- 32:30 snow, everything. We went into a stable outside a little town there and a fellow came by foot with an order. To go immediately to the command, comitito nazionale delinationalone, to the liberation command where the top people were.
- 33:00 And they were canonica, in the church, the house of the priest of the town. To receive an order. I go there tired. I left the men there. One of my attendants came with me. I went up and opened the door and I saw all these people there. Sitting, a committee. What they decided to do...it was a little town, Kelina.
- 33:30 There was a barrack for the police. And there they had all the Cossacks. There would have been about forty five of them in this building. You know, an Italian buildings. Not in timber, it's made of rock. So I was arriving. My commandant got up
- 34:00 and decided to blow up this building. And they tell me, my commandant came down from his seat and said to me, "Otto you have to do this and this and this. You have to go down there. You will find three barrows of dynamite. Some people will give them to you. You put them on the door. You give the Mitchell,
- 34:30 you blow up the building." I look at him. I was not so sure. I was tired. My men were tired. It was snowing outside. I was not so keen. I said, "My men are tired. How can we do this?"

- 35:00 We can't continue to fight like this, they will kill us all." He took out his pistol and said, "Ordalees are ordanee." "orders are orders." If I do not do it I would have gone. The first thing I do, I get the
- 35:30 three Armenians who had saved me before. I told them to come with me with and bring a couple of my partisans. I got from the red people, the Garabaldini, their dynamite. So I took a very long Mitchell, about
- 36:00 forty metres and put the thing in the door it was set and suddenly when everything was ready, before I do the Mitchell, I told my men to scream in Russian to yell out, "Come out because the building will blow up. Run away, run away!"
- 36:30 So they started to scream like that to them. But instead of listening to what we were saying, they were getting ready to fight. So the Mitchell go, and it was screaming, screaming, screaming until it arrives there. Bloody, I've never seen something in my life. Suddenly the thing blew up. Booom. Something incredible.
- 37:00 And I started to cry. Gosh. That moment all the valley was on fire. Shooting everywhere. Shooting I don't know what. Bloody. It was a disaster. It started a tremendous fight somehow. Alright. So I went back to my men. We had to go into the building, in Ovaro
- 37:30 straight into Ovaro because the Cossacks, those alive, they were all in the schools and the building was on this side, and from the windows of the building we used to shoot them. Because they were traitors. They didn't do the right thing. They didn't do that sort of thing to us, according to them
- 38:00 And I used to see some Cossacks coming out from the building with a handkerchief, a white thing to give up. But their officers inside would shoot them. Use to see them fall down on the steps, some of them wanted to finish. But anyway there was an inferno for about two days. In the mean time the free Cossacks,
- 38:30 there was about four thousand, were coming up to go through the pass into Austria and they were coming up. We had had notice that they were coming. We were worried too because it would be more fighting and more disaster. Anyhow my orders were to go the other side; I decided to go myself with a group with a bren.
- 39:00 We had two or three brens on a post where they were going to pass. But at a certain moment I looked down and I could see Cossacks down there and suddenly they started to call me. In a minute I thought I would go down to say hello to them to show them we were not bandits. Some force from the sky stopped me from doing that.
- 39:30 It would have been about two hundred metres away and if I would have gone there they would have kept me they would have put me in front of the big group of Cossacks coming up. So I stopped. At the moment I retreated back and I find a big noise down,
- 40:00 two or three grenades exploding in the bush. And then I got one here on me. And when the cadets that were in the hotel, when they first came up, they'd been able to escape I got a splinter here, a bit here, not much. I went up into the mountains. I lost control over my men and I got up in the morning
- 40:30 and there was beautiful sun, on the top of a mountain there in the middle of the rocks, half dead. Blood all over me. I looked down, I went down to Ovaro and disaster, flames. And I see about twenty five, thirty of my friends all there, lying on the railway station, all dead, because of the Cossacks there.
- 41:00 The Cossacks passed through the town and they killed another friend of mine further up. He was just watching, he came out, just stupid to come out on the street as they were passing . So I went up Monte Corjo.

Tape 7

- 00:33 **Rinaldo, we'll pick up the story where we left off. So you woke up in the morning and you were half dead and you looked around and you saw a lot of your men dead.**
- Yes. I went down to the town with my men and some of the partisans. In fact they were not really partisans. But they were detected as partisans,
- 01:00 they were working on my lines. Their home was there in the town, but they were dead. There were about four or five of them that were living in the town. So when I arrived there I had a doctor who looked after my arm.
- 01:30 One thing I saw was that the people were not happy with me because they thought I had created all this. But the thing that was tragic was what I saw on the street, it was very dangerous, a lot of grenades, we had a school there, in the town where we were fighting, unexploded.

- 02:00 I saw a dog start running around, going over the grenades, they will explode, more damage. So I took a gun and tried to shoot the dog, so I stopped that. But when the people listen again to all this noise they were in shock and all this. Mind you
- 02:30 this is the town, when I used to go back afterwards and they used to play the bells for me. So it was a shock for all of us including me. I could have been dead and I had to do the orders which I was receiving. It was war and I was in command of something and I had no alternative. Unless you're a deserter. Unfortunately that happened.
- 03:00 Suddenly I decided what to do and I heard that not far away the Americans had arrived. The English used to come up to the Adriatic side and the Americans used to come up the other way, through the centre of Italy, from Milan.
- 03:30 And the Americans arrived at Brunico, not far from where we were. Say about 80 kilometres. So I went myself with a group of my partisans in a car to convince the Americans to come quickly and to try and protect the people in the area because all the Cossacks, some had been able to come through
- 04:00 and some were still able to come through and a lot of men deserted and they went up in the mountains. They were killing people everywhere where they used to be when they were in the mountains, they were dispersed. They didn't want to go through to Austria because they had heard that the Austrians or the Germans were fighting at them. They didn't want them. After the promised them all the protection in the world. They didn't want them in there.
- 04:30 So I went down to Brunico and finally I went there and I was all rotten and dirty and soiled. I saw these Americans there with their tanks and everything and finally I was accepted by their commandant of this division that was there. I went to see him and I insisted. The Americans were taking the film of all this, to make a film in America
- 05:00 So I tried to convince them to come. To come to help, to come a bit further. Evidently in the end they decided alright, they send some tanks to see and we send a group over. So they started to come. Suddenly I saw them to stop. I had about five tanks with me.
- 05:30 They stopped and, 'They're frightened.' I thought to myself, my mentality. So got to get back. So I left them there. Apparently there was a marking line where they had to go for, they couldn't go any further because the British were in command of the operation, we'd gone to the British now.
- 06:00 I went back and again I found the fighting and all these disasters. After a few days the air became a bit clearer and you could see what happened. The town was burned out. The people had been blown up in the barracks. They were still digging them out from the ground. So what to do?
- 06:30 I had been called down to Udine because that had already been liberated. So I went down. But before I went down I received an order. Before I went down I was ordered to go and take off the emblems from Cossacks passing through there because they had to
- 07:00 go through the pass to go back to Germany. So I set up a point, a block, where they had to come to me and take off their braids, they were generals. I had my partisans on the side. I was doing that when I received an order to go to Udine and before that I had to catch the general who was an important general with his jeep,
- 07:30 with his armoured thing., going towards the place to escape too. So we waited for him and we got him and we took him down to Udine.

Was he by himself?

He was with his attendant.

Did he put up a fight?

No. He was very unhappy.

What was his name?

I don't remember now.

- 08:00 I gave him to the British in Udine. They took him. In fact they took him in the car where he was, I was thinking maybe they could leave us the car, anyhow. From there, I being in command they gave me a big barrack in Udine where the Alpini were.
- 08:30 I was in command of all that. So I put my partisans in it. And we stayed there for about a couple of months, patrolling and so on. At one stage I was going in my car, I had a proper car then, we would build old cars from this and that when we could. Suddenly on the street going somewhere to look for something, was a fellow with a pushbike.
- 09:00 I was going with the car and he suddenly came out of this place, and I blow him up in the air. I thought I had killed him. I saw this poor guy coming out and come to me and said, "Excuse me excuse me. It is my fault." I thought he must have been a Fascist. He was frightened. Full of knocks but he was alright.

09:30 Anyhow I stayed two months there.

What month would we be now?

At the end of April. We are at the beginning of March. The war was finished on the 25th, but we were fighting still in May. Because there were a lot of Cossacks and Germans and things, they were in the mountains, molesting things and doing bad things.

10:00 We were worried about them. But they had no food. They were dispersed. Some of them, particularly the Cossacks did not want to go to Germany. Those who had been able to go through as I said before. Some were sent to Yugoslavia to Tito because Tito wanted them, and the officers had been sent by the British, because the British were in control of that area.

10:30 The Americans were where we had stopped between Adam and Brunico. The other ones had been sent to Stalin who wanted the officers. They killed them there. This is the part of my war. Now since then towards the end of March, no May,

11:00 at the end of June say, I had been back home and released as a partisan with honours and medals and things, documentation.

So you got to celebrate?

Yes celebrated but unfortunately we were still fighting. In Milan, I have pictures there, where there were festivities. The bells rang that day, on the 25th.

11:30 But the fighting was still going on.

So you had to keep on your guard because there was still danger?

Yes, danger all around yes. So from there I went back to my work and back to my studies...

What sort of decorations and awards were you given?

I had the Bronze Medal that any partisan was allowed to have.

12:00 Then I had a Silver Medal for bravery. They gave it to me in 2000. So I had plenty of awards and medals. I will make something to put my memorabilia on. One day if you chance to meet me again I hope.

12:30 You could come here for a drink. A proper drink of my father's wine.

So there you were. The war was over and you went back to your town. And were you still having to do patrols then?

Not necessarily. The British took over and the Americans. In our area it was the British.

13:00 **So when did you finally get back to your town?**

Say about the beginning of August, the end of July, I went back.

So how was it being reunited with your family?

It was great. We were liberated. There were sad stories to tell. The war is a terrible thing.

13:30 We are foolish to make wars because as I said, as a Latin member I prefer not to see wars, as everybody. But they still come.

Had you lost any family members, any cousins?

No. I lost some in the earthquake just after the war.

14:00 Yes, of course. A cousin and a teacher who was a member of the family. In fact, a lot of people used to travel in those days, the traffic was disrupted, so people used to use tracks, mountain tracks.

14:30 The English aeroplanes used to come and they used to gun any vehicles. So this one was in the truck about ten kilometres away from Udine and he was caught. There were accidents of that kind. But aeroplanes used to be always patrolling all the time. And then life started to come back again.

15:00 **Did people in your town know much about what you had done throughout the war?**

Yes they knew.

But at that point when you first got back were you aware then?

Yes very quickly after they started to find out what I did. Particularly when I brought these people in when I left for Australia in 1949. They found out themselves the reason why I had come. My family was a very well off family you see.

15:30 They were very good in the society. I am not a poor migrant. In fact when I came here I paid for my trip

and I had a job before to get here. I was a draftsman with an architect. They were who started my life here. My principal thing was to bring the people who had fought with us

16:00 and we won, and to bring them to Australia. To maintain what I said to them.

Let's go back a little bit then. You were back at home. Your commitments with the war were finished. So what was your plan then? What did you want to do next?

Alright. Being a man of action of that kind, I saw a lot of friends of mine and some of my partisans were taking posts in the government.

16:30 It was very easy then. Even myself I could have become a minister there today, but I refused to do that. I could have gone there. Instead, my vice commandant, he did like me. But the fellow, the *sussi stainsa* [phonetic] we call it, he got a job with the province, so did many other ones went into the government you see, local or non local government.

17:00 Some of them went to Rome and became ministers and things and entered a political life. Instead I went back to work, to study. I went back to university at Venice.

When did you start back at the university?

The same year and I lost three years in the war and so in two years I had to gain those three years, which I did.

17:30 At twenty six is the right time to have finished university. I finished at twenty six. So I gained the three years in two years. That was very good at that time. Because in those days university was no so easy to go through. It was pretty tough, particularly the University of Venice. I remember there were subscribed at the time there were

18:00 two hundred and fifty university architectural students because of the war. Only two hundred and fifty, in all universities. In my course when I got my degree in 1947, we were thirty seven who got the degree. So you see, it was not that easy. So I passed, not with great grades

18:30 But I was the other day, I was giving a conference at the University of Venice. Professors from Milan, from Turin, and myself. They compared me like Pier Luigi Nervi, of what I did in Australia. Pier Luigi Nervi is one of the top engineers in the world. He has died now. But I knew him. I knew him because I did work with him. We did Australia Square, the first one. And then in Melbourne we did barges for the Australian Navy in concrete, full of cement.

19:00 It was a technique that was used to build yachts. The first building I did myself as a facade was the [UNCLEAR] Hotel. You can see it today. It is about fifty years old. You can see the facade just as new as it was then. All my work has been done proper with no trouble. The local people used to copy me.

19:30 They knew, you can do it, the work, you just do it, but they didn't know the technology behind it, the mixes and the system. Everything used to crumble; they called it cancer, concrete cancer. My buildings don't have concrete cancer.

Just to go back. How did you make up that lost time?

I studied

20:00 continuously. What I did, I had private lessons and in the night I used to have a room near the university. I had this room half of this size here. And I had all the walls with formulas and technology things. I used to run out of paper so I write on the wall so the woman was unhappy with me. But I promised her I would paint over it after, which I did.

20:30 **After being in such an intense experience in the war, were you tempted to just have a holiday instead of being so busy with work and to go around chasing girls and have some fun?**

No. No chasing girls, no other things, no holiday. Back to work. And the only thing that saved me was that. To study.

21:00 I had no time to think of the horrors I had been through, or the occasions I had been through. And the time of the terrible war. So I studied hard so eventually I was able to pass and be an architect. Today, I am compared to Pier Luigi Nervi by professors. My universities were Venice and Milan and it was a great honour.

Did it take a while to

21:30 **settle down to be a civilian again?**

Oh yes.

How did you get through that?

I used to dream, very often.

Nightmares?

Yes nightmares, but when I woke up it was alright. Instead it was always in my ears...

- 22:00 the aeroplanes coming around, in the night, for launching. That sound lasted for about ten years. Even in Australia I started to hear it. In fact once, I can say this, when the Lysander, Monfredi the same fellow that I bought the
- 22:30 first parachute to Cardinia, to the partisan formation, came to help us organise ourselves. The same fellow decided to go over the other side and they called him back because he was termed as being a spy after a year and a half, he was with us. So we made this strip for the aeroplane to
- 23:00 land in the middle of the Germans, and go off. When Monfredi came, he called me the night before. He was going to go because the plane just came there for a night or two and then went straight back. He wanted me to go with him. And when I went to salute him in the aeroplane he repeated it again. "Come with me." And I said, "No, my job is here, here I stay, goodbye."
- 23:30 I saw him after the war in Rome in the Quinnanalee Hotel [?] and he was very impressed to see me and to know that I was in Australia.

So you had to deal with some nightmares...but you just realised you had to get busy with study?

Yes being busy saved me because a lot of people went out of their minds. A lot of people

- 24:00 They were not capable to do things.

Some of the partisans had mental problems?

Yes.

When did the other partisans start to approach you and ask you about all the promises?

Just after the war. There was no work there, there was nobody. Say after three or four months they used to come in flocks to me

- 24:30 Not only my battalion but all of them.

How did you deal with that pressure?

That was pressure yes. It was tremendous, it was terrible. To see their houses because I used to go up there and see them. They were burnt out; I didn't know what to do. You go back to Italy today and see that area

- 25:00 it is all renewed, you see it all remodelled. When I go back, "Otto is here!" everyone is happy to see me because very few partisans, particularly those on the side of the Communists, the red scarf, they were welcome anywhere. They did funny things some how. Communists are terrible people.

- 25:30 **So you had this ongoing responsibility. People kept coming to you saying, "Otto where are all these promises?" So northern Italy was suffering after the war. What were some of the problems?**

Because we were a farming area. We had no industries. No work. No money. No nothing.

- 26:00 Particularly up in the mountains there was even no farming. So they had emigrate, because of the mountains are there, you can't grow things So slowly, slowly the government started to infiltrate with the industries. Today it is the most industrious part of the world. From Udine, where I came from to Trieste, to Torino on the other side of Italy,
- 26:30 the northern part of Italy, it is the richest part of the world. You can make anything there. It is fantastic. Everybody is employed now. But at the time there was nothing. After the war there was only destruction and misery and hunger and unhappiness. Now it is the happiest part of the world. In that area they were very poor farmers.

So what did you used to say to the partisans when

- 27:00 **they came to you and made their case? How could you make them feel better? What did you say?**

I had a bit of patience. You've just arrived here, now somebody will come, somebody will do something. Well the English were there. In fact quite a few girls married an officer for instance.

- 27:30 A close friend of mine in Singapore, a woman, was living in my little town there and she married one of these. I'll tell you a bit of a story. Suddenly when I was in Australia, my mamma, the first thing you have to promise an Italian mamma, a Catholic Italian mamma like I am, is to go to Mass every Sunday.

- 28:00 When I arrived in Australia here, always a sense of leading, leader. You know Kings Cross, you grow up here. And I had formed in those days, when everything closed at six o'clock. Saturday and Sunday every thing was closed. Gaston was there, an Algerian fellow used to have coffee and we used to have coffee there

- 28:30 because on the weekends it was all closed. I formed a group of fellows, foreigners because we couldn't speak much English. So there was six or seven of us always, a group of us together. One was Hungarian, another one was a Muslim from Egypt. So when I used to go they would come with me. I would do that on the weekend because during the week I would work. I used to go to this Gaston. And we Italians and we continentals would have a drink now and then.
- 29:00 And we would go to this Algerian fellow and had coffee at the Cross and we would sit there on a Sunday and Saturdays and we would be served tea of cognac. The tea, the cognac looks like tea. So we used to fill the cup up half with the same colour, and the police used to come around to see what we were drinking. "Oh it's tea, alright."
- 29:30 Now I met June my wife, June, I must show you a picture of her. A nice lady. I met her the first week I arrived here, in Vaucluse, because a friend there who gave me a permanent lending. Molocco, we were in the building business and find me a job here before I arrive. She was the only woman on this Sunday. There was a party there,
- 30:00 it was a beautiful house in Vaucluse, only talk to me. Because me being a foreigner, a bit different, men didn't want to talk with me. So only woman talk. So I said, "Alright next week when I come back, next Sunday I will come back again, I will talk more with her." I went back and I find myself, "Where is this lady,
- 30:30 shaped." He said, "She is gone for a trip to Hong Kong with her aunty." I think, "Oh, gosh." So my friends said, "Oh well, so many women in the world." And they present other women to me, but I found myself lost, I forgot about her. After seven years, when I used to go to Mass myself, this group of Muslims, Hungarians, Russians,
- 31:00 they used to come with me, everywhere I go. Suddenly, when I used to go back to Italy, every time they used to present me all the senioritas in the world. They made a big party or me. I used to go for business sometimes. The first time I went was for the Government of Queensland to sign a contract for 2000 houses in Corina. Anyhow when I went there they would make me this big party, a fiesta
- 31:30 And introduce me to the senioritas, in the hope for my mother that I marry one. The second or third time when I went back I stopped in Singapore and I went to see this friend of mine who married this English, whatever you call it. He was in charge of ICI there. I ask her, "Look I want to go and buy a ring." She asked me, "What for? You need to be nearly getting married to buy a ring." I said, "I buy the ring now and find the seniorita."
- 32:00 So she took me into a shop in Singapore and me just a poor guy, thinking I come from Australia so I'm a millionaire, but I was poor, no money. She took me into this shop and presented me, "Oh yeah, yeah, these are the rings." And I thought, "this will cost a mint." In fact it cost a mint. So me for not to create a bad feeling I bought it.
- 32:30 I got all my money and employed in this ring you see. I went up there, all fiesta, all senioritas and when I come back I find the ring in my pocket. Gosh. So one day I went to Mass, important to me at the time, at St Canice at the Cross, at the back.
- I find June there, after seven years.
- 33:00 This woman, she says always it was the prayers of my mother. We had a cup of coffee and I met her a few times and it fitted perfect. I had bought a ring without the finger. So we were married and we had five kids. And now we have a catastrophe of eighteen of them altogether. And I take an opportunity later to show you a picture of my wife.
- 33:30 **Alright I just want to bounce back to when you were finishing your studies in Venice. At that point you were getting to the end and you knew you were going to be qualified as an architect. What were you planning would be your next step?**
- My dream at that point was to migrate. Because in Italy there was very little, after the war there was only disaster.
- 34:00 **You didn't see any alternative?**
- Only to migrate. I was thinking of going to Argentina, I was thinking to go to Venezuela, because my people used to be in that area, Latin speaking. But I had a second cousin in Adelaide and when I was a kid
- 34:30 he used to send cards and writing and I used to see this Australia when I was four or five years of age. I would see Australia, far away and this and that. So it was always in my mind. Why not Australia? So I wrote to him and that was how I came here. He introduced me to these Melocco people and the Melocco people were from Italy and where I had been fighting.
- 35:00 They saw me as a solid sort of fellow and the arranged for me to get a permit.
- Before you embarked on your journey here, what was your picture of Australia? What were you expecting in your mind Australia to be like?**

Well not certainly like I found it. I thought it would be more like America somehow.

- 35:30 Because Australia is far away. But mind you, the moment more difficult for me to migrate, everything was fun. Every thing was gay and happy until I went to that ship Toscana. A friend of mine, a solicitor warned me. He said, "Remember Rinaldo, when you leave the ship,
- 36:00 you land here, where you have been fighting, where you were born, where you grew up, it's like your body stays here, it's like part of you stays here and part comes away." And that was true. Perfectly true. The moment that whistle went and I had my ticket in my pocket. One way only. Not like today. And you didn't know when you would arrive.
- 36:30 This Toscana was a First World War hospital ship, converted for the emergency. It didn't last very long. They scrapped it after two or three ships to Australia. It was exciting. But at that moment it was terrible. Absolutely. And even today, my heart is in Italy. My brain, my body is here.
- 37:00 I try and get the opportunity to go back to Italy as many times as I can now.

How did your parents feel about you going to Australia at that time?

They were surprised. My father who was more pioneering said, "Go, you have to be a man." My mother said, "No, Stay here your part is stay here." And my sister wanted to come to. But my father wouldn't permit her to come.

- 37:30 He was doing quite well in his business and my brother is continuing his business not me. If you go to Italy one day maybe you go to visit them. Now they are not only in wine they have a brewery, a big brewery too in the north of Italy, fantastic.
- 38:00 Australians drink beer and now they drink wine. Italians used to drink wine and now they drink beer.

And did you know much about Australia apart from what you had heard from your second cousin? Did you know about Aborigines or kangaroos?

Vaguely. I was not interested. I was more concerned about buildings. I was more concerned about my profession. What I can do there. In fact

- 38:30 my idea was to come here and change the face, in an Italian way I explained to you about that house. In fact, what's happened, when I arrived here my idea was to do architecture. I was to do the exams. But very quickly I found out that I was missing the prime material that I was trained on. Cementa, Concrete.
- 39:00 In Italy we have no steel or timber. After the war the mountains were all cut down for firewood. And so I saw there was no concrete here. So I had to convince Australians to do buildings in that way.

What was your first impression of the centre of the city when you first saw it?

- 39:30 Well it was a mix of different architectures because of the English Empire. And various architects going in that area, South Africa for instance, somebody came here to design something and do it in the type of South Africa. The other fellow from India, you see a lot of buildings in stone here with forecourts in Macquarie Street, they are more Indian style. So
- 40:00 it was confusing. Today, well of course we have the skyscrapers and it is a different story. A different approach to living. Here I can show you pictures of when I arrived here, it was all flat. The AWA Tower was the tallest member in the sky. Now it is all buried in the other buildings
- 40:30 But Australia Square was with me.

Tape 8

00:32 Rinaldo, in your early days in Australia was there any prejudice against you as an Italian?

Well, against me not so much, in fact none. Because I was an educated person. I had my degree. I had a different standing. But I knew that a lot of

- 01:00 Italians who came here had a very bad experience. Some time I was to some groups of Italians and very often some Australians would come to us and say, "Speak English!" And we weren't able to speak English. Maybe that, I considered a very good idea. A very good thing because you had to do in the country where you come,
- 01:30 you do in Rome as they do. The first thing that is very important is to understand English and speak English. Now I know quite a few people from Italy who are interested to come and I the first thing I ask them is, "Do you speak English? If you don't speak English, forget about it." Another thing is that's very important is when they ask me in Italy, "How long is the trip by aeroplane?"

- 02:00 I say, "Twenty-five hours." and they say, "Oh no that's too much." I say, "Why do you want to come to work in Australia? You don't like the sound of the trip, so you're not good enough." A new country, a welcome country for people who want to have courage, stay and progress. Not place for bludgers. I tell them straight like that. So a lot of people come to me.
- 02:30 The say that Italy now it's pretty hard. But it's not pretty hard. Italians want to select their own work. If they want to be an architect they want to be an architect. They're not prepared to carry cement for somebody like I did for myself. So things are different.

So did you encounter any of that being called a 'wog' or a 'dago'?

No, not in my case, never.

- 03:00 As I say I had a sort of standing. I used to mix with the right people. Not only that, even when I was in the pub, no one pushed me around. I tell you a bit of a story here. Suddenly I wake up and I'm convinced I'm here in Australia and I have to do things as the Australians do.
- 03:30 I tried to do things differently and very quickly I found out that I was on the wrong track. And that's another reason why perhaps I married an Australian. If I had been very homesick and if I had married an Italian we would have been two who were homesick and maybe we would have come back. So I'm still here and I'm very happy now to be here. I would have not been able to live in Italy any more.
- 04:00 Two three months ok, but this is my country now. Now to become an Australian was not easy. They told me, the people who brought me here that in two or three years you will be like an Australian. Not true. It took about fifteen years, even more. When I arrived here I was twenty-seven years of age, you are already formed, your mentality and things.
- 04:30 And the idea of the Italians is mostly to convince people to do as Italians do, which is not convenient. So I decided now, "Alright, I have to mix with architects. I'm an architect. I want to do buildings." It was the Australian Hotel where I used to go on Fridays. I used to have a room with Narfield in Victoria Park with an architect from Hungary.
- 05:00 He gave me the job while I was in Italy as a draftsman because I couldn't speak English. I didn't know the dimensions of the imperial system. That was very difficult for me because I was trained in the metric system. In fact when I did learn it very perfectly, the imperial, they suddenly turned it into metric. It was more difficult for me to learn the metric than it was to learn the imperial in the beginning.
- 05:30 To go back into metric. Anyhow the wages, I used to live at Elizabeth Bay in a beautiful room with a kitchen and so on. I used to catch a train, a tram, no, a bus first up to the station. The station at Victoria Park, where they are building all the flats now. There was a tram there.
- 06:00 So I started to do my work there and I was amazed in the beginning how this office was working. These boys when the boss was not there they were more interested in sport. They would get balls of paper, put a basket there and throw the balls into the basket.
- 06:30 Then my disappointment came when suddenly it was five o'clock and I was working there, doing drawings and so forth, and I wanted to finish. In Italy you finish the job and then you go, ten of fifteen minutes or half an hour. The fellow came to me and knocked on my door and said, "You're in Australia now. It's five o'clock you stop everything and go." So I had to do that.
- 07:00 That was hard for me. So I decided to mix with architects. We would get our wages on Friday. Friday evening we use to go to the Australia Hotel to drink. We had a group there, Eddie Gibbons was the boss, architects there, six or seven. There you would see a group of drinking mates, at the Australia Hotel
- 07:30 So I went there. We were in four and I found out quickly that I had to drink four beers, one pay, then the other pay. I was not very used to these big beers. I was used to drinking wine, my father in the business too. So suddenly I was walking, oh, like this.
- 08:00 The next Friday, again I stuck to architects. We were in eight. I don't know how came all eight. In Italy at that time it was a poor country, where I was coming, just after the war. When you are at the bar and you have a glass of wine or something,
- 08:30 drinking with mates. And if you don't want to drink one or two and the third you don't want to drink, so push it away a bit and very quickly somebody grabs it because there was not much money and not much wine around for nothing. So when we were eight this time, suddenly I drink one two three and the fourth I said, better I not drink. So did the same
- 09:00 thing. They were talking very little with me but they were watching everything I was doing. I take the glass of beer and I push it a bit away. Hoping that somebody would take it like in Italy. John Watts, he is a tall fellow, when he saw me do that he understood my intention and he grabbed the glass and he said, "You do in Rome as the Romans do."
- 09:30 And I had to drink the lot. The eight beers. Bad again. But I wanted to be part of the architectural team and I got used to drinking beer. In 1952 I went back to Italy for signing a contract for 2000 houses for Brisbane with the Housing Commission, the Minister of Housing

- 10:00 for Brisbane, for Queensland. My mother, I was in Brasia where Pizzotti came from. My mother rings me to say, "A big car has arrived here with big writing at the back, Australia." I thought, 'Who could that be?' "Tell them, look I can't come now, but tomorrow, keep them there and I will be there."
- 10:30 I arrived there and they were exactly those mates who were at the pub. I told the house girl at the time, "These are Australians." In fact my mother wanted to send them to two rooms. But they were all in one room because they wanted to stick together.
- 11:00 They were sleeping in sleeping sacks, sleeping bags and the others on the bed. And I organised with the girl to get them two bottles of wine and polenta, and nothing else and glasses. "Why?" she said, "Because
- 11:30 he told me a cup of coffee." I said, "No, leave to me." So she did that. They drank all this wine. The second day they were drunk all day. Because they continued to drink the wine, like me in Australia. The third day, I see the same fellow, John Watts coming down this long corridor. He came to me and said, "Rinaldo, this is fantastic.
- 12:00 Beautiful Italy. Your mother, your people, very kind, very nice. Fantastic. But why in the morning all this wine and that polenta." I said, "You do in Rome what the Romans do" I said. So I paid him back. It was great and we became great friends. So there you are. My experience in Australia in the beginning.
- Because you were an educated person with an educated profession,**
- 12:30 **do you think your experience in Australia was different to a peasant coming from Sicily."**
- Definitely. What I was trying to do, I was trying to mix with a particular class of people. For instance in Vaucluse where I met June, there was a fellow there by the name of McClosky, Roger McClosky. He was an engineer. A very capable fellow. A building engineer and construction.
- 13:00 One day when I was there he used to take me; I didn't have a car I was living at Elizabeth Bay. One Sunday we were there to listen to the tennis. Those days it was not television, it was only the radio. And I ask him a passage to take me down to Elizabeth Bay as he was passing through the Cross. He was living in Concord.
- 13:30 He looked at me and he was not very happy with me, he was, "Foreigner. What do you think. We're engineers, we're architects, we don't need people like you around." Australia at the time was the biggest country in the world and nobody knew much because they had never been around the world much those days, just after the war. So he had a little car, a Morris Oxford.
- 14:00 Rushcutters Bay was around town and the tram use to go from Rushcutters Bay and then up to King's Cross. So with this little car, this was my first experience, in my second week that I was here. Suddenly the tram stopped, he agreed to take me. The tram stopped and the people started to come out. He went to brake and the
- 14:30 brakes didn't work. So we went over the people, boom, boom, knocking here and knocking there. And the car stopped at the end down there, in the ditch, at the end of the curb. Suddenly we look back and we saw all these people running to us and he said, "Quick, jump in." So I jumped in and he ran away.
- 15:00 I got a shock, "Where are we? This is Australia? What happened." Then that fellow became the most close friend of mine after that experience. It was great. In fact he went, because I used to talk about my family in Italy. I had a nice sister, Anella, and he went to Italy. Apparently he fell in love with my sister.
- 15:30 An Australian in Italy. He was about my age, thirty six or thirty seven. So she was engaged somehow. My father had arranged for her to marry a guy. It was more or less a business. This Roger McClosky used to take her out and my father was a bit unhappy. So one night he decided
- 16:00 to confront this Australian, Roger McClosky. So he went to my studio, because I was not there anymore.. A studio is where you sit and have a drink. So my father went in, called him, when Anella about twelve o'clock or one o'clock arrived with him, "Hey gentleman, come with me." and he brought him into the room.
- 16:30 It Italy, when you have to commemorate discuss something, like in France, there is wine always present. A drink of wine or cup of tea or something else. So my father being in the wine business presented the best wine and they started to discuss the matter. My father would have said, "Look my daughter is engaged." But he couldn't speak English and the other fellow couldn't speak Italian.
- 17:00 And all the family were outside the door listening. They stayed in there for about three quarters of an hour, an hour and then they came out embracing each other, they had drunk all the wine! Perfect. When you used to travel in those days, the world used to be a big world.
- 17:30 Not as it is today where everything is amalgamated. Today, no I didn't have much experience in the difficulties things about being Italian, only maybe in the job. In the job sometimes. Architects who I used to work with here were amazed about how I was doing things.

- 18:00 The pencils I used to have. I used to have different equipment and they used to laugh at me. But I used to turn out drawings and I have references from architects, everywhere where I had been building and doing work. I was a great success and they wanted to retain me. They didn't want to let me go.
- 18:30 **In those early years in Australia you obviously still had in the back of your head this responsibility to your men, the partisans?**
- All the time. And I was glad, my sister, just died last year when I was in Italy, she gave me most of the names that she and my cousin had recruited in the area and the contracts, even the contracts that the government had made in Italian for these Italians to come to Australia. At that time they were welcome and
- 19:00 they were accepted. They were sponsored by Clyde Industries in fact, A big company here. One thing important about migrants. At that time Australia was a white class country and nobody else. No yellow, no black, no this or that.
- 19:30 I went with June to Fiji for a holiday and I stayed in the hotel there, I can't remember the name now, a holiday resort. And I saw a fellow, a foreman making a bure [hut]
- 20:00 for the hotel people to stay. I looked at him and I said, "Do you want to come to Australia?" "Why?" he said. "I see you have a trade, you are a carpenter and I need carpenters there." He said that everybody came here and told him to go to Australia
- 20:30 and when they go they forget about me. So I'm not interested. I talked with him some more and then I came back to Sydney and I put an application in for him. I had his name and everything. And he was accepted. He was the first Fijian who came to Australia. A carpenter, a worker.
- 21:00 They gave him a permit with my guarantee. Do you know why? Because in the statistics in Canberra, it is written. They see my name and the people I've brought here have all been strong, capable and hardworking people. So they let him come in. And through him, with a family after, came other ones. I needed a draftsman and they were very capable people.
- 21:30 They have done very well. So I opened the way for the people of that kind which Australia needed. Hard working people.
- So the three hundred and eighty people that you brought over from your region, did they all come at once, on one boat?**
- No, no. They came in various lots by plane. They used to pay for their trip, some of them, in stages, while they were
- 22:00 here working. Some people were top tradesmen but some had no trade at all. They used to live in tents. You imagine living in tents in Cooma. Seven degrees. Minus two and three degrees. But they were used to it. They were people from the mountains in Italy.
- 22:30 **Did they come with their wives or children?**
- No. Before they came over on their own with a permit only and if they proved to be OK the used to let the family come. But nobody went back or were sent back, for any visa. Never. And they've all done very well. Some went back by themselves for family reasons, and when they see me there, they keep in touch with me
- 23:00 they are very sorry to be back because they want to come back here. Things are much different now to those days.
- So down in Cooma there you had a complete Italian community?**
- Yes. It used to be Fulan. Friuli is a special region in that corner near Yugoslavia and Austria. We speak Nadino.
- 23:30 A million people or a hundred thousand speak Friulano, when I speak Friulano no one can understand me, I speak already two languages. So they came from this part and they all did very well here and they are so grateful to Australia and the Australians because Australians are very kind people and I find it myself. This time here coming back from Italy,
- 24:00 you find Australians have come more up to date with foreign people. They have to if they want, not so much immigration but tourists is what we are looking for.
- That relationship as the commandant. It's not really like a traditional military relationship, was it more like a father figure or a patron?**
- 24:30 Yes. My family on the side of my father and my mother, they were always top elements like leaders. Like my father was in the wine and in my mother's side was in the concrete. As I mentioned before they worked in the Kremlin. The Tsars, he used to work for Furabito, a firm of Rome.
- 25:00 They used to have teams which were promoting cement. They had teams with people in charge and they would fix up cement works that was not properly done or properly worked. So the Minister of the Tsar

in Russia had a problem in St Petersburg.

- 25:30 Underground rooms where they used to keep their own antiques and valuable things against fire, invasions and so on. There was seepage and humidity coming through, of course they were in glass boxes and what not. So humidity was attacking this. My father was called there by the minister with his team and when he looked at it he found out the solution.
- 26:00 "This is easy," he said. "We have to make another wall with the big stones that were there, another wall with a cavity with a waterproofer." In those days, 1914, before the First World War there were no chemicals around, it was all natural stuff. So my grandfather explained to me when I was a kid, how he did it.
- 26:30 A waterproofer, he needed to waterproof it. What he used to do, he used to mix in the water the white of the egg. The white of the egg can be used to stick labels. My father used to stick labels on bottles. The white of the egg, the performance was, between the granules of sand,
- 27:00 the granule and the egg was forming a film in the void and not permitted the water to go through. And so he solved the problem, and the Tsar used to go there himself, the Tsar himself and he would give him some gold money as a present. So he brought them home. So these families were top people.
- 27:30 The name of Lavolare, is already a name very well known in Italy. It was part of that generation. The Fabbros, the side of my father, are also very well known people as merchants in that area of Udine.

So you're saying your family had like a leadership status?

Yes. Definitely

- 28:00 **And that status was for you a responsibility and later became a promise to your men?**

Yes. That's a fact. None of our relations, my close relations, none of them have been labourers or working for somebody else. They've been able to work for themselves, they formed an industry

- 28:30 that suitable to the time.

And you helping these men was a way of repaying their loyalty to you?

Oh yes, during the war. And the promise. Also I felt in the end that even though there was a war alright but I felt in the end that somebody should have done something for it, but I find out that.

- 29:00 nobody was interested at the time. So I stepped in and I did it. And that has been recognised in Italy today. No question. All this publicity and all the welcomes that I have in Italy is for that reason.

You and your men made a lot of sacrifices fighting in the mountains there and were in danger. How do you feel about the country of Italy and how it has progressed

- 29:30 **since the war and after your sacrifices?**

That has been a great disappointment. Because we fought with all our heart and with all our strength and all our will, unfortunately Italy as never been converted in the proper manner.

- 30:00 The Italian people and the government let themselves be dragged around with not very correct laws. And I tell them very clearly and sincerely that I'm very disappointed in Italy because everybody tries to do, in Italy

- 30:30 a law will come out and they study to find a way to beat, to counter the law. And that is a grave situation. They say to me it is not only Italy, it is all over the world the same, not true. Unfortunately they call it Mafia but in some parts of Italy, they are not Mafia, they are good Italians like anybody else. I employ

- 31:00 a lot of people from Sicily, from south of Italy and they are very top workers and very good people. There is only a very limited elements who do the bad things, in the mind of Italians and they are infiltrated apparently into the government and try to steer the government in the wrong way.

- 31:30 Because when I ask, "Why you want the money in cash, why you don't pay the tax, you should pay the tax, it's like robbing your family." They do it anyway and there is no excuse. But anyhow, and it is so open unfortunately. Even with me they ask me, "Pay me black." Or whatever they call it.

- 32:00 I'm very disappointed and I never accept any of these propositions.

So you think that in some way Italy has lost its way?

Italy became, every family is a state we say, a government. They look after themselves and their family and it doesn't matter about anything else.

- 32:30 That is the tragic thing. In Italy there is a lot of poverty too. There is a lot of people with a lot of, they are well now. They have the big problem now; they call themselves, extracamardardi, extra people who have come into the country without permits. They need them though because the Italians became so

lazy,

33:00 and you can't find brick layers any more. People can't mix concrete. They have to use machines or these extracamaradardi..

If you had stayed in Italy after the war, how do you think your life might have been different?

If I would have stayed in Italy my life would have been better because I am Italian.

33:30 And easier. But I will become maybe a softer person. Maybe a more cooperative person. Being here now and having lived with my wife who was Australian and my kids being Australian,

34:00 and Italian I could say because they are of my blood. But I couldn't live in Italy. I do not know, I couldn't live in Italy for the ways they do things, but it's difficult for me to explain because I'm not Italian any more.

34:30 **What contributions do you think Italians have made to Australia?**

Tremendous. Italians, particularly in the building industry. I know concrete and concrete is a very heavy material and a very cheap material too. So you have to work very hard to make a penny. I was fortunate because I went into precast concrete, architectural precast. So I used to do something unusual and different.

35:00 When I came here and when I found out that the material wasn't in existence more or less, I started to do things. I saw for instance at the pubs, they used to have all these tiles outside. A yellow colour. The colour of the beer. And I said, "Why that horrible thing? Why don't we do something different?" I used to do exposed aggregate. With the quartz from Tenterfield, it was a fantastic

35:30 white. And things like that. And then I went with out finishes and other ideas and this and that. I used to go to towns out west in the beginning and do something with glass because I found out that Australians like to see glitter, something different. So I used to break glass into chips and then render it and expose it. It was a success at the time.

36:00 I used to know Sterzen who used to be the manager and he gave me the first job. I used to do the front of bars. And then I moved into different areas and then I went into architectural finishes for tall buildings. And I was the first one at that time. Even the fellow, he brought me down here

36:30 Milako. He was in a similar business doing Terrazzo marble. I asked him what he thought if I would do this. He said, "Do not do it, do not touch it. If you do that you'll go broke." He knew that if I was going to do that he would have to change all his machinery to do it different. I used to come all the time with new ideas. The bigger corporations like Pioneer Concrete

37:00 and they other people like Rocklands didn't like me. They wanted to crush me down. They wanted me to go public; the solicitors at a certain point because in the 70s I was quite well off. I rejected that because I didn't want to use other people's money like sometimes they do. They use and then they go broke and that responsibility would have been too big for me.

37:30 So I sold out to Boral. They took me over in 1974 and I became a director with them. I was very well regarded there. But because of my innovation, Italian innovation in the industry. Since I stopped about fifteen years ago nothing new has been done in the field.

38:00 But my people tried to do it but they didn't have the right imagination, they weren't coming up with new ideas for finishes. I was lucky because ...I could make more money. But if you tried to make a footpath today, the competition is great and you

38:30 do it for next to nothing. The people are hungry today and they need the money. They have just arrived here, so how do you compete.

What are your thoughts about the importance that Anzac Day plays in Australian culture?

Oh yes it is important thing.

39:00 First of all for the unity of Australia and to teach, to let know to the young people that there has been a past with wars. And there will continue to be a future at war, so to be ready if needed at any time to defend your country. That is very important. The same thing in Italy.

39:30 I go there every time. Every 25th of April I'm there with my mates, with my people, to commemorate this and to remember and to know that our friends, our connatarios, we call them, have died to save our country for our liberty and the imberessari,

40:00 for the well being of ourselves.

And the 25th of April in Italy is significant, why?

Because it is coming the same day as Anzac Day because it was the day of the end of the war in 1945. The 25th of April. Unfortunately we had to continue, myself and my partisans continued for three

months extra because there were dangers around.

40:30 **Have you ever participated in an Anzac Day in Australia?**

Yes In the second year I was here. I had with me my original Alpino hat with a feather. So I went to march. I just put myself in the middle of some mates and everybody used to look at me.

41:00 Where did he come from? Who is this guy? The war that the Australians fought was more in the North of Africa, Turkey and those areas, and where the Alpini were not engaged. The Alpini was west of the mountains, so they kept them in Greece and so on, against the Germans on the mountains.

41:30 So they were not very familiar with this, they are now, because of the marches. They asked me, "Who are you? Are you Robin Hood?" I knew who Robin Hood was because I was in Nottingham to see his castle.

Tape 9

00:34 **Rinaldo, why did you survive your very intensive experiences of war?**

I survived because God gave me the opportunity to survive. It was very easy to go to the other side.

01:00 But we were young then. Full of enthusiasm. Full of will. Strong, and we thought we were immortal. Today it's a different story. I did my job.

Did you pray when you were fighting?

Yes.

01:30 Many times. And I was praying when I was doing buildings here. To confirm that the building I was doing was correct, I used to stand underneath trusses to convince people because they were thinking it would collapse. I would stand underneath the crane. I had that courage because I was convinced that my work was correct.

02:00 **So God's always been keeping an eye on things for you?**

Yes He has been very good to me.

You mentioned a number of times when you were in life or death situations, and perhaps you even had a language barrier, but you were able to communicate with someone with your eyes. What's behind that?

02:30 **Why do you have that ability?**

It's a fact. I'm able to convince Milko, the Yugoslav, when he start, to hold the gun ready. Because maybe the faith I had in the truth.

03:00 My mother always taught me and my mother was also a very strong woman. She said to look things straight in the eye and be sincere and honest. If you are tricky, if you are not honest, you will fail very soon. That was my teaching.

And you've stuck to that throughout your life?

Stuck to that.

03:30 And when I was in similar situations I was always convinced that I would get out. I was strong enough to convince the other person, to transmit my thought of the truth. I was strong enough to resist any attack, in battle and in person. Even in my professions.

04:00 Sometimes things were not accepted, "No, it's not possible to do." My professional for instance, in 1965 Soerkano [President of Indonesia 1945-67] wanted to invade north Australia. Somebody from Canberra in the navy area, the Department of Supply,

04:30 they knew I was in concrete and they knew I was doing this type of work like Rigonelli, the boat engineer building yachts in Italy. They asked me if I can build barges. I said, yes straight away. The reason why, was to have these barges and transport them to the north because concrete is more resistant there than steel. Steel will deteriorate with time. On the barges they would put the tanks and floating sides.

05:00 And a container inside. They would take them up there along the rivers ready in case of any attack or invasion.

05:30 They gave me the order of three. I'm an architect and I didn't know a thing about them. But I had the guts to, "Yes I can do it." The first thing I thought. "Wow, to start." I had to learn very quickly what was

ferrous cement. I did already. I had already done Australia Square I worked with that. But barges is a different story.

- 06:00 So I talked with a marine architect and together we discussed the matter. We had a very good engineer. He was a New Zealander who worked on the Opera House, I got him with me. And with my ideas we started the process. To build three at prototype. At that point when I bought the land I had no factory and I did this type of work under the trees, pine trees.
- 06:30 There were a group of pine trees there. In the open. I had very good tradesmen, very good men. They came from Italy on that occasion that I mentioned to you. And myself. And with faith, with everything, when you say it can be done, has to be done it will be done. I signed the contract to have three as prototypes and 50 as an order.
- 07:00 Suddenly the idea was to build a form. Cast the concrete around the form and then pull it out with a big crane, turn it up. It's like a skin; it was only two centimetres in thickness. Turn it, and put these forms
- 07:30 together and stress them together. So you can make a model bigger with more elements. Only suddenly when I looked around with my little experience in that field, I thought something could go wrong here.
- 08:00 I had better go to Italy and see Pierre Regonelli. I telephoned him and he was in Cortina on holiday. And he said, he knew already my name, he said, come up I will accept you because he had some interest in a young man too. I explained to him what I was doing and in the meantime my work
- 08:30 had started because the thing was in a hurry. In Australia there was no where to do anything else. There were no places like in Italy to build ships. Had to be done, something quickly. So, "No you do it wrong." he said. "You should not do it this way." You have to make first the shape of the barge, with wire,
- 09:00 layers of wire. Very thin, galvanised wire and then render it both sides with special cement like the yachts. When I came back to Australia I looked and there were already five forms made. I have pictures of them. I said, "Gosh!" The Department of Supply in Canberra used to come every second day
- 09:30 to see what we are doing, under the trees. Today to do something like that you would need big factories, ten engineers, highly qualified people and millions of tests. I had nothing. Only my courage. So I said alright. No alternative. We can't change it. We have to go with my idea.
- 10:00 So we built the other six, three or four forms six altogether. So when we started, after twenty eight days to lift the first one, it didn't come out. We had taken all the precautions, but the rules say...the mould itself would come up...tons and tons of concrete. Two cranes lifting...gosh!
- 10:30 He was right. What to do? We would put jacks underneath. It would have been a failure for me, destroyed! Fabbro! You would have not seen these buildings today. So, thinking, no sleeping. I thought what to do? We tried everything. I thought,
- 11:00 'Why we do not drill little holes around the skin into the form?' Water goes everywhere, runs everywhere. You can't stop water. If we put water in. We put little pipes in. So we did that and the water went in and around
- 11:30 between the form and the member. And they used to pop out like that. Pop! Fantastico. Victory. Another one would not have thought like that. So we did the job. It was successful. They tested the first barge and the second and it was a complete result.
- 12:00 They had ropes about ten centimetres diameter, they used to break the barge over the concrete.. So victory. The only thing that went wrong was Soerkano changed his mind. I lost the contract. But the technology that was used for these barges,
- 12:30 you go around now in Australia in harbours and wharves and marines. You will see the same technique that I used myself. They are made in concrete, going up and down for marine service. Not so in that occasion but in various other occasions it had to happen in that way. I never refused a job.
- 13:00 Because I had faith that I could do it. I never retreat. Whenever anyone treated me in a wrong way I would convince him that he is doing something wrong and not to do it. That was my winning side. My strength.

Was there ever a moment during the war that you felt like giving it all up?

No. Never in a minute.

- 13:30 Like I never been in Australia. In Australia it was so hard sometimes, moments so difficult. I used to live in my little room there in Elizabeth Bay and I used to scrape the cushions and braid them with my teeth because everything was against me. Everything was going in the wrong direction. But with perseverance and with courage
- 14:00 I succeeded. That step build the rest. I'm not a rich man. I did not make a fortune, but more important, I have a good name and I changed the face of Sydney because what you see is my work.

How did your experience in the war change you as a person?

- 14:30 Well in fact it gave me more strength, the experience of the war. Yes, yes. Because I can tackle even today as an old man, I can confront anyone for the truth, for the honesty and for what is correct.
- 15:00 I'm not frightened in anything that I believe is correct. In all senses. That has been life up to date for me. As I say, at my age, you can see my face; it is clean, clear with a bit of strength still to go.
- 15:30 **Do you have any particular things that you still feel you want to do? Any dreams or plans that are still there to realise?**
- Well, I have a son, Mark. A young man about forty and he is willing and pushing me to get into the building business.
- 16:00 To continue to do something. Not because I'm frightened to do it but because I don't want to do it. It's too much commitment for a man of my age. He will be on the side to do it, but unfortunately he has not the experience. I was prepared in the past to help him financially, but he had to
- 16:30 go to school, to learn. He had to be like I was myself. Transport cement to workers and things like that. To learn the basics of things. Well...better to set myself up where I am comfortable in life.
- 17:00 In fact I live in a way that I used to have properties at Taren Point, in Canberra, in Melbourne and something else in Canberra. I converted the factories into industrial parks and I have an income with that technology that I used myself. Because I was the first man to use steel tub, now everybody does it. I started
- 17:30 to do it myself forty years ago and nobody believed it. Even the banks didn't want to have anything to do with it. They wouldn't give me the money because concrete was not known. They used to paint the bricks outside on the concrete. I used to use the a scalier to get the colour of the brick because
- 18:00 concrete was not welcome. Today everything is in concrete. And how difficult was it to persist, all my friends know. All the real estate agents, builders and others know how hard it was. At one stage I came up with the idea of an economical house,
- 18:30 for the Aborigines. I used to, with Pizotti, they wanted me to build houses in the conventional way, but they were destroying them in no time. Kicking away the doors and burning them up. So I come up with an idea to do them in ferrous cement. If they destroy them they can't destroy the structure. You can fix it.
- 19:00 So I did that. This was in 1969. Two bedrooms with living room, complete, but not with finishes, like a kitchen.. A bare structure. Finished painted and so on. The house was about eight squares. It was designed by me and the cost was eight thousand dollars at that time.
- 19:30 Today it would be about fifty thousand, or sixty. So everybody would be able to have one. The idea was to do it in ferrous cement. Do it in a factory or on the site. The idea was to put these model of panels, put them in a truck and at the site build the structure up.
- 20:00 Anyhow that was that.

How are you treated when you return to Northern Italy these days?

- Always welcome. They are always waiting for me. Not very many have that opportunity. The people I talk to have done well. They have capital, money now, they came here with nothing. And I say again, they came here with a ticket
- 20:30 one way only. Today the Italians come and look around and see all the possibilities. They have so many possibilities to go here or there. We were here for working, to do things. Now they come to look at things. But in Italy I am welcome and people are grateful for what I did for my people that I brought here.
- 21:00 My partisans came here but then they brought other people. So as I say, through my people there will be today about twenty five thousand people in Australia, from that area. Before I came here there were not many. Only a few from areas where they are good migrants and good workers.
- 21:30 **And your efforts during the war are still remembered?**
- My efforts are remembered. They know what I did and where I have been and they are praising me all the time. Taking films of me. They want pictures, they want interviews, and every time I go there I'm in the paper.
- 22:00 The partisan from Sydney is back in Italy.

If they ask you why do you like Australia, what do you tell them?

Well they get a bit surprised because a lot of them they ask, "You are here now to stay." and I say, "No, I can't stay here. I can stay for two or three months but after I get bored with the people. Too much

confusion. Too much uncertainty.

- 22:30 Australia is a country with more tranquillity, more honesty and you can plan things. While here in Italy it is more difficulty." A lot of people say why don't I have six months here and six months in Australia? It is impossible. I tried this time. I was away for three months in Italy. When I came back
- 23:00 I was under the influence of the trip. Maybe when we are young it is a different story. But I find, people they told me, to go in the direction to go up is one way much easier, but when you come back it is more stress. I don't know the reason. It must be because of the orientation you were in the aeroplane, and all turning. But it is a fact. It takes about two or three weeks
- 23:30 to settle. It is two week now I am back and I can say it is only about now that I feel alright. I couldn't sleep. Things are completely different. Food, air. In Italy unfortunately I live in a place where there is a bit of pollution and I have decided to buy an apartment in the city, but it's not very successful. It's better to go back to my own land where I grow up, in the bush.
- 24:00 **Do you think we will always have wars?**
- Unfortunately as things are standing, different type of wars. Not like war that I've been through. The wars are different today. They're quick. They're smarter, more intelligent. And nobody knows where we are being taken. In the world we're living in,
- 24:30 and the way some people think, this war we are in against terrorists, this will last, not only years, many years. It will not stop so easily. Being a partisan myself, it's very difficult to resolve.
- 25:00 The Germans had a lot to do. Not because of the Americans but because of their own liberators and bombs and this and that, or equipment or anything. They found they hardest thing to deal with people like us, the partisans. You can strike at any minute, any time if you want to.
- 25:30 **I just want to give you an opportunity now to pass on any final message or any reflection, any thought you want to share with future Australians, related to your war experience, how you feel about war and the future?**
- 26:00 Well to the young people of Australia, and to the people of Australia, all I can say, we are lucky to be in this wonderful country where there is plenty of space, plenty of sun, plenty of opportunities, necessarily to be filled with good people. With hard workers.
- 26:30 And I tell to my fellow Italians that I brought here and those who are here, when I come back from Italy, "Be happy, you're an Australian." You have to use your courage, honesty and as I've said many times in my interview, to have courage and not leave it, not to surrender. Never. Work hard. Thank you very much.

INTERVIEW ENDS