

Australians at War Film Archive

Norman Grinyer - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:35 **Can you start by giving us a summary?**

I was born in July 1920. My parents, my father was born in Queensland at a place called, doesn't matter, outside Brisbane. My mother was born in Newcastle at Carrington.

01:00 They must have met before the First World War, they were married in 1918 and I was born in 1920. I went to school at age five I think at Haberfield and then I transferred to school at Ashfield. I did all my education at Ashfield. Up to the age of fourteen and I left school and I

01:30 began work. Apprentice to a printing firm in Sydney and age nineteen, I enlisted in the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] and went to war. Came home and I was twenty-three and I was married in 1942. We produced our first child in 1944.

02:00 Another one in 1948.

We got up to your children?

Was born in 1944 and son was born in 1948 and they have now produced their children and their children have produced children so we are great grandparents now.

02:30 What else is there? When I was 19 I joined the army and went to the war and as I said came back in 1943. That was the exciting times of my life I suppose.

Can you outline your war service?

03:00 Briefly we left here in 1941, went to Palestine into Egypt, from there went to Cyprus. Or went up the western desert first, then went to Cyprus and then into Syria up to the Turkish border and then came back through India and Ceylon, back to Australia in 1942. September 1942 went to Papua New Guinea.

03:30 Right in the middle of the Kokoda Track campaign. I served there until February 1943. Came home by hospital ship. Spent a long time in hospital and eventually discharged from the army in September 1943.

04:00 The salient points.

What are your earliest memories of your parents?

My father was very autocratic, probably a hangover from the Edwardian period. I was a product of the time, where children were to be seen not heard.

04:30 I was never taken into family confidence, things just happened to me. My father was obviously lord and master. He was the provider and mother was the housekeeper, mother etc. No, many, many things happened during my childhood that

05:00 I was not even told about. They just happened. That was life at that stage. I remember I was sent to school at Haberfield and for some reason or another, I was never told, I was taken away from there and put into school at Ashfield and there was never any explanation or things like that. Childhood was a

05:30 wonderful time because we lived in an age which heralded the present age. Airplanes, people flying from England to Australia, Bert Hinkler and Amy Johnson, was the days of Kingsford Smith. Airplanes were something new. Exciting, motor cars, well I don't remember motor cars before

06:00 1927. It was the age of steam. Travel was very limited. You go to Gosford or Ettalong, even Katoomba for your annual holidays, it was a long way, 50 miles. Travel was very, very limited.

06:30 I went to Brisbane at one stage to visit an honorary aunt who, it was the family comment that she should go to England. Once or twice on the Bay lines. Now the Bay Lines were the shipping lines that

were called after Botany Bay and Moreton Bay. The various bays in Australia and this was a trip and it

- 07:00 would cost 100 pounds which was 50, no 200 dollars in today's terms. So your travel from Australia to England probably take you about 4 weeks. This was the salient points, big time. It was a period of wonder, amazement. Suddenly,
- 07:30 see in this period even a bit later than that was the time of rapid movement, express trains, the Victorian train the, what's it called, the Victorian express train made its debut and we had an express train travelling the Caves Express to Jenolan Caves,
- 08:00 the Jacaranda Express, these are all down at Tharawal Museum now. But these were, you travelled to Sydney, to Newcastle for 4 hours by train. It was a time when things began to move rapidly. the Spirit of Progress was the Victorian train. Nicknames the Spirit of Protest.
- 08:30 Things were moving very quickly. We children, we were only kids, went expressly to sit on the embankment of Ashfield station to watch the first electric train go through. This was our childhood, things were happening and we were all
- 09:00 part of it. I remember, I was about 14 or 15, walked from Ashfield to Mascot Aerodrome to have a flight in an airplane, big deal. Because a ride in an airplane today is just a normal thing. But then it was really something. Even my daughter when she was about 12 or 13, we took her out to, I think it was Mascot and
- 09:30 she and her girlfriend in a Tiger Moth flight. A joy flight. Today you get into a mighty aircraft no problem at all. They were the days of my childhood where we saw all these things happening.

10:00 **What did your father do for a job?**

He was a printer. With a firm he worked for before World War I and here again, the type of life we lived, followed the father's footsteps. If he was a wheelwright then the son became a wheelwright. If he was a carpenter he became a carpenter and so this going right back into England

- 10:30 in the old guild days. But this was the normal thing that you followed your father's footsteps. That's, I broke away from that later on.

Where did your father go to work?

Ansett E. McCurret and Stewarts in Day Street Sydney. There by hangs a tale too because during the Depression years he worked very close to the municipal markets and it was normal procedure after a market day there, the fruit and vegetables that weren't sold

- 11:00 were sold at discount prices to clear the market because there was no refrigeration in that period either and so that anything left they'd get rid of it the easiest possible way and he used to come home from the markets with a bag of peas and all manner of things
- 11:30 that were surplus to the day's sale and that was during the Depression years which was commonplace at that stage.

What sort of impact did the Depression have on your family?

Considerable, although again I must say, reiterate that it wasn't talked about. These things were not discussed in the family.

- 12:00 They were facts and you lived with it. With our family I can recall my uncle who lived with us. Used to go prawning in Parramatta River. He'd go away for two or three days at a time with a few friends, they'd go away rabbiting and they'd come back with rabbits. Go away for a few days fishing and come back with food. There was always this scramble for
- 12:30 food. My vivid memories are the hawkers [salespeople], I'll go back a little bit here. This is the days before motor cars and horse and cart were the normal thing. Like the butcher would deliver his meat in a horse and cart, baker the same thing, milkman and there were little dairies all over the suburbs and these people would come down with their horse and cart selling milk or
- 13:00 hawking milk. So to go away rabbiting or anything like that, always the chappie on the cart would come around trying rabbits, rabbits all alive, clothes props, the bottle-o, man come around collecting bottles for sale. All these things were happening
- 13:30 around us and never ever actually touching us, we were aware that these people were out to make their few bob. That unless you were effected, and we were, I suppose the children were affected, not physically but I can remember breakfast of bread and milk,
- 14:00 cereals were, they had to be purchased, you didn't have them in the Depression. I can recall Irish stews which were basically potatoes with stewing chops. I can remember buying stewing chops at the butchers. That was the meat content. Rabbits

- 14:30 and of course my father had a vegetable garden which supplied quite a lot of the padding around the meal. Also he kept WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s, there was always eggs. But these things weren't discussed it was just, we were fed we were looked after, we were clean. We went to school, probably barefooted some of the times. But physically
- 15:00 in actual, I can remember kids at school who would go to school with sandwiches and some of these kids would want to swap sandwiches with you. Obviously in retrospect in thinking about it now, that probably on very, very limited filling for the sandwiches and come around and swapping sandwiches probably gave them a varied diet. Things, looking back in retrospect
- 15:30 things fall into place. Why things happened, but at the time they just happened. We just lived normally. Sort of didn't know any different and so it was like as if. Interesting life, interesting experience to think back on all that. Just vignettes
- 16:00 I can recall the consternation of every, electric feeling through the adults when the government bank collapsed right in the middle of the Depression and they ran out of funds, they couldn't meet the withdrawals and they just ran out of money and they closed the doors to the bank. But that was, we only got the ripples of this and how
- 16:30 people reacted, this was a calamity for people who were out of work, or living on limited income. but the bank closed its doors, there was no more money in the bank. Just, if you imagine today, well it's just happened with AMP [Australian Mutual Provident] and a couple of the big firms, they went broke and because we have radio and television today, the ripples weren't quite so severe because we all heard about it.
- 17:00 But imagine if, Mrs Joe Blow from next door came home, "They've closed their doors what are we going to do?" This was a big deal.

Do you remember grown up talking about it at the time?

Only, you only heard the side of it, when people were talking on the periphery and you got their reaction and their reaction was more eloquent

- 17:30 than words. The feeling of shock, the feeling of, this can't happen and it has and this was the feeling that resounded upon we children. We didn't understand, we've had school bank accounts, put sixpence in a week, that sort of thing. So we didn't understand the full ramification of it. But the shock waves from the people around us who were talking
- 18:00 about it were quite solid. I can remember going up to Ashfield and looking at the bank, and the bank is probably still there, closed the doors, you know.

Were you hungry at all?

I don't recall ever being hungry. I know we used to follow the fruit and veggie man around in his horse and cart catching specks from him. Specks were bruised fruit or slightly damaged fruit that was

- 18:30 unsaleable, "Got any specks, mister?" This was the thing that, we did this with my brother, because we were hungry or whether it was just normal thing we did because we lived a totally different life, to life of children today. There was no money for toys, we didn't have them. So you made your own, we all had billy carts
- 19:00 a fruit case mounted on four wheels with an outrigger out the front and steering and brakes. That was a dual purpose, it was a messenger cart, you'd drag it for miles to have billy cart races. You always modifying them.

Were did you race?

Of all places, if you know Sydney at all, Parramatta Road at Petersham.

- 19:30 There's Taverners Hill we were on top of that hill, we used to race down that hill. Yes, they were the things of course you couldn't do it today.

Can you describe what that part of Parramatta Road looked like then?

Traffic, the thing that sticks in my memory.

- 20:00 Motor vehicles were unknown. there was bus that used to travel from Grace Bros, from Broadway to Parramatta. This was an alternative to the railway. We used to go along Parramatta Road from Broadway to Parramatta. Its depot was at Burwood
- 20:30 White's Bus I think they were. My most vivid memory were the steam driven trucks which were the forerunner of long distance transport today. These had a vertical boiler up the front and the driver used to get out every now and again and shovel more coke into the fire box underneath it.
- 21:00 My most vivid memory of them was they were caring beer I think and they had a most distinctive alarm system on them. I think they used to call them hop beer trucks. How it operated was a little steam whistle that went, boop, boop, boop, as a warning but

- 21:30 they had solid rubber tyres, wheels, tyres. I don't recall what Parramatta Road was like as far as surface was concerned. Again my most positive memory was during the Depression years, they resurfaced Parramatta Road with concrete and it still existed. They didn't know at the time, they didn't realise but
- 22:00 the ground water below the road was fluid and so these, they laid these long concrete blocks but they moved, and so there were ridges in these and they are still there today. That's about all I can recall of that period. We used to walk up the tarred roads bursting tar bubbles. Because of this ground water, the heat on the
- 22:30 road with summer, that the steam would rise, the vapour would rise and get underneath the tar and force it into little bubbles and we would burst these with our toes, and there would be a little squirt of water in them. But ,

Did you parents shop on Parramatta Road?

Yes, on Parramatta Road, our shopping centre, I think there was three shops

- 23:00 there was at Metalruss [?], a grocer's shop or smallgoods shop, a butcher's shop, and another shop and I don't know what it was like. I was known as the 'chocolate king' at Metalruss because I used to spend what spending money I had on what were then, penny Nestlè chocolates. Little
- 23:30 bars of flat chocolate, they are out of vogue now and caramels, four a penny, now a penny was less than a cent. Today's valuation. But you could buy a block of four caramels for or an aniseed box or four of something else. So we used to break them up and buy one of each, and you would get four assortments for a penny. Because we didn't have much more than pennies to spend in those days.
- 24:00 I remember later on I used to get about sixpence pocket money, sixpence a week, 5 cents. But you could do wonders with it. Because we learned, I still talk to people today of my vintage of having a Depression mentality. Where
- 24:30 you go through a shop, and I do it myself, I must admit this, you go through a shop and you look at things,
- 25:00 "Oh that's attractive, but I don't need it," and that is your attitude. "I'd like that but no, I don't need it. I can afford it. I can well afford but no, why should I get that?" And this Depression mentality, it, you go through the house turning lights off. Now
- 25:30 my children, who most of them, went into Central and Western Australia on mission work for years. They would leave all the lights on in the house, and I was going around turning them off. Because this, you saved money, you didn't spend money needlessly, you looked at the value of things and if you go through the village you find every one has got
- 26:00 this Depression mentality of the same type of thing. You don't spend money needlessly.

Why do you think your family wasn't as profoundly affected by it as other families?

Because I was never told, we never discussed this. I know my father he bought a car in 1937. It was a Chevrolet Tourer. I recall, see we were never told, and I recall at some stage that car was up on blocks in the garage and obviously ran out of registration; we couldn't afford the re-registration. I think I know we had tennis courts up the backyard. My grandfather owned quite a lot of land there.

- 26:30 This was well before things were developed and I think my father must have sold those tennis courts to a spec builder because I don't recall when the courts were sold or anything about it, but I do recall as a child playing with a group of kids my age where these cottages were being built and my knowledge of
- 27:00 historical lineage that a couple of these cottages must have been built in the early 1930s because the bricks were purple. This was, I studied under a gentlemen, can't recall,
- 27:30 he took me under his wing much later when I was an adult. This is well after the war. Having a look at the development and the age of buildings and I could almost, through his instruction, I could almost tell the age of a building by its construction and I know that in the 1930s, 1920s
- 28:00 the bricks were all standard size but they had an elongated oval of red in the centre of the brick and this was the period in the 1920s. Where were we?

28:30 What were your parents' experience of World War I?

My father went away in 1915. He was involved in a couple of major battles in France and Belgium. He was very severely wounded in the Battle of Bullecourt, evacuated to England. He had head wounds,

- 29:00 shell splinters in the head. He eventually came back to Australia. He suffered virtually all his life from the effects of the wounds. Again we were never told anything. but my mother did tell me a couple of times that he had to go to hospital for a period of time for treatment, etc. His nerves were really knocked around.

29:30 He was partly deafened and this could explain a lot to his remoteness from me, as he just... We didn't have that close father-son relationship and so it really affected all of our lives. After the First World War. He died in 1946 I think.

30:00 He was 65 when he died. That's about it.

What was that remoteness like?

Well he was unable to share the normal things in life with us. As I said,

30:30 he couldn't... Being remote like that he couldn't, he didn't take me anywhere, I was taken, we didn't go to, well I'll use an illustration.

31:00 As my daughter was getting older, twelve or thirteen, reaching puberty. I and this rings a bell, because I was way ahead of my years there. I told her one day, "Never get bored. I'll take you around Sydney and show you what is around so you'll never get to the stage of, 'I don't know what to do.'"

31:30 We went to all the museums, the art galleries, and I even took her, as a twelve-year-old, to the Tivoli [theatre] and this is what available to you and it's all available to you: the museums, the art galleries, all that is free, the Tivoli has got entertainment in Sydney. It's all there. You never have to say, "I don't know what to do."

32:00 Now I did this with my daughter, probably in defiance, or against what I wasn't told or shown. When the kids were young, when Brenda was only a matter, probably a year old or something like that, a friend said to me, "There comes a time in your life when you cease to become a father

32:30 to your children, but you become best friends," and I worked on that all my life. And my son rang me from Zeehan in Tasmania last night to wish me well for today. So it's not father-son relationship, it's more family friends. My little great granddaughter, that's his granddaughter, all of three.

33:00 On a phone call the other night I had been talking to my son, and the phone rang again and it was young Rebecca. She had bunged on an act, she wanted to talk to Grumpy. So that was, relationship, I am not great grandfather, I'm Grumpy and she wanted to talk to me and well she rattled on and so forth.

33:30 Can you appreciate that this is friendship rather than relationship and it's what I missed with my father, this was not on. He was, I explained it to a psychiatrist once, he was God. Untouchable, remote, but I have, I think I rebelled against that. It was not for me. The family is family. I have a

34:00 granddaughter in England who is forty-odd. She looks forward to Easter because we send her at great expense, we buy a chocolate bilby and pack the box with Easter eggs and send the box across to Beth and she gets a chocolate bilby Easter time each year from us and it's not my grandfather sent me

34:30 it's much closer than that. It's mad, the whole thing's mad, buy a bilby for about 4 dollars and stick a couple of dollars of Easter eggs in and it costs about 12 dollars to mail it to England, mad but that's the way it is.

How much of your father's aloofness had to do with his wartime experience?

I would say 50 per cent, that he couldn't relate to children. But the other 50 per cent

35:00 was that it was not traditional to relate to children. That children were told, they were expected to know. From what he told me of his childhood, with his father, he had certain tasks to do every day and these were expected to be fulfilled. He

35:30 just sort of passed them on. I had to mow the lawns and I had to do certain things. I was never taken by the hand and told, "This is what gardening is all about and we are going to plant these seeds," which I did with my kids. We'd plant things and we'll put this in here and so forth. Closeness it just wasn't there.

Did your parents ever talk about the war?

No, no

36:00 except my father did comment at one stage to me. The extreme frustration. He went away with an ambulance unit, he was not a fighting soldier and he said the frustration of being shot at and not able to be able to shoot back was quite considerable and I can appreciate this from my point of view to have to lay down and take it rather

36:30 than do something. Well imagine if well, those things happen. Go on.

What did Ashfield look like as a suburb then?

Well it was no comparison; I had nothing to compare it by. But I know we used to walk to school. It was about a

- 37:00 mile walk from where we lived to Ashfield station, and then another half mile to school. There were quite a number of parks, open areas. Which gave us a marvellous playground. There was no traffic. There were I remember when we used to go to school, on one of the corners there was a big mango tree and
- 37:30 we used to love to crush the leaves and smell them and take them to school in our pockets, the smell of mangoes was fantastic and the, there was like you living today, there is no comparison of what it could have been like years ago. For instance up here at Narrabeen there were little houses, shacks, along the foreshore
- 38:00 of the lake. Obviously during the Depression people came and lived there, lived on fish, prawns, had a few goats in the countryside in the bush, to provide milk and the occasional bit of extra meat. It was told up here, there was no buses in the early days here. There was a walk down, oh yes one bus up in the morning and one down in the afternoon.
- 38:30 And there was a goat track down to Narrabeen village. So these people had no idea what it was like today, and the people today have no idea what it was like then.
- What did your house look like when you were a child?**
- It was a two bedroom brick house. I'm, I believe it cost about 500 pound to build.
- 39:00 It would have had a fuel stove built into an alcove like this. Which became my bedroom eventually. A fuel copper electric light. Probably an outside toilet unsewered. My
- 39:30 memories I can recall up the backyard there was a tall red gum tree, which was I don't recall it being taken down but it must have been because it was in the sewer line so I know there was an outdoor toilet. I don't recall ever using it because this was normal.
- 40:00 And this is the thing they had to divorce yourself from, what was normal and what you realised was. There was a fuel copper in the laundry. I can remember a black cast iron gas stove with a latch across the oven door.
- 40:30 Which you opened the door, I can recall that. Oh, tubs in the laundry, double tubs. A back room which was semi enclosed and eventually as I grew up it became the family room. The living room, but in those days it was an open area, semi-open area but I can't recall any details of it. I know my father used to, in the Depression years he had an incubator in the bathroom, for incubating eggs. Chickens and so forth, what happened to them I don't know. It was kerosene driven so there was always a smell of kerosene fumes in the bathroom. there was no, there was only cold water in the bathroom, no hot water systems in those days. I know we used to carry hot water from the copper, the fuel copper in the bathroom for a running bath.

Tape 2

- 00:32 **Tell me about the school you went to?**
- Well Haberfield school was obviously the result of World War I. It was staffed by either very young or very old teachers and from virtually child minders. Probably the reason why I was taken away and sent to Ashfield school. It was a more personal level between teacher
- 01:00 the headmaster was a World War I veteran. Whether he selected his teachers or not I don't know. But a couple of the teachers had a very, very profound affect upon my life. One of them, Mr England, who was our English teacher and maths teacher. He impressed upon, and it stuck with me all
- 01:30 these years. Your education begins when you begin to think. It's very profound and the, as I say the teachers took a very personal interest and I found that I was I had a very logical mind and English grammar
- 02:00 Geometry, algebra were all very logical subjects. Oh, history and I wallowed in these, science, I get myself involved in that. We also had a teacher there who was a manual arts teacher you would describe him now. Woodwork and metalwork teacher.
- 02:30 An eccentric gentleman, used to wear butterfly tie and bow-tie. Always wore a suit. But he established after school a hobbies class. Where he brought kids together interested in their hobbies and he developed an interest in these and I can recall a couple of school mates of mine
- 03:00 they were interested in naval procedure and he got out his books on naval law, seamanship, and instructed them in basic stuff, naval or maritime movements. The colours the port and starboard, and
- 03:30 the rights of the road, the shipping always keep to the right and I can always recall his instruction there, "Red to red." When you go anywhere your port side was to the port side of the other ship. So you went that way on the right of the other ship. This was stuck on me because when I go out sailing or

ridiculous things you keep to the right of these things.

04:00 Going past a marker buoy, a green light on the buoy was the green light of the ship and so you passed it on the, so on.

Did you do much boating as a boy?

No, no.

How would you get to school?

We walked to school. There were several ways we used to walk, follow different roads. But walked to school because there was no transport

04:30 as such. Ashfield School which was on Liverpool Road, on the far side of the railway station and of course yeah.

How old were you when you left school?

Fourteen, yep, I did second year at school and it was only those who were going for

05:00 higher education or going for the intermediate in those days. Who continued into third year, I left in second year. Started the intermediate.

Where did you go after school?

In my lifetime? I started work with WC Penfolds in Sydney as an apprentice letter press machinist and

05:30 I took a five year apprenticeship, I broke into that when war intervened.

Tell me about that job?

That job? It was mixing, moving into an adult world which was rather traumatic. I was a brash young

06:00 kid. Working with adults and learning a trade and continuing, expanding my education because I had to do three years night school English and maths as well as a period of press work. Which was practical printing.

06:30 No that was about it.

Can you explain exactly what you had to do in that job? What the equipment was?

Well it was working a printing machine which in those days was totally different to printing today. We worked with cast monotype which was cast lead type and ordinary

07:00 letter type which is developed into form by a compositor. Putting this onto a flat bed machine and preparing the printed sheet and then eventually running your machine to print X number of copies.

07:30 It was, in those days it was a very skilled job. it required a lot of skill a lot of information and it was rather perfectionist type of job. I recall when I was doing at tech there the technical teacher was producing a book on his own and he asked me to print it for him because I

08:00 was a perfectionist, even now I still am and he chose me to do it because it had to be to his specifications. But apart from that, no, it was a normal job.

How much did you get paid?

Fifteen shillings a week. About a dollar fifty. Over time I'd get another 5 cents an hour. Big

08:30 money and it used to cost us about 25 cents a week for a weekly ticket from Ashfield to Sydney. So you didn't have very much to spend. After the first year the money went up to nineteen and six, that was about

09:00 two dollars and one dollar ninety five a week, big money.

Where was the printing place?

It was in Pitt Street. On the corner of Hosking Place. Very close to Martin Place, Penfolds, well they have just folded up the firm is just folding up now. It was a big

09:30 a large printing firm in its day. it was well, modern printing, quick printing and all that sort of thing it's taken the, taken that particular form of printing out of the market and the development (UNCLEAR), which was started by the Women's Weekly right through to the days of multi colour printing

10:00 in a very large way. We used to print Bushells' calendars and this was a job which ran for about 9 months of the year, printing the calendars. But now that's gone, the calendars are so different. It's a industry, a

10:30 from of printing which is completely outmoded by modern methods.

Other than the calendars what were you printing?

I was mainly doing work for Mercantile Mutual, Nestlè, a couple of the banks and a number of

11:00 major firms. We used to print the cheque books. These were specialised jobs. A lot of ledger work, ledger paper for various companies. Because these were the days when you had ledger clerks and no computers and everything was entered into books with very heavy cartridge paper. Leaves, they were ruled, write ledger, but they were all hand done.

11:30 Quite intricate. There was large book writing section within the firm where oh, the covers were bound with leather. They were embossed oh it was, a carry over from the dying days of the Victorian period

12:00 where everything was heavily embossed heavily done, hand worked, quite a thing.

What your first memories of learning about Europe with regard to the impending war?

The impending war. Well we were

12:30 well informed by newsreels of the invasion of Belgium and France. Of course there was the forerunner to this, 1937 there was the Spanish Civil War which was the forerunner for World War II. Here was the

13:00 proving ground of the modern weapons of war.

What did you see on those newsreels?

Firstly the horror of war, displaced persons, evacuees, lines and lines of people who were completely displaced.

13:30 The horrible human carnage of civilians who were, the modern equivalent is our boat people coming here. People escaping from war was what they had and we were seeing this on films today.

14:00 This was happening and this prompted amongst those of us who were thinking in that period, we mustn't let this happen here. This is going in a different tack. We were brought up in an era where womanhood was sacred, not, was put on a pedestal and we looked to see women, women and children pushing

14:30 prams riding on any vehicle they could. Dragging things, we thought we can't let this happen to our women here. Because the women were a thing apart, the thing which we still, we of our generation still hold today. Women are

15:00 just, that little bit different, to be protected, fragile flowers and all that sort of jazz. But we saw all this happening, we saw what was happening in Warsaw and in Belgium and in France, towns and cities being bombed and so we related this; we can't let this happen here. I know amongst my mates that the general thought was, "We'll go and bugger up

15:30 their backyards. We won't let them spoil ours." And this was, we knew this was happening, we could see from 1937 the rise of the armies, the war things that were going to happen and also in that period realised our own, in England and here and in France and Belgium, the unprepared ness for war

16:00 that lead to the defeat of France, etc. We could see all this happening.

What was your first military training?

My first military training. I joined the Australian Tank Corps and an elite little unit at Randwick of 33 troops in 1937.

16:30 Because firstly we could see that there was going to be a war and we wanted to be as prepared as we could be. So we joined this unit and we learned basic army drill, basic things. Probably our greatest ally in this was we ourselves, as Australia and

17:00 we had a pride in ourselves, had a pride in our forebears and a hero worship effect of bushrangers and cops and robbers and that sort of thing. So we learned bush crafts ourselves because this was our heritage.

17:30 Learned survival tactics in the bush. Scouting was another adjunct to this, we were not dependent upon what we call modern day things. We learned to be self sufficient. Hiking was a thing in our youth. We'd go to

18:00 Berowra, around there, taking food and frying pan and billy with us and we could be self sufficient, a group of us, boys and girls. Be completely self sufficient for a day or two days in the bush. So that learning the military aspect was just a side issue to survival that we knew how to put up tents, we knew how to make a bed in the rough and this

18:30 sort of thing and so there was no, it was only an extension of what we were doing in play, in our normal life. We learnt weapons. As I said when I was talking about this in the early days, because we had no

- toys during the Depression and because motor cars were a rarity. Her we were given the opportunity of
- 19:00 playing with real toys. We had a tank or tanks with motors and we learnt how motors worked with cut down demonstration pieces and but it was an extension of our life, moving into a new era that we were... As I said, we had real toys to play with.
- 19:30 **What were those tanks like?**
- They were bought, they were 1928 versions of the latter part of World War I. Fifteen ton tank driven by an Armstrong 8-cylinder engine. Maximum speed of probably about 15 miles an hour. Cumbersome, big
- 20:00 things, but they went. We were able to train in them, they had guns, we would fire them. We used to take them into Sydney each year on Canberra day and dress the senates up with them. the last parade we had, big parade in 1937. That must have been the King's Jubilee or
- 20:30 something like that. We had a very big parade in Centennial Park. Big deal, it was the last big parade, a minor parade in 1938. Yeah.
- You joined that unit because you were concerned about what was happening in Europe. Who else was in the unit?**
- A whole group of us joined up, well became friends at the same time, became united in
- 21:00 in that unit. There was a group of us about twelve of us who went to World War II as a group maintained our friendship right through until and including today. Some, one, my own particular schoolboy mate, joined the air force and was killed over Britain in 1942
- 21:30 I think. But a group of us developed camaraderie during that 1937, 1940 period and maintained and is still strong today amongst the ones who are left. About that way.
- 22:00 **Did you talk about the events in Europe at home?**
- The?
- Did you talk about the events in Europe at home?**
- No, no, that was, I think my father was too emotionally involved because he had been through that. It was almost like he believed it was my duty to joint the army
- 22:30 he did say to me at one stage, if I hadn't enlisted in the AIF after my militia experience pre war in peace time, he would have kicked me up the bum because it was his, again he was of an earlier generation and more patriotic than us. But he believed he should have done what I did. In fact he held me back. When I enlisted, had he given his permission
- 23:00 I would have sailed with the 6th Division and he used his war time experience saying, "Don't go with the first mob because you have to establish camps and establish your bases and that is a hell of a lot of work, go with the bases are established." Which was true to an extent
- 23:30 but although we did have to establish our own bases and so he gave me his permission to enlist. I had to alter my age to get away. I was not accepted because I was too young. So I had to alter it there on the spot, change the, my birth from 1920 to 1919. That sort of enlisting officer must have turned his back for a moment or two
- 24:00 which he did, and he said, "Oh we can accept you, righto."
- Can you remember the day that war was declared?**
- Yes I was at home I think it was Sunday and I was listening to my own radio and it must have been at night because I had to disturb Dad to tell him that war had been
- 24:30 declared. That was it. It was expected, it was no great drama, Churchill's speech, or actually, no it must have been Churchill's speech that war had been declared. It was no great surprise it was more the Brits
- 25:00 had warned Germany to get out of Poland in three days or else we would declare war. So it was expected.
- How soon after that did you enlist?**
- Well we, I was with the tank corps at that stage, we were called up to a thirty day camp. It was the preparatory first stage of the realisation that we were at war and we had to do something about it. Put legislation into action of what would do.
- 25:30 So went to camp for thirty days and merely being over we were called in for a ninety day camp and that was the period we expanded our army. We called up universal trainees at that stage. That was the fist National Service call and the units
- 26:00 where we had thirty members of the tank corps we probably expanded that to about a hundred,

virtually over night in the 90-day camp, which we held at Greta outside Maitland and that camp was then prepared for intake of more personnel. So there you are.

What kind of training were you doing at that ninety day camp?

- 26:30 Virtually only basic training ,getting ourselves into view of working as a group rather than just being sent out as soldiers. We were working as a small force. Being accustomed to, well we had to go
- 27:00 we were training not only ourselves but all the support groups of the line of communication, brought food in, the cooks and the storemen, that supplied the equipment, it was mainly a training program for them, rather than for us. We were the medium, we had to be clothed and fed and looked after but all the other people who were
- 27:30 supporting us had to be trained And brought into line, So it was mainly a training area for them.

Where did you go to enlist?

The day I enlisted, we enlisted in Greta in that 90- day camp we put our papers in. I had my NX [enlistment] number.

- 28:00 But we were called up and inoculated and carried on, on the 20th of May 1940. So my papers who my enlistment date as the 20th of May 1940. Although my papers who that I was on war service from the date of that ninety day camp, the date of declaration of war in fact.
- 28:30 All that period I was on war service and credited in my service. But 20th of May 1940 I actually went into camp as a fully organised tank crew member. At the showground I think, no, Eastern Command Victoria Barracks, and was transported from there.

29:00 Tell me about the enlistment procedure and what you had to do?

We were called up, signed on the dotted line. X-rayed, inoculated against typhoid fever, I think that was the only shot we had that day, two injections and

- 29:30 then whizzed off to camp, given, oh issued with equipment then. We didn't have uniforms at that stage we only had our civvies, issued with uniforms and taken from there by transport
- 30:00 to must have been Central railway station and then whizzed off to Liverpool to the camp there.

What were you told at Liverpool about what you would be doing?

Well again it was more as a holding camp. It was a World War I camp, galvanised iron huts. Which was very cold, almost at Liverpool station

- 30:30 and there we were more or less mobilised and given some basic training. Then we did our first movements, we were issued with rifles and things and we marched from there to Ingleburn, it was only about five miles and that was our permanent camp. From there we were issued with vehicles and
- 31:00 real vehicles and our Bren gun carriers and started our real training. Of course there again we had to break in, again it's what my father said, we had to break in a new camp and it was from there that some of the infantry battalions marched from Ingleburn by road to Bathurst and established camps there.
- 31:30 It was more or less a whole period of time where we were gathered in and sorted out rather than a period of training. Our training really didn't start until we got to Cowra, where we had large areas to run around in, you must appreciate that Ingleburn and Liverpool, they were some what settled areas, there wasn't area there for well that's why the infantry marched from Ingleburn to Bathurst
- 32:00 there was area there to move a thousand men on the ground. Whereas in some suburbia and sub rural districts three wasn't room to move lots of a thousand men.

Who was sent to Cowra? How many of you?

There were five hundred of us sent to Cowra, we were the first troops into the new camp. It was eventually held oh thousands, there was

- 32:30 a brigade there about three thousand, there were about six thousand troops when we went to Cowra we outnumbered the civil population which was three thousand in town of Cowra. About six thousand troops and we had area from Cowra out to Wyangala dam that was our training
- 33:00 are we moved all over that country. So we used to train, go out to Wyangala and back again, that sort of thing.

Tell me about that training?

Well the first thing was to teach us to move as a unit. Now a unit was, or sub unit was a troop of

- 33:30 three tanks or three Bren gun carriers. A squadron consisted of twenty tanks or Bren gun carriers in troops of three. So you had to learn to move as a sub unit of three. You then had to learn to move as

part of a larger unit which was part of twenty odd vehicles.

34:00 We had to learn radio communication because you couldn't call from one tank to another. So we were under control by radio. We had to learn map reading so that to leave a certain area and meet, or regroup in another area was part of the training, you can only do this by learning how to read maps.

34:30 We had to learn road reconnaissance, cross country reconnaissance so we moved down to Campbelltown, Camden area and of course there was, we had to learn to use weapons and how to cooperate with the other vehicles to lay down fire. We had to learn to cease working as an individual

35:00 and work as a group.

What was your particular role?

I was a gunner operator wireless operator. but by the same token we had to learn to be a driver or a gunner or an operator. We were interchangeable within a crew. But I was a wireless operator.

35:30 **Can you tell me what you had to do as a wireless operator?**

Well her again to us who were unskilled in radio wireless was virtually a new invention, it was the 1930s I suppose the radio was a radio as a radio came into bearing

36:00 people had radios in their homes. But never were we involved in the mechanics of a radio so we had to learn that. We learned how and why they worked. A natural bent would come forward here, that some of us were much more adaptable than others and knew much more about it.

36:30 So there was a lot of skill, there was the ability to operate a radio, to be a control of a radio transmitting receiving set. So you had to learn certain skills

Can you describe that set to me?

Well a radio

37:00 transmitter receiver it was a, firstly you had to, put it in simple terms. the radio receiver is the same your own radio receiver, whether it's a portable or mobile or what have you. You tuned to your station but we had to tune a transmitter to that same frequency.

37:30 So that as you were receiving a signal you could transmit on ht same frequency so that everyone listening to that tuned frequency, listening to hat radio station as you became a radio station, everyone listening to it, when they were not listening to it could receive the signal sent by any other radio on that same frequency. So we didn't have as they developed later in the war

38:00 that two frequency thing where you could speak over and still receive your signal at the same time. It was only a unidirectional while you were transmitting you couldn't receive and while you were receiving you couldn't transmit. But it gave us communication upwards of twenty sets. So we had to learn the skills of being able to tune your set to that particular frequency to make it absolutely efficient.

38:30 **Where was this positioned in the tank?**

In a tank it was positioned in the turret behind us. In a Bren gun carrier it was positioned above the tracks on the immediately behind the driver and it had an aerial sticking up in the air, that was it.

Where you working with tanks or Bren gun carriers?

39:00 With both. Tanks or Bren gun carriers, both things.. That came into being later on in the war. When we were eventually over the Middle East we had various types of tanks we were issued with. We were, we used French tanks, captured French tanks.

39:30 Captured Italian tanks and generally all sorts of things like that. We were a very versatile unit and very versatile mob of men, yep.

What was camp life like at Cowra?

Well it wasn't...

40:00 Camping was not new to us. During the Depression years and after the Depression years it was normal to go camping. Motels were not heard of. Going well we didn't have the money to go to holiday homes and things like that. So we roughed it all the time, this was normal.

40:30 But you go camping, might only just take a canvas fly with you and between two trees and you set up camp and that was the only place to sleep. So camping during the army was no different to that. In Syria occasionally we

41:00 had tents, mostly we just slept under an olive tree and just, well the worst part of that, when you went into a ploughed field, you had to break up the wads first to make your bed. But there was no, we immediately had a well I'll describe one to you. We were in Queensland before we went to New Guinea

and

- 41:30 There was Max Nichols and myself, another Bren gun carrier. Which was underneath the tree. We stretched the cover we had for that out so we had a cover for where we slept. For water supply we were on a sheep station creek so first thing, a couple of wooden boxes, knock the bottoms out of them and take them down to the creek and place it in the water, pull all the stones ...

Tape 3

- 00:31 Anyway we established the camp. We takes these two boxes down the creek so that we have a well. Now this was all basic training. We weren't taught this, we knew this, this was instinctive. We also built ourselves a fireplace. We were very, very comfortable.
- 01:00 One day our signals officer came around to find out how we were getting on and he sat in my seat in the tank and switched the radio on and there was my radio tuned for radio Germany. Using two biscuit boxes with headphones in which was amplifying it, and he sat back and listened to the beautiful music that was coming from Germany. this was how comfortable we could make ourselves in adverse, we
- 01:30 were underneath a tree with just tarp for a cover and we were, you know, all the modern cons we wanted. Our own tubs for doing our washing, the whole thing. This was, I would like to go back, I think a lot of this was basic genes. My forebears came out here to Australia as convicts and they
- 02:00 were deposited in a strange country, completely foreign to them, they came from London, a settled city and you can imagine bush, nothing here. They had to make their own way and I would say that a lot of the mobility to transport themselves to a new era and survive was passed on
- 02:30 as I say through the genes and people like myself benefited from this. We could adapt ourselves very quickly to a change of situation and survive. Whether it goes back further than that, survival situation in a very primitive form. That this actually occurred to us, that we survived.
- 03:00 In very, very adverse circumstances. If you had read the history of World War II the blokes in Tobruk, the blokes in various places, survived. Because something in their distant genes laid down the basis of survival. There we are. So I put a lot of it down to that, it was a natural thing for us. In a lot of circumstances to survive.
- 03:30 Anyway, we had this camp built this camp, we survived and this was the way I went right throughout the war, no matter where we were, some how within ourselves we had the survival thingo within us, built in. In built method of surviving and we survived. See we went from, I was in the Western Desert, we went from here up to the Turkish border and historically
- 04:00 we had the coldest winter in thirty three years. This was the Stalingrad winter that so affected the German Army. We did things to survive in that cold weather to get by. So we went from Western Desert heat to snow country up on the
- 04:30 Turkish border, snow and ice and to survive because there is something in you and we went from there to jungles in New Guinea, we survived again.

In the training camp what conditions were you begin prepared for?

We didn't know. We thought probably we would go to Europe. But when it sorted itself out

- 05:00 we realised we were going to the Middle East. So from a bit of information from the World War I characters we realised we were probably going to the Western Desert or into waterless country and the advice given to us was water is your main problem. So you've got to conserve your water and learn
- 05:30 to live on a minimum amount of water per day. The result was that when we were living in the Western Desert we were surviving on one cup full of water per day and that was for everything. One of my mates down here, he was with the 6th Division cavalry and his granddaughter interviewed him before he died and she is a TV presenter and she wanted to do a documentary on him and
- 06:00 she said, with this water problem how did you get on? And I could appreciate it because I was in the same boat but with a different unit. You had a cup full of water. That was a wash, a shave, clean your teeth, bath yourself. You say what was that? APC, armpits and crotch and she said, "But didn't you stink?" And he said, "Probably, but we all stank the same so it didn't matter."
- 06:30 **You mentioned you had advice from World War I veterans who had been in the desert? Who did you speak to?**

Well there was a couple of World War I blokes that were in the regiment, who had falsified their age. But the advice was, get two water bottles if you can, instead of one. They gave you a reserve, you get your water bottle filled in the morning, that would last you all day. That was from

07:00 a quarter or a litre of water, fortunately, that would do you all day. I did have two water bottles and that pulled me through a lot of problems.

What did those World War I veterans tell you about what fighting in the desert was like?

Survival. Keep your head down.

07:30 Conserve your energies. Whenever possible sleep, throw yourself down in a heap, and I practised this I, can still do it today. A five minute break will give you five minutes sleep.

08:00 Basic things which we knew anyway from scouting days and this survival thing. I don't think we ever had trouble with people with blistered feet wearing boots, walking for any distance. Because we had all walked in the bush we had all done all that sort of thing. I think probably the greatest thing of course was conservation of water.

08:30 Drink as little as possible and this came as a shock to us later on because it did leave residual problems with kidney problems and things like this. You tend to dehydrate your body. Learn to survive on two meals a day. Scrounge as much as you can.

09:00 If there was, as you were going through various areas, particularly in Palestine, Egypt, if you could purchase fruit and the number one lesson with this, don't eat anything you can't peel. Because of hygiene, lack of hygiene, transmission of diseases, finger-borne, bodily-borne and

09:30 so forth. So if you could, and they did offer us in these countries, hard boiled eggs and oranges and we would swap bully beef for food like that so we could have a change of diet. For instance if they put us on a train and sent us from here to beyond, we would get so many tins of bully beef and so many loaves of bread

10:00 and so many tins of jam, and tins of butter or margarine. Most unappetising. You would swap as much of this for food that was much more palatable. So these were all survival things. they weren't anything that was laid down in a book anywhere, it was pure survival tactics.

10:30 What were your impressions of the World War I veterans, who had survived the first round and then were ready to go back?

They were, we termed them bow and arrow soldiers. They had fought a totally different type of war, trench warfare. Conditions which we didn't experience and so they

11:00 didn't try to tell us of the conditions they lived in. But they tried to tell us more of survival tactics. Looking after yourself although this was not necessary. They had much worse conditions. They suffered from the effects of lice, body lice because

11:30 of unhygienic conditions and lack of ability to bath. We only struck this once when we were in the desert, and we were quartered in dug outs under the sand and we were pestered by sand fleas. This was only about 12 of us at this stage so we just packed up and went and lived in the open because we just wouldn't put up with sand fleas.

12:00 Where we could we got down to the shore and bathed, etc. We were meticulous about keeping our clothes clean. We were very fortunate that we were living in a different era to the World War I blokes. I had a set of Milanese underwear or probably two sets, knickers and a singlet. This was marvellous because you would rinse it out at night

12:30 hang it on outside, a bit of rope or something and it was dry enough to wear in the morning because it was non absorbent and I came back in 1942, came back to Australia, and I tried to buy another set because these were worn out and I couldn't buy Milanese stuff anywhere and our army issue was course material which

13:00 you wash it and it would need days to dry it. See again World War I blokes advice was to travel as lightly, well light, with the least material things as possible. Because you had to carry your things with you, you see the hitchhikers today and it's bloody ridiculous in my opinion. But we could move at the drop of a hat with an absolute minimum of goodies, and travel

13:30 lightly and do as the hitchhikers did, we would wash the clothes out a night and have them dry by the morning this sort of thing. But we didn't carry all the bits and pieces and accoutrements they had. You had eating gear, a dixie that you could cook in, frying pan things, water bottles, a bit

14:00 of extra food. A change of clothing, always had a couple of pairs of extra socks. But by travelling light you could, you were much more mobile much more quickly organised.

What do you think made these World War I men want to go back?

I don't know. I don't know.

14:30 Accepting the thing that was driving us after the war to mix with the blokes who knew, who understood you and you understood them. That was the, the worst feature of coming back into civvy life after the war was that

- 15:00 you had been, you as a person, had been isolated from the civilian life for three or four or five years and you had absolutely nothing in common with the civilian world and I think a lot of these World War I blokes wanted that again. I suffered from this. I went back and rejoined the army in 1945 or something and I was, went through the ranks and ended up an officer.
- 15:30 Really because I missed that life and there were a lot of blokes, World War II blokes who went back and I went back because, a lot of World War II veterans went back into the army after the war.
- 16:00 There were two reasons, one was there were a lot of people in the army now, after the war, who were National Servicemen and we felt that we could pass on our experiences and knowledge to them and also that we were mixing with our own kind again. Instead
- 16:30 of talking to people who had no idea of what war was all about, the whole thing, we were a, we were kindred and we shared the same experience and knew the same thing and we were also passing on the information to these kids. Teaching them soldiering in the field form,
- 17:00 the ability to, teaching them survival that's all. Because a lot of these kids, kids of that age group now and a bit older have no idea of survival of, well the emphasis is on taking risks these days. To test yourself to the utmost, go right to the line. We learned
- 17:30 you don't go to the line. You stay back from there because that's a line of no return and this was the thing that we learned right through, there is a thing of no return. You don't go beyond that. You go to it but you don't push yourself over it and that's survival pure and simple.

18:00 **What battalion were you part of?**

I was with the 7th Division cavalry regiment, that was, we were an elite unit whose task was the same tasks that the light horse had in World War I. We were a reconnaissance unit, we were armed, we were using armoured fighting vehicles. But our main

- 18:30 task was to be very mobile. Go out and survey out the land. Check on map accuracy and generally do a big reconnaissance job. That was our main task, it wasn't actually get in and do the fighting. It was

- 19:00 to support the blokes who were on the ground fighting by supplying knowledge to them.

Could that be any unit in 7th Division? Or other divisions?

There was a cavalry regiment in 6th Division, one in the 7th, one in the 9th Division and it was a particular role to play. We were described as being the eyes and ears of the divisional commander.

- 19:30 That was the role we had. The role that I actually had a major part in was one day we were in Syria after the Greek and Crete campaign. We were expecting the Germans to violate the treaty they had with Turkey and move, see the

- 20:00 Germans were hell bent on capturing the Suez Canal. That was the reason for fighting in the desert to capture Cairo and the Suez Canal. After the Greek and Greece and Crete thingo, we expected them to violate the treaty with Turkey and come down through Turkey through Syria, down to Palestine to take the canal. It was a very, very lightly held area.

- 20:30 To realise this we were sent to Syria and our task, we were to do another Tobruk at a place called Tripoli. To hold, if the Germans did break through, is to put a break on these lines of communications, the Tobruk thing and the Tripoli thing. So I went with a

- 21:00 a small group, there were four of us I think. Went right up to the Turkish boarder, mapping the road and all the obstacles and mapping and placing on the map the delaying areas. So if the Germans come through the areas we would put in a delaying force to hold him back. That was just one of the roles we had, one of the last deeply involved in. Anyway it's getting a bit complicated.

- 21:30 **We'll talk about those in detail later. Were the men in your regiment grouped together because they had specific skills?**

Yes.

- 22:00 Because they were primarily all light horsemen in civil time, in between the wars. So they had done a lot of this. On horseback, and they were all country boys anyway and they had survival skills of their own. They had knowledge of unknown country, virtually, of how to move through that country,

- 22:30 use maps, the whole thing. Yes, we were all well skilled in these things. We were chosen for that treason.

You weren't a country boy?

No. I learnt awful fast.

In training?

Well I had a lot of acumen. A lot of interest

23:00 and a lot of incipient knowledge. I was interested in history, interested in geography and so that moving into these areas was no great difficulty for me and I had a natural bent for this sort of thing anyway.

Before you arrived in the desert what did you know about that part of the world?

Nothing

23:30 very much. I wanted to see it, I had a great interest in Egyptology. That I wanted to see, I wanted to feel it. But I did. Yeah, more of that later.

You talked about the images of refugees in the newsreels etc, how much did these images

24:00 **play a part in the sense of adventure in wanting to get over there?**

Sense of adventure was mollified by the knowledge of danger. Educationally to see these places with a background of wanting to understand, rather than wanting to criticise,

24:30 see we Australians lived in a very isolated area. We, so many Australians don't know how the other half lived. They tend to

25:00 judge everyone else by their own standards rather than look at the standards of our existence and very, very hypercritical of other races and nationalities. I was not like that, I wanted to find out how these people lived. There is all little side issues on this.

25:30 But I wanted to learn, as one of my fundamentals, I wanted to learn and I did. It was a wonderful experience learning. I mixed with people I learnt part of their language, I was able to converse with people using a little bit of foreign languages I knew.

26:00 **At that time in Australia what did people think about what Arab life was?**

They were wogs. Pure and simple. No understanding of their culture, the reasons for, or the, just, they were just wogs.

26:30 They didn't speak English, they didn't dress like us, they didn't eat our food, they are bloody wogs. This still holds true today, mind you. I'm Australian, my ancestors were convicts. I have no ties with any other countries but I am very critical of the narrowness of the Australian. What stimulated me, and of course this is breaking away from

27:00 this all, but what stimulated me was that I met people from Europe, travelling through central Australia who said to me, "We've met Australians overseas and they say to me, 'What's Ayers Rock like?'" " I don't know. I've never been there." And this is true, a ten day trip in Europe, boom, boom, boom,

27:30 well I've 'done Europe', marvellous. You know, they don't speak English, can't get a cup of coffee. This mentality still pervades our society here. You don't go to a country to become part of them, to understand, to mix with them and I did and I can tell your stories about, you know, this

28:00 will come out later on.

This bond of mateship formed quickly, can you describe who your mates were in that regiment?

Yes, there is two of them now, particular, both incapacitated, one's lost a leg and one's lost the use of his leg with a stroke. 'Tubby' Flint, we became mates in Egypt. He was sent

28:30 to me I was on the phone picket and he was sent to me as a runner. Tubby was three days younger than I am, he was born in Cowra. He's a country boy. He married about the same time as I did. His

29:00 daughter is living in Southport Queensland. She's had a kidney transplant. His son is living out from Parramatta, the other son is living up the Central Coast. Tubby's wife died of cancer, he remarried. His wife died about two years ago. He had a stroke.

29:30 **How did you form a bond with Tubby? What was your relationship with his?**

We lived together. We shared the same things, and I'm telling you this because this is how close the bond is. I know his family and all about it and he knows about my family, all about us. It's a bond that defies any description, it's closer than a brotherly bond. It's

30:00 spiritual, psychological bond if you like. Tubby rings me every couple of days from up the central coast. He's just been to a wedding of his grandson. The link is intangible but it's there, it's very, very strong. How can you explain these things. I met Tubby in the desert and we have been

30:30 friends ever since and this is true of another bloke I served in the tank corps. He lives in England. We phone each other every couple of days. He had adopted my granddaughter. Yes I wrote to Beth and said, "Seeing you are up in England, contact Col Dermott." Called him and he said, "She is a lovely girl. You

should be proud of yourself and she used to visit us, my wife and myself, before my wife died

31:00 and I have adopted her as my adopted granddaughter. Do you mind?" And I said, "No." And he said, "If I die, all my possessions go direct to her." How do you explain these things? It's a bond borne of hardship of fear, of

31:30 all the human emotions, they are all there, and you form a bond and this is why we were so isolated when we come back to civilian life. You've got nothing like this in civilian life. This other mate in the nursing home out near Bankstown and I know all his family life, he knows all mine.

32:00 He had a stroke up in Central Coast. His niece, where he was when it happened, rang me and told me all about it and been there and saw him in hospital, and saw him down in the nursing home where he is now. His wife died, but before she died she was very ill, he was caring for her, he would get four hours respite care a week.

32:30 I would meet Tubby in Sydney, I would take him to the nearest club. Our a few scotches into him, then he'd talk his head off. Take him down and get a feed and send him home again. Now only one day a week was all we could do it. But we did it. How can you explain this. It's a brotherhood if you like. It's inexplicable.

33:00 It's there.

Can you tell me about when you received orders to leave Australia?

Yes we got ten days leave, I think it was ten days, pre embarkation leave. We were in Glen Innes by that time.

33:30 No we were in Cowra, we got embarkation leave. I came home and got our affairs in order and I think Shirl and I went away for a couple of days to sort of consolidate our relationship. We got engaged and

34:00 I spent a little bit of time with the family. Then it was back to Cowra. A lot of our chaps took their ladies back to Cowra with them. One of my particular mates did. Took Mary back with him. I spent the last few days there. We had Christmas dinner at Cowra camp and then on the train and down to Darling Harbour, board the Queen Mary and across to the Middle East.

34:30 **Were there many men who got married or engaged in that pre-embarkation leave?**

I don't know but there was, Frank did, David did, Col didn't, I did. I would say about thirty per cent of the men, about a third got themselves engaged or

35:00 committed in that period of time.

Why?

I was asked that only just recently. Because fundamentally, and I can only speak for myself, I think it happened right through. You needed an anchor. Something to hold onto back home. I think this was the reason, you were going away to the unknown, and you wanted

35:30 somebody to hang onto, something that meant something, rather than just divorce yourself from everything back here. Some used their parents as an anchor, that was a big thing. But I think most of us were more adult than that. We wanted something more tangible to hang onto. I think that was reason,

36:00 just you needed something to believe in.

What discussions did you have with your fiancé with your future? About the possibility you might be killed?

None, we didn't talk about that. That wasn't going to happen. We did talk, we, Shirl and our discussed our children what we wanted, a boy and a girl, and the names we wanted for them.

36:30 That was about all. The future was a big question mark and we didn't get stuck into that at all. That was in the future and it was, as I say, a big question mark. Get home first and see what you can do. Because I got two, I came home twice, came home from the Middle East. That's when we got married. Then I went up the islands and I came home

37:00 on a hospital ship and spent lots of time in hospital and there we were. We got ourselves established in that after I came out of hospital. Anyway that's jumping the gun.

What news were you receiving about the progress of the war when you were on pre-embarkation leave?

We had very good, because we were an armoured unit

37:30 we had all our wireless sets, radios and because we had radio operators with them we were attuned all the time to Reuters news agency and we were getting it by Morse code and we would sit in front of the set and write, transcribe the Morse code, sheet by sheet and it would go out. The blokes would read the

latest news. So we had a pretty fair idea of what was going on all the time.

38:00 **Can you remember what significant events were going on at that time?**

Things were very grim in Europe, of course it was down to the Brits and, in England being bombed heavily. There was very little fighting going on, because the 20th of May, when I went in, was Dunkirk. They pulled the troops out, there was a phoney war going on then.

38:30 And the bombing. Russian convoys, they were sending ship loads of stuff on the convoys. Fighting in the desert was going on. The thing that struck me and has always puzzled me is information we got

39:00 which didn't come through normal channels. There was a form of ESP [extra sensory perception] going on. We were, we knew things were going on and that there was no publicity about them and it's always puzzled me. I was up in the islands and Shirl's brother-in-law was in the Middle East and I wrote to her to tell her that Morrie was on his way home.

39:30 That's when the 9th Division came back from the Middle East. We were given that, we weren't given any information, we were isolated from news. but I knew that Morrie was coming home. Don't know how it happened, but we knew a lot of things like that happening.

40:00 We called it latrine telegraph. There was information coming through that wasn't logical. It was true but not logical. How it got through the only explanation I can give is that there was a certain amount of ESP going on. Mental telepathy. One day I am going to start asking questions about this.

How much rumour was there?

Rumours? There was always

40:30 rumours. Always rumours, home by Christmas and all sort of mad things. It was treated as levity. It was the normal thing, now what's the latest rumour today? And it was a joke. No one believed rumours but it was always, it was should I say, a break in the monotony of nothingness. You can always create a good rumour.

Tape 4

00:33 **Tell me about your trip across on the Queen Mary?**

Yes. Well we went aboard the Queen Mary, this big luxurious liner and horrors of horrors we were conducted down to E deck aft. It was just above the water line and the whole area had been cleaned up. No cabins just

01:00 a large area and we camped there. No beds, a mattress thing on the floor. Being Australians we were not impressed with this at all. Can't live in a place like that. So a great number of us picked up our beds and we went and lived on the, not boat deck, A deck.

01:30 Now the Mary was unfortunately for us a cold weather ship. It meant that she was closed down and air conditioned right throughout and the temperature was too high and even up on A deck, we had the space and we were out in fairly open area, but it was still last in.

02:00 You could get out on fore or aft but you were enclosed there. Anyway that was our quarters. I was nominated for a mess orderly which did not please me one little bit and I had to, we had I think it was five thousand troops aboard and so there were three meal times. In stages.

02:30 My job as mess orderly was to feed one table full of troops one meal, three meals a day. Once I had fed them I was off duty. This was the part I didn't like but however I went ahead with this and my first day I went to the kitchen, the galley and come back

03:00 with a large bowl of porridge and serve each man and they all complained, "There is no salt in the porridge." So I, the next morning, I put a couple of handfuls of salt in the bowl and the cook looks at it, "What's this shit your putting in here?" A bloody big Scot. I said, "It's salt." He said, "Is there another bloody Scotsman out there?"

03:30 So we looked after them. But the good part came after this. All the people who were on duty onboard the Mary from all sorts of tasks from up on the bridge, signallers, watchmen the whole thing. We were all given a little blue pass which took us anywhere on the ship. Those who wanted to went down to the engine room and I found it very comfortable to go

04:00 up on the viewing bridge, just under the bridge, where there were comfortable chairs and I could say, "Bring me a beer please." And I could sit back in luxury and look at the surrounds and drink my beers up there, it was heaven. Because I'm a bit of a snob anyway, but that was beaut. I didn't have to line up with the blokes on the after deck and get me billycan full of beer, I was served beer. No I had a

04:30 quite a good trip across on the Mary and then, the meals where I wasn't required, the second and third

sitting. I was free to go wherever I wanted on this ship. This little blue pass it was magic, armed guards every where, "Oh a pass, righto away you go." I visited the first class swimming pool and all the officers and their ladies could swim.

05:00 I wasn't very impressive but I did it. I had the open run of the ship, it was very, very good. That was the trip on the Mary.

How long did that take?

About five, about ten, twelve days. I'm not sure. I could check. I've got my diary here. But we won't go into that now. No not very long.

05:30 The longest trip I think was, we went, left Sydney Harbour and because of the, there was a raider about, we went south of Tasmania, down into the Antarctic and across the bite to Fremantle. That was probably the longest part and the coldest part of the trip, going down into the Antarctic. Then from there on it was scoot up to Colombo or Sri Lanka.

06:00 And we transferred ship there, because the Mary was a bit big to take up the Suez Canal.

What are your memories of Colombo?

Colombo? There were three of us and we went ashore at Colombo and we got on a rickshaw and we went up to the Bald Face Hotel, the second best pub in Colombo and we went up to

06:30 the lounge where there were palm trees and chairs and the whole thing and we drank several bottles of Abbott's lager, brought to us by a turbaned gentlemen. Little turban man. We played the snob in Colombo, we did it properly. Then we went down to the bizarre and the markets and met a lady down there who was befriending troops.

07:00 I don't know if she was Australian or English. But she took our names and addresses and corresponded for a few days. But she was playing very much the lady, not, very much the lady in Colombo and being friendly with troops as they pass through. More or less an information service. She was a delightful lady.

07:30 That's the story of Colombo.

Where did you go after there?

We went to, we came from Trincomalee where we transferred ship, we went across direct to the entrance of the Suez Canal at Port Tewfik and we had our first bombing raid there and they took us off the boat and put us on the train. We went up to the Suez Canal to El Kantara.

Could you tell me about that first bombing raid?

08:00 Oh yes. We were a small ship called the, she was a troop ship that took troops to the Boer War, that's how old she was. I can't think of the name, her sister ship was in Sydney. Anyway, and I was volunteered by the sergeant major on gun duty, anti aircraft gun and

08:30 I complained most bitterly. I said, "I was mess orderly on the Mary and now you put me on the, yuk, yuk, yuk." He said, "Break up yourself, Grinyer." I said, "Oh, yeah." But I found that it was a British ship and the rules were different, troops got two meals a day, breakfast and dinner. But the duty crews got three meals a day and

09:00 on top of that we got early morning tea, morning tea, afternoon tea, and supper. Beaut, so, you know, bucket, go down and get a can of milk. Bucket of tea, sugar, biscuits, the whole thing. Past all these blokes sitting on the deck, "What have you got there?" You know, gun crew. We did

09:30 very well but the first night on Port Tewfik I was laying back in my hammock, I had the hammock swinging, the little rail on the back of the ship. Slung across it, the bottom of it touched the deck but that didn't matter. It was comfortable and I was laying back in there and a thunder storm, thunder storm?

10:00 Oh thunder storm. So I pulled the hammock over so I wouldn't get wet and the lights in the sky and I realised the that the thunder was bombs and the lights in the sky was anti aircraft gun fire and burst lights, and the things flying across were airplanes. So I kicked the gun crew out, opened up

10:30 the breech of the gun, opened up the ready bins of the ammunition and went over and rang the bridge and said, "Gun crew here, guns ready to fire" And the answer came back "For Christ sake don't fire the bloody thing." So we didn't. I don't know whether they were frightened, well obviously if we started firing we would have given our position away and the ship's tied up. They

11:00 sank several ships at Ismailiyah and blocked the canal there. That's the reason we had to go up by train. So that was our introduction to the war. Loud bangs and search lights and all sorts of things happening and action stations.

11:30 **What were your thoughts when this happened?**

Bloody hell. You, with training you act instinctively, you don't think, you realise what's happening, you

are being bombed and so you act instinctively. That's the reason I threw the breech of the gun open. I had never handled a gun like that before but I knew what to do and that's what you do you act instinctively.

12:00 That's the whole of you training to act instinctively, you don't stop to think. You act.

Where did you go after here?

We went to El Kantara, across the Suez Canal in a punt and were fed on long sausages and sandwich and a cup of tea and put on another train and arrived at Gaza

12:30 or, well near enough to Gaza anyway. At two o'clock in the morning and taken to our camp. There was tents and four or five inches of liquid mud and we slept in that overnight. I put a groundsheet down and slept in the mud and then woke up the next morning to this. We couldn't believe that this was supposed to be the desert.

13:00 It had rained and it was a sea of mud, yeah.

What were your impressions of the landscape?

In Palestine? Well I was only there for three days and I volunteered to go up the desert and we were marched to Barbera Station and got aboard a train and choofed off up the desert.

13:30 That was an experience. This was probably the first real experience I had. We dropped off the train at 2 o'clock, the army seemed to be delighted in this 2 o'clock in the morning jazz. We were dropped off the train at a place called Kingy Maryout. But we had no idea where we were, they just put us off the train there.

14:00 Two o'clock in the morning it was cold. I was miserable, we built a little bit of a fire and cuddled around that. Shivered for the rest of the morning and I can remember Johnny Simmon at day break, Johnny stood up, "This is where you girls shouldn't be here" And he stood up and he did a complete 360 degree traverse.

14:30 Looked around there and he said, "God, miles and miles of bugger all being blown about by the wind." That was the Western Desert, not a tree not a building and empty horizon, 360 degrees, miles and miles of bugger all being blown about by the wind and it was our introduction to the Western Desert. Eventually they took us out of there and put us in another camp.

15:00 Just outside Alexandria. But first impressions, that was it.

How about the locals?

there weren't any locals there, there was nothing. Here again was a complete introduction to the desert and the people. We would go for a route march into the desert.

15:30 There'd be nothing but sand and sand dunes, rocks and all the odd things. Not a tree, not a blade of grass to be seen and after a while we would knock off for a smoko, half an hour's march and everyone down and have a smoko and out of the sand around up would appear Arabs, burnous and the whole thing. Selling eggs and tomatoes.

16:00 Where these people came from we haven't a clue, but they just appeared out of nowhere and this was common after that, this was the normal thing. I don't know whether they followed us or whether there was an oasis nearby or what. But out of nowhere, and talk to anyone who had been to the western desert, they'll say the same thing, these people appeared from nowhere.

16:30 Selling tomatoes and eggs. They, I don't know whether it was typical of the Middle East, but tomatoes as we went through Syria, everyone grew tomatoes. Italians, everyone grows tomatoes. Even out here. In Egypt everyone had tomatoes. Don't know why, whether it was just that they would grow well there. That was the impression I had,

17:00 my first impression of Egypt and the Western Desert, just people coming from nowhere and miles and miles of damn all. Carry on.

What kind of training were you doing at this stage?

We weren't doing any training, we were set up to

17:30 take over some captured Italian tanks. We had had a couple of severe defeats in the desert and we were very, very short of equipment and the Italians had surrendered a large number of tanks, I don't know, I've heard figures up to four hundred tanks. Up at a place called Bada Fon [?]. These were being brought back, there was talk about sending the Australian army division over there and

18:00 some of these were destined for them before they arrived. Some of them went to a British regiment and we were going to take some ourselves to replace what we had lost. So we were headed for there. but in the mean time they dumped us at Marsa Matruh and a bit further on, we thought we were going up to Ceylon. But this didn't happen we were stranded in the desert, we were

- 18:30 lost and dropped off and no one knew where we were, We certainly didn't know where we were. So we found a vehicle dump and we resurrected a motor cycle and two trucks. They were damaged but we fixed them up so we could use them. We then went looking for equipment so we armed ourselves with a lot of captured equipment.
- 19:00 And got ourselves thoroughly organised, we were a small armoured unit. Self contained, now this was the old story of survival. Self sufficiency getting yourself organised, we implemented all these things into one group and we were thoroughly organised. We were a little fighting unit. We used to go down daily to the beach and have a swim and so on and some one rumbled us and they declared an amnesty and we questioned
- 19:30 they allocated an area, that we surrender all of our arms and put them in the amnesterial area and the next thing we know we had overtures from a unit called the long range desert group.

Tell me about the amnesty?

- 20:00 Well the same as the police had asked, an amnesty to surrender all your arms, the same thing here. They asked us to surrender all our arms, because these were all illegal, we had equipped ourselves, and equipped ourselves very, very well. But some one had rumbled to the point that we shouldn't be doing this sort of thing. So they declared this amnesty and this was when the long range desert group came into the feature and they
- 20:30 were looking for volunteers to, this was the forerunner of what we call the SAS [Special Air Service] now, the mob that were in Middle East. These people had a base in the Qatar Depression, they went out in trucks and they harassed the enemy from behind the lines. There was a, an appealing job. We all volunteered we all wanted to go to this. But
- 21:00 the army stepped in would not allow Australians to be taken over by another nation, the Brits in other words. So we were bundled into trucks and sent back to Egypt, back to our own unit and much to our disgust we were, oh before this we were, we were destined to go to Greece. The Greece campaign was on and the Greeks were very short of equipment.
- 21:30 And so these tanks that we were going to get were to be sent to Greece and actually they did go. So we were bundled up and sent back to Alexandria and put on 24 hours notice to go to Greece. That was the standby, 24 hours, prepared, had to be prepared to move within 24 hours to go to Greece. By this time the Greek campaign was being folded up by the
- 22:00 Germans so they sent us back to our unit, went back via Palestine back to our unit and arrived back there and much to our commanding officer's disgust, that he didn't want us to go up the desert anyway. He wanted us to remain with him. Because we were all highly trained skilled men. So that was that one.

Did you manage to get these captured tanks?

- 22:30 We didn't get very far at all, the Libyan, just over the border of Libya, we were destined to go to a place called Charring Cross. Now I don't know where it was, it's a scene of a major battle there. But we were supposed to go to Charring Cross to pick up these tanks. But this was all cancelled in the end. So we just stood around the border of the Libya, Egypt, that when they sent us back.

23:00 Where was the enemy at this stage?

Benghazi. There is a story there to but this comes later on.

At this point what kind of work were you doing? Were you just moving north?

We were waiting to pick up these tanks, that was our task. then when that fell through we were just

- 23:30 disbanded and sent back to our unit. Our original jobs anyway.

What did you do from then?

We went back to Palestine, then back to Egypt. The unit was outside Cairo waiting. Now the

- 24:00 story of events from now onwards. We arrived there and we were equipped, we had tanks we had everything we needed and the 60th, our sister unit had just come back from the desert and they were un-equipped, they had lost all their equipment or it had all worn out and they were waiting with us. Now the Benghazi handicap just started at this stage. The Benghazi handicap doesn't ring a bell for you?

24:30 Can you explain?

The Germans were at Benghazi, the Italians had been defeated and the Germans were ready to make major push to come down and hit the Suez Canal and our troops that were up at Benghazi had worn out equipment, had been up, a mighty dash up there and their equipment was

- 25:00 unserviceable and the Germans mounted their attack and the British had no alternative but to fall back and it was rather a hazardous thing. It was rather a major push by the Germans to come through. We

were in Tobruk at the time but they were pushing to come right through the canal.

- 25:30 We were destined to go up there to prevent this. This was known as the Benghazi handicap and anyway, 60th Cav [Cavalry] had been in the desert, as I say, had desert experience and there was a toss of a coin, which unit was up. The 60th Cav or the 70th Cav, and we lost and a friend of mine, a chappie I served with prewar in the tank corps at Randwick, had gone to the 60th Cav and
- 26:00 coincidental, one of those things, the tank he was given had my name written on all the ammunition boxes in it. He had my tank. So anyway he went up the desert and of course they were pushed back very smartly, he tells me later on that the tank broke down, they had just been issued with two complete tank tracks which they had hanging over the vehicle and they spent all one night sitting in the tank with the
- 26:30 German punsters going through passed them on the attack and then they walked for five days to get back to base. It would have been. Anyway because we had no equipment I was claimed by the gunnery instructors to go as an instructor. Back to the barracks at Cairo as a gunnery instructor and the rest of the regiment
- 27:00 went on duty in the Suez Canal. This was interesting but very boring. The Germans at that stage were dropping mines into the Suez Canal. The task we were given, well I wasn't but the unit was given, was by, trigonometry, to determine where these mines had been dropped. So by being
- 27:30 on both sides of the canal with compasses as the mines splashed into the canal. they would take a bearing on it, a compass bearing and later when they, the three compass bearings and the line of them, that pointed them to the intersection where that mine was. So that I was
- 28:00 location of every mine that was dropped in the canal. That went on for about ten days.

You were a gunnery instructor at Cairo? Can you tell me about that?

Well it was a major English barracks in Cairo and we were converting from one type of tank to another. We were training

- 28:30 gunners on a power traverse. What was, instead of mechanically or physically winding the turret around on the traverse, had a power traverse, which was oil-driven and you had to train gunners to use this new equipment. A9s, A11s and A13 tanks and
- 29:00 that was part of my job to do that and in between times to take them on the gunnery aspects of the tank. So we still got one in.

What was Cairo like at that time?

Well we found, we frequented mainly restaurants to get a good feed, a good meal.

- 29:30 And nightclubs, which were rife. Cairo was alive, Cairo, very, very odd. They changed sides very quickly. They were pro German tonight and if the Germans got a bit of a cutting they were very British tomorrow. So you didn't know which way they were going. But the nightlife
- 30:00 in Cairo was geared to officers coming back from the desert on leave and it was a very hectic night life. As a matter of fact three of us went to Cairo opera house to see a production of Very England. All this thing was happening in Cairo in the middle of a war. It was a total change of aspect. However

What were the nightclubs like?

- 30:30 Can-can dancing, traditional dancing. Bags and bags of grog, pink gins and Tom Collins [cocktail], the whole thing. Many officers in full dress, evening dress. Women resplendent in evening gowns, etc. Jewellery the whole thing. Completely out of place to us.
- 31:00 But we could handle it. But you know, it was complete juxtaposition of lifestyle from living in a hole in the desert to all this lavish. You could walk outside that and come in to the bazaars in Cairo and to our standards, very
- 31:30 very basic. the women were only chattels. The life was very, very basic. We were not impressed with that at all. We liked better than the basic Fellahian Cairo offered. It was the, two forms of life, basic crude,
- 32:00 well just basic and really lavish living, and you could take your pick.

What kind of things would people do in Cairo? What would you do?

We, well we were only there for a short time. Went to the bazaars had a look.

- 32:30 Went and smelled and tasted the basics of Cairo, which were not appetising. Went out to Heliopolis, which was the cultural centre of Cairo. Mainly Greek, French attitude there. It was coming back
- 33:00 into our form our cultural background. These people were, well it was almost the culture we were used

to. Went out to have a look at the pyramids, but not impressed.

Why was that?

From what I had read and I had read on Egyptology.

- 33:30 I was looking for a more sophisticated form of culture. I found the unfaced rock was not attractive. The tombs were not as,
- 34:00 not sophisticated is the term. Just very rough. Jewellery of the period, I found very coarse. I was expecting more finesse to their art. I was disappointed in all that. I looked at Celtic art since then and
- 34:30 a lot of that is much more sophisticated than I thought of the Egyptian. But no, I was not impressed with that at all.

What about the food? Can you remember the first time you tasted the food?

You'd go into a café or a restaurant and order steak and eggs and you would get a dish of steak

- 35:00 and tomato and lettuce and all the dressing and chips and, "What about the eggs?" "The eggs will come, the eggs will come." And you finished you steak and tomato, etc., and the next thing you get a plate of eggs and tomato and dressing and chips the whole thing, steak and eggs, could not conceive that was one dish.
- 35:30 Their native cooking, well the only equivalent is kebabs here and the, long meat, etc. Today to me it's not appetising and of course we were against, all of our forebodings. You don't eat anything that has been handled by the natives.
- 36:00 Because of lack of hygiene and so forth and you look at the stuff and say won't be in that. But by the same token you'd get steak and eggs which were griddles. It was lavishly applied with garlic. We while we were there we acquired a taste for garlic, which I have lost since,
- 36:30 thank goodness. Because even exuded the body odour, smelled the garlic anywhere. Those sort of things that, we wanted the type of food we got from home. Mainly because we were starved of it on army rations. This was probably a fundamental thing
- 37:00 within our, any in our body that we wanted the vitamins and the food that was not necessarily Australian but gave us something different from bully beef and biscuits. It wasn't very nutritious.

After being a gunnery instructor where id you go from there?

At 2 o'clock in the morning or something like that they

- 37:30 moved us, we went to Cyprus. We were driven along the Sweetwater Canal to Port Said and that was a shock because on all the wars, all the troops they brought back from Greece, and they had all been evacuated in a hurry in just what they stood up in and
- 38:00 mostly they were exhausted and they loaded us onto a very old tramp steamer and we set off that way and these people had come from that way. So we didn't know where we were going, but obviously going in the direction of Greece. But we ended up on Cyprus.

Can you comment on the condition of those troops you saw coming back from Greece?

- 38:30 They were army evacuees, they had been pushed out of Greece. Mostly they were only dressed in battle dress and a great coat. They had nothing else with them, excepting a rifle and they were all haggard and bearded, they had been through a very rough time. They were brought out in all sorts of ways. submarines
- 39:00 troops ship on naval vessels, anything at all they could put them on to get them out and save the army. There is more about that later on when I get into Syria. But we...

Did you know at that time what had happened in Greece?

No, no. We didn't know what was going on there. We knew

- 39:30 that these people had been pulled out of Greece and that they had put a lot into Crete and they were fighting there and we surmised, and it was only surmised, that we were being sent to Cyprus and we were a sacrificial sheep if you like. There weren't enough of us to do any damage to the Germans if they invaded Cyprus and we would all end up in prisoner of war camp
- 40:00 probably. So much so that when we got to Cyprus, there was group of us that made a quick reconnaissance and found the boat that we were going to try and get away on. So we were, we knew that we were destined for nothing very much. Things were grim, very grim at that stage. Although we knew there was only a thousand of us on Cyprus.
- 40:30 And if the Germans did as they did in Crete we would have had no hope in hell. We were, well as I say,

sacrificial goats. We were there just to wave the flag, that was the task we were given on the island. To dress differently each day, to travel the entire width and breadth of the island.

- 41:00 Let the locals see us and give the impression that there were millions of us there and from what I hear subsequent to the war, it worked. The Germans thought we were a heck of a lot of Australians on Cyprus and they had such a grumbling from the Australians on Greece and Crete that they weren't going to touch us anyway.

How would you dress differently?

We wore tin hats one day and the slouch hat another day, black berets another day, bear headed another day.

- 41:30 Wear shirts one day, a jumper, any sort of vary our appearance. So we were not realise that we were, we, there was mistake made when we came out of Syria. We were, they pulled us out ...

Tape 5

- 00:33 **Can you describe your first impressions of Cyprus?**

What I saw was I thought we were back in Australia. There was this great Mesaoria Plain with hundreds of windmills on it and it was just like the western plains here.

- 01:00 Wheat fields and a beautiful temperature. Very, very nice, a British colony therefore spoke English. The main population was Greek, quite a heavy population of Turks.

- 01:30 Yeah, the girls were like Australian girls, just the same, it was like walking back home here. The culture was very, well it was Greek culture, and it's very, very similar and we got on very well, the girls all spoke English. They were presentable and we enjoyed their company, we found out about their basic culture.

- 02:00 A lot of the girls were prostitutes. We enquired why and again we ran into Greek culture, where a girl had to have a dowry to be marriageable. Because of the war and the fact that all their commerce had folded up, their families had told the girls to get out and make their own way.

- 02:30 No money in the family to give them a dowry, sort themselves out. But we treated them like ladies and enjoyed their company. We weren't, weren't sex mad, weren't over there to race off with anything we could find. But we found them

- 03:00 like the girls next door and we enjoyed their company; it was beautiful. Really for the first time we arrived in May we had been across to the Middle East for 12 months in amongst Arabs and that type of culture and then we suddenly found ourselves back in the culture we understood and we enjoyed it, really enjoyed it and they like us. One of my mates was

- 03:30 invited virtually every night to one of the homes and he said, had little, just as an aside from all this, they had little crackly things for hors d'oeuvres, I thoroughly enjoyed them and I found out what they were. They were sparrows, skinned and deep fried. Crunchy.

- 04:00 I became very friendly with a Turk. A chap my own age we corresponded after the war for a while. He introduced me to a street vendor who sold nuts and all sorts of things, fruit, introduced me to some of the ladies in the area and I spent quite a bit of time

- 04:30 with these girls in their lounge room with a bowl of fruit in front of us and it was beautiful to be in a convivial company. It was no strings attached it was beautiful.

How did you meet these local people?

- 05:00 I met them in a bar. There was two bars the Rodney Bar and the Kit-Kat Bar. The Rodney Bar was ours, we had taken that over. That was our rendezvous, we would meet there and the girls would be there and you would just pair up and have a beautiful evening dancing and laughing, drinking quietly. Same as you would in a, not a pub here,

- 05:30 wrong atmosphere, in a oh, I don't know where you meet the same sort of thing here. In a more select hotel where there was a lounge and quiet and no blaring hip hop music and that sort thing. Just a quiet relaxed atmosphere and that's what we wanted. See we had been through all the

- 06:00 the unrelaxed atmosphere. We had been at the war and to come back and sit back just like your own lounge room in your home it was very, very pleasant. You could just forget the war behind you and just enjoy it.

You mentioned there were prostitutes on Cyprus? How did you know they were prostitutes?

We told us. You know, that's easy. The

- 06:30 I suppose the climax was the British regiment was there, they treated all women like prostitutes, they had just come back from India and they had absorbed enough of the culture that women were only to be used and they were
- 07:00 applying the same principles on Cyprus as the women were only to be used, and as a women, well she is only a prostitute anyway and what's it matter. We had experience, Max and I, one of our, it's going back. The girls that had been known to us, one pound sterling, twenty-five bob Australian,
- 07:30 we could set them up in their own residence or whatever, they were ours. But they reserved the right to be their own woman when we weren't there. One of our mates had one of these girls all set up, she was his. But Len, due to misbehaviour on his part, ended up
- 08:00 in jail, into the camp, only for ten days or something. But Max and I would go and visit his lady, only for company and we were in there one night with her and a bloke bashed on the door and burst in and he was a Pom and all he wanted was sex and he wanted her rightly or wrongly.
- 08:30 He grabbed her, she fought back, and Max whipped up behind him and pulled a half-nelson on him and she immediately started using her nails down his face and so forth. I grabbed her and carted her off and threw her face down on the bed and sat on her and keep her down, waving her arms and legs and carrying on, while Max hurled this bloke out and we quietened her
- 09:00 down and continued our evening. We treated her like a lady in distress, irrespective of the fact that that the Pom was treating her like a prostitute, we treated her like a lady and ended up having a quite pleasant evening with her, looking after her, drinking coffee with her. This was a thing with we Australians. We treated the girls as
- 09:30 ladies and maybe we were naïve, I don't know. But, however, that's the way things worked out.

Where their brothels on Cyprus?

Not as such no. No these girls had their own rooms and lived their own life. There was a peculiar thing, I have never worked out, and it still existed

- 10:00 I have seen films on Cyprus since then, where people older people and the earlier generations tend to live in what appear to be caves. They rock dwelling sort of thing, not a house, but hard to explain. But these were quarters under
- 10:30 an existing building. Like in the basement and there were rooms or apartments underneath there. Odd but however, we accepted that. That was the key, accept a culture as it is. You don't sneer at it and say, "Oh god fancy living like that."
- 11:00 The culture was there, that was it and you moved into it, you moved with the people and you accept them and you become accepted, not two different groups of people.

You mentioned a German invasion was imminent, how was this culture prepared for that?

Cloying to us.

- 11:30 Because we were Australians because we spoke the same basic language, because we integrated with them, we were their saviours and it put us in a very, very invidious position. That we weren't invaders we were saviours and it was a very, very peculiar position to be in. We were
- 12:00 saviours, only way you could put it, they looked to us to protect them.

Were their physical preparations being made on the island? Like wire on the beaches?

We, I was one of a group. I seemed to be involved in many things which were not normal army routine. But I was one of twenty who was trained in explosives to destroy seven bridges had the Germans invaded.

- 12:30 Our task was if the Germans invaded because we had tanks and Bren gun carriers and we were mobile was to race to the point of invasion, then pull out. The preparations you refer to, they had prepared on top of Mount Olympus, three months rations and wiring that we were to retreat to the top of Mount Olympus
- 13:00 and then attempt to escape. This was orders to us and so we worked on that line. I was one of twenty to blow seven bridges behind us as we went up the mountain and we had our own escape planes organised I had a pack made up with rations and my escape gear in it and a
- 13:30 boat picked out that we were going to try and get out on. We did pick up survivors from Crete. Blokes there, there was so much of my history to the Middle East campaign that overlaps the sort of something happened. I was telling you about the Benghazi handicap, and the lapse there. I met a German after the war who was with the German Africa corps and
- 14:00 we were talking about the place and I said we were up the desert when the Benghazi handicap started. He looked at me and said, "What is this Benghazi handicap?" I said, "That was when Rommel and us

had a race to see who could get to Cairo first. We won." And he said, "You think this was funny? This was serious." German attitude, we regarded it as a complex

14:30 engagement between two forces, who would get there first, we won. But oh no, it was Teutonic, it was totally different and this was carrying on after the war. Imagine other Germans and he had a picture up on his wall of the stoker dive bombers and I said, "Oh stoker 87s." He said, "You know them?" and I said, "My bloody oath I know them." He said, "Ah, war. That is a man's game."

15:00 After the war, horrifying.

After the defeat of the Italians at Benghazi what was the feeling amongst the troops about the Africa corps and the German advance?

Well it's interesting because we were circularised with a former order that

15:30 Rommel had established a mystique around himself and this was to be counter minded by our troops that we were not to fall under this mystique that Rommel was invincible. Because he was coming down the desert by this time. This was, the British were subject to this feeling that Rommel was invincible but we weren't The

16:00 Australian is a peculiar bloke, he believes in himself. We were better than anyone else and we were rather amazed at this attitude that we weren't toward Rommel being an invincible general. This time they got Montgomery out there to counteract, to create a mystique to Montgomery to counter the mystique

16:30 around Rommel.

Where do you think this mythic status of Rommel came from?

A gentlemen, another gentlemen who served with the Africa Corps I met, and he spoke perfect English and he gave me a photograph of Rommel.

17:00 It was given to the troops up in the Western Desert and I've given it to my son now, but it was presented to him by Rommel. This is how Rommel got his mystique; he presented himself to the people.

How did that reach the Allied troops?

I don't know.

17:30 On the radio, on TV the other night, was on Rommel, and they were talking to the British troops and this chappie said that they were ordered to, "No," he said, "we referred to the Italians as Itye-s and the Egyptians as wogs but we referred to the Germans as Rommel."

18:00 Now he was a Brit and he was recipient of that and that it wasn't the Germans who were coming down it was Rommel and that mystique had filtered through, as far as we were concerned, they were bloody Jerries down there. We had some German prisoners of war who were quite reasonable. At that stage they were quite convinced that Australia was gone. That the Japanese were going to take us.

18:30 **Where did you meet those German prisoners of war?**

In prisoner of war camp. In Egypt.

Was that before you went to Cyprus?

No it was when we came back. That was on our way home.

What were the circumstances of you meeting them?

We were just going past the prisoner of war camp and it was noticeable that mainly Italians in the compound and

19:00 in a corner were a group of Germans. They were, they had nothing to do with them, they were Germans, much the same we were Australians and oh Jerry, oh Australia finished and then don't you believe it. Because of some reason

19:30 there was an affinity between the Germans who served in the desert and the we Australians. Now one of my mates who served with us right through Johnny Shaw. He was voted for the bank of New South Wales I think and he used to do periodic visits to Germany on business for the bank and he was welcomed with open arms into the beer halls anywhere as a member of the Australian Africa corp.

20:00 And his last trip up there, he said, "My one delight," referring to a night in a beer hall, he said, "Drank them all under that table. I was the only one left standing."

Why do you think there was this mood of gentlemanly behaviour in that desert fighting?

Basically a common heritage, they were German, we were British. Didn't necessarily mean the same language but there was a common, and bonded together

20:30 by the fact that we were in the desert we were all away from our homes. As I was talking to you earlier about having an anchor you know, the Germans had an anchor in song, Lily Marlene. We didn't find anchor in song but we had our anchors back here. But we were

21:00 in a neutral territory in North Africa, they were from Germany we were from Australia. There was a common language, English, where we could converse. There was a mutual respect, there was no respect for the Itye, he was just an Itye, a wog. But there was a mutual respect, Australia for the German and now this was right through until after the war. You talk to people who were there, one bloke, he said, "Now where were you during the war?"

21:30 And I told him and he said, "Oh we were in an eight-wheeled armoured car overlooking Cairo. I was looking at Cairo through my binoculars." Could have thrown a stone at you from where we were. So there is this common

22:00 basis. Peculiar, this was war, this what happens in war. Inexplicable but it happens.

What were your living conditions like on Cyprus?

We had a tent and a big slit trench and in

22:30 that photograph a hidey hole where we had the radio sets buried in a bomb-proof shelter. We then used our initiative and we, there was big thing and because we used our initiative and incentives and odd things we dug holes in the wall where we mounted batteries, and

23:00 from the batteries we had wires so we had electric light. We had a primer stove mounted in a niche in the wall. So that we could make coffee and so forth and it was a good hidey hole when you were on night patrol or anything like that, we just didn't live there we lived out in the open in a tent, and lived there right next to my tent I had a deep slit trench and this

23:30 was normal, no I did, was if, if we had a raid at night I could just roll over and be in the slit trench and it was good thinking.

Can you describe what a slit trench is?

Yes a trench deep enough to stand in hopefully, about eighteen inches wide and about six feet long or longer than that if necessary, it could hold two or three men so that

24:00 you were under cover in the event of a bombing raid. A bombing raid, or bomb attack. there were two types of bombs they used, and anti personnel which was exploded about three feet above the surface of the soil, and the normal bomb which would penetrate to about a foot or a couple of feet into the soil. The shrapnel from these would be deadly

24:30 there'd be all sorts of junk. Explain the story that will clarify this. There was a heavy bombing raid on the air field at Cyprus. One of my mates who was in a motorcycle troop took off on his motorcycle across the air field to render a (UNCLEAR) because he was only one of quite a number. He said he got halfway across the airfield and his bike stopped and he fell off it and he had a

25:00 piece of shrapnel that went right through the motor of his motorbike and jammed it naturally. This is the sort of thing you had a slit trench for, to protect you against. That would have only been eighteen inches off the ground. It would have gone through the motor of the motorcycle. So imagine if you were standing there, you would get your legs chopped from underneath you. So you determined you should have enough of your body under the ground that

25:30 you'd wouldn't be exposed to be hit by shrapnel. Now there is an illustrative thing of why we had the trenches.

Can you describe what the air presence was of the Allies and the enemy?

Air presence, we had number three squadron of the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force], Louie Truscott squadron defending us on Cyprus in Hurricane fighters. We also had all the aircraft off HMS Illustrious.

26:00 These were torpedo bombers, torpedo bombers which were aircraft carriers, aircraft carriers... No, can't think of the name of them but they were based on Cyprus. They were

26:30 secretly and still a secret but we believe they were fitted with radar and they used to go out hunting enemy ships at night. They were a target for the bombers we had the Junkers 88 flying across from Rhodes. Rhodes was the closest island, it was a Greek island only about a hundred miles north of, that one there.

27:00 North of Cyprus and they used to attack us from Rhodes. The Vichy French at the time before the Vichy French capitulation. They used to fly from Syria to attack us with American Glen Martin bombers and French fighters. So that we were at all times subject to aircraft bombing attacks. With very, very little warning. the island of Cyprus is only sixty miles by forty miles

27:30 now it didn't take long for aircraft to fly over the, the borders of the island to be come to the centre where we were, you could see it. So we had to be on the alert all the time, bombing raid were, well one

night we were mounting a picket in Nicosia and bombing

28:00 raids eventuated and we hightailed it to the nearest slit trenches within the town itself. These things happened, you had to be prepared for them the whole time.

What sort of anti-aircraft support did you have?

We didn't. No anti-aircraft support. No radar on the coast. All we'd get, we'd hear the planes coming over

28:30 and we were informed that our own planes our own defensive planes were not so much to fly above three thousand feet. We would expect the enemy planes to come in much higher at ten thousand, twelve thousand feet which they did. We only witnessed one dogfight where they shot down one German bomber. There was good

29:00 there was good fifth column coverage. Bombers would come over and immediately after attack we would put an air umbrella up of about three hurricane fighters flying over the island. But as soon as they came back to land, the Jerries would put in another bombing raid because they weren't that far away and as

29:30 soon as they were told that our fighters had come down to refuel and re arm, they would come across. So our people always at a disadvantage. There was never an attack put in while we had our planes in the air. We were on the defensive all the time..

What existing infrastructure was on Cyprus for the Allies?

Only the

30:00 commercial airport at Nicosia and they one that they built for the Swordfish torpedo bombers for the Illustrious, which was very well hidden very well concealed. The Germans never found it from the air.

How was it camouflaged?

I don't know I didn't go anywhere near the place. Well there was not necessary to go there. A few of our people on duty, they to refuel their planes

30:30 a group of our people volunteered to transport the petrol, to fuel them, and to assist in putting the torpedoes into place. Apart from that we didn't go near the place.

Given the threat of invasion can you describe your daily routine?

31:00 We were on double summer time, that was daylight saving. Was an hour but we doubled that. So we would be astern, armed ready to move and as I said before our task was to go to meet an invasion force. We'd be ready to move before there was first light, before the first appearance of the sun

31:30 we would stand by ready to move for the next two or three hours. We would then knock off and have breakfast. Go about our daily duties then

Which were ?

Wash and shave first up. Get ourselves something to eat, maintain our vehicles, mount a wireless watch. We were on wireless watch from the time we stood to

32:00 then from there onwards we maintained an hourly wireless watch with all the troops who were scattered over the island. So before that, the wireless watch would merely be, if there was a landing I was, I was controlling it, I would come on the air and alert everyone and give them their orders. After we stood down, there would be an hourly wireless that everyone, each one

32:30 would come on the air on the hour at the hour and the hour that they were listening and waiting for orders.

What sort of equipment would be required for a wireless watch?

Well we had our own radio. One radio set to each troop. Every vehicle had a radio watch. The wheel vehicles

33:00 probably one wireless to every six vehicles, they would be in a group of a convoy of six vehicles. So they would have a wireless communication. No that would be it.

Can you give me an example of the nature of communication?

Well

33:30 come onto transmit and call, give your call sign. Identify yourself as to who you were and the code that we used was the, what they call the, oh send, just send the Morse call sign and then

34:00 a signal to say either have nothing to report or whatever it might be and answer me and in numerical order each troop was numbered and all the wheeled vehicles were numbered, so that in numerical

order they would come around in sequence and acknowledge the signal and then drop off and I can always remember

- 34:30 we had one troop out at Kyrenia in a, they were an anti-tank mob and I called them, I called the whole thing in, and I didn't get a reply from this bloke. So I called him individually and I kept on calling him because I didn't get any answer and eventually he answered me, this
- 35:00 was all done with Morse code and I asked him where he had been or why hadn't he answered and his laconic answer was just sent back the message 'Sleep, sleep'. A very, very intelligent gentlemen. He had, he was financial bloke from Sydney and
- 35:30 he was eccentric. We called him the oldest corporal in the world and he believes in his sleep, or something like that because he want on call and when he came in, he told me he had been asleep. That was the way our communications worked.

You considered yourselves sacrificial lambs,

- 36:00 **what were your feelings about being taken prisoner of war?**

I think we were resigned to that, but we were also, rightly so, we were going to have a go at escaping.

How did this escape plan work?

Well we had a boat picked out and we were going to head due east.

- 36:30 We were only sixty miles from Turkey. The sequel to that was when we were in Syria, we were, again I was involved, I don't know how come, but I was involved. One of our officers was detailed as a receiving officer who was called officer in command of Greeks and
- 37:00 every night a train load of, truck loads of Greek escapees would be brought into our barracks in Aleppo and it transpired because I was talking to each people. They were of all nationalities, Brits and Australians and whatever, who had escaped from Crete and Greece.
- 37:30 And they had come back through Greece, through Turkey as Greek refugees, they were all dressed in civilian clothes. Now because we had met these afterwards, after we had been in Cyprus, we knew that we could have escaped too. There was avenues of escape and these people got out
- 38:00 we'd picked up escapees from Crete on Cyprus. They come across by boat, we picked them up and sent them back home, back to Palestine by plane. But there were escapees and we had picked some of them up.

Had you received instructions to defend Cyprus?

No not individually

- 38:30 we may have, may have higher command, but we had no individual instructions for the defence of Cyprus.

So was your role to report intelligence when the Germans landed?

Oh yes, we would have let them know, yeah.

- 39:00 **The British were contemptuous of the locals, what was the relationship like between the British and Australian troops?**

We had nothing to do with them. Nothing to do with them at all. No it's, it was animosity. We objected to their concept of discipline

- 39:30 they could not accept our concept of discipline which was based on mateship. This mateship is a peculiar thing. We just couldn't handle them at all. Their ideology was just totally foreign to us. So I couldn't handle them. They, when they
- 40:00 sent us to Cyprus, they sent a letter to the governor of Cyprus. He was a knight, someone Battersby and the note, well the order was that, how did it go, "Sorry, but we are sending you a regiment of Australians. Sorry,
- 40:30 we are sending you a regiment of Australians." And Battersby replied, something or other, but I am married to an Australian, that is a regiment. He had married a girl from Tasmania of all things. So we were on first great terms with the governor of Cyprus. But this apologetical of British high command.
- 41:00 Now, "Sorry we are sending you some Australians." Now we were third-class citizens, and the British troops treated us as such, we were colonials and it still exists. British, Brits tend to come out here to teach us a way to live. Teach us the way things are. It's a peculiar mentality which has
- 41:30 gone on for two hundred years but, they are odd people.

Tape 6

00:32 **How did you come to leave Cyprus?**

We didn't know at the time, but in reading history that period, Churchill was very upset about Australian troops being detached from the Australian forces and being put under British command.

01:00 Menzies was very upset about Australian forces being detached from the Australian's and put under British command and the general hoo-haa about it all and they whipped us out very smartly. That was the main reason. According to what I have read now the, they didn't call it crisis, the problem was over.

01:30 Germany was fully committed to attacking Russia and the pressure had been taken off the Middle East. So we were no longer required there. So they gratefully restored us back to Australian command in Syria.

Can you tell me about that notice you were given about leaving Cyprus?

We were told that we were

02:00 pulling out of Cyprus. I was talking to Captain Yetten [?] and he said, "You're leaving next Saturday," and I said, "No, no, no." They knew when we were leaving but we didn't. We were taken, we handed over all of our equipment to a British regiment that came in after we left. We were then taken down to the wharves at Famagusta.

02:30 We were embarked on a destroyer, HMS Hubbard and we left and raced across to Haifa. Let again about 2 o'clock in the morning, and we arrived in Haifa about 11 o'clock the next morning. Or the same morning. Now that was all rather hush, hush, rather rapid and away we went

03:00 just like that. Our job was done. But we had had a remarkable time there because my immediate officer was a World War I bloke and he had been all through there. He was an historian so we went over all the ancient ruins on Cyprus, there was a Greek colony, there was a Roman colony, there was part of the

03:30 oh, Muslim empire. It was cared for by the Knight Templars of St John. King, oh, who was it? Anyway he married the Queen of Cyprus and built his honeymoon at the Castle of Colossus and we climbed all

04:00 over these places and saw them all. So my interest in history, my ability to walk over these old ruins was absolutely astounding. Very, very regretful to leave there. Only spent about four months there, but had a marvellous time. But was regretful when we left the place.

04:30 **When you arrived back did you go onto Syria straight away?**

Yes we landed at Haifa, went straight up to Mount Carmel and from here went to Tripoli then straight up the coast into Syria to a place called, oh, little town, anyway and from there we went eventually to Aleppo. Where we

05:00 were stationed for quite some time.

How did you travel to Syria?

We were put in the back of trucks and trucked up there. Most unglorious. When we were at Tripoli we met up with the 60th Cav again and we left them in Egypt, and they went up to the Benghazi handicap. We ran into them and they handed all their equipment over to us. We gave them

05:30 ours and eventually we got all that back and out of that we got quite a few French tanks, captured tanks and all their equipment and then we moved up to Tripoli with all that heap of junk.

What were you told about what you would be doing in Syria?

We weren't told anything, we went up to garrison the place after the Vichy French and then when we arrived in Aleppo

06:00 we were then briefed that we were expecting a German breakthrough and we were, we sent out two patrol from there. One into the Syrian desert to find out what the going would be like if the Germans came through and, there was a back door through the Syrian desert. Another

06:30 patrol went right up to the Turkish border to check all the roads up there. Wilbur Idlib, another chap and myself on outpost duty there, and we received a notification of the German, the Germans had come through as tourists on one of the roads. Now I don't know if you know much about the tourists but

07:00 this was a, an attempt to infiltrate, we had tourists going up into Turkey. While we were at Aleppo we were witness to quite a few very odd things that happened during a war. In Aleppo, New South Wales government railway locomotives and

07:30 rolling stock were coming into Aleppo and then being repainted and sent over the border into Turkey. Airplanes were being, fighter planes were being flown in with British and American markings. They were painted over and the crescent put on and then taken into Turkey. We were army in Turkey, quietly,

but officially, at the same time we were sending tourists into

08:00 in civilian clothes up in cars into Turkey to have a look see. The Germans were doing the same thing, they were sending tourists in civilian clothes down into Syria to have a look see and anyway. While we were at Idlib, we were notified that one of these trucks had come through on one of the roads and we were able to contact our own people and they intercepted us anyway.

Can you tell me how you actually found that out?

08:30 Well there was a phone call to us at Idlib telling us that a car full of Germans, tourists, had come down the road. We contacted our headquarters in Aleppo to let them know and they certainly acted on it.

What was your role at that time?

I don't know what my role was, I don't think I had one. I was sort of being put here and there to do things here and there

09:00 and never looked at. I was detached from my, from the regiment somehow, in that case there was Carton Spade and myself and we were living in a little village. On our own and, we were cold it was a very, very cold winter and we contacted the local village chieftain to buy a bag of

09:30 charcoal from him to stoke up our own little fire to keep warm and that was only contact except by the telephone. So we were just two of us on our own and what role we were playing I don't know. Just these odd things that happened during war time.

So when you were sent to that place what had you been told to do?

I don't think we were told to do anything. We were at Idlib, we were doing a job, we were manning the telephones, communications.

10:00 That was it, we were in charge of communication. I had an interesting time there, I met two of the locals and as I had been doing at other places, meet them and invited home and had meals with them. They were, I don't know, probably Arabic, I don't know. They could speak some French and I

10:30 could speak some French and that was our communication. But it was an interesting time.

Can you tell me about that visit to someone home?

Well it was, to begin conversation I pulled out my wallet with all the photographs of Shirl, my fiancée. They were very, very interested, they were Muslims and photographs,

11:00 graven images, forbidden in the Muslim world. They were very interested in Shirl in a swimsuit, and Shirl in a dress and odd things. Then they started telling me about their own experiences. This younger chappie, my age, he was engaged to a girl in Aleppo, but he had never seen her. Never seen a photograph of her, wouldn't see her. Then his mate who was a couple of years older, he chimed in that he was

11:30 married, and he in broken French and in pantomime, he explained how he had a devil of a job on his wedding trying to get a peek at this woman who was under the veil, trying to get an idea of what she looked like and the whole, he had two children by this time, but it was very interesting, the difference of cultures and yet they spoke, they were, what interested me most was

12:00 they were living in a situation in a city which was predominantly French with a heavy American. I've got to go back here, Syria was part of the French empire. But the Americans had introduced American universities to the place and so you had two different cultures functioning in

12:30 a Islamic situation. So you had three cultures. I met a kid there about nine or ten, he spoke nine languages and he numerated American and English amongst them, and he could speak American. But here was a culture clash of people living in a fairly free French atmosphere in

13:00 an Islamic situation. Now in Aleppo we noticed quite a number of the wealthy women were wearing perfectly transparent, black yashmaks, the half veil. So that they were wearing a veil but it was completely transparent, rather attractive. The, I went to a store, similar to Woolworth's here, I wanted to buy

13:30 some needles do some mending. I could speak French to the girls, they could speak French to me, and they were just like going to Woolworth's here. it was interesting because how all these cultures interacting and here was I in the middle of it all talking about things, how these two chappies were obeying Islamic law and couldn't see the

14:00 woman until they were married. Never met her, no photographs of her, purely arranged through families. So it was quite interesting to.

What was the visit to their home like?

The house was walled, complete wall around it. The men's quarters, or the man's quarters was

14:30 apart from the house. His mother only visited to provide food. We were, when she brought the food she hammered on the door and then scuttled off and he left the time to go back home again and went to the door and brought the food in. So he was segregated from the female side of the family and lived as a bachelor in his own family home,

15:00 odd.

What was the name of the town?

Idlib.

You say you were manning the telephones? Can you explain the set up?

We had a gentleman there who went by the nickname of 'Automatique', 'Automatic' in English. He was in charge of the telephone communication of the place. So he used to drop into the place

15:30 perhaps every two or three times a day, just to talk and chat and drink coffee. But we had a telephone on the wall which connected us through the local telephone drill, got girls on the exchange, through to well, we'd go direct to Aleppo to our headquarters and so it was quiet interesting to pick up the receiver, turn the handle and have this girl answer and you wouldn't know whether to speak to her part Arabic or

16:00 French and invariably we'd ask to be put through to Aleppo and usually French terms, Alep. Then get onto a switch girl there and ask to get to the Australian military in Aleppo and so it was rather complicated to get a message through. It worked.

Where were the messages coming from that you had to pass on?

16:30 I don't know. I never knew we just used to get messages and that was it. I would say that we were working on a spy system. We were, very secret service so we didn't know, didn't ask questions just did it.

What kinds of messages were they?

Very cryptic usually, just that a car had been spotted going

17:00 through so and so and do something about it and we did and you'd just notify the headquarters in Aleppo just with the basic information that was all the needed and they acted upon it. Where they acted or who they acted to, I don't know. Probably a higher command along the way. Probably the provo [Provosts - military Police] corps or the military police, they would handle it from there.

17:30 **Who was Automatique?**

he was the local telephone technician, went by Automatique. He spoke very, very rapidly, hence his name, Automatique.

So was he Syrian?

Yes he was a civilian.

He was a Syrian local?

Oh yes. He could speak French fluently a little bit of English. Enough that we

18:00 could communicate with the whole secret of it. He drank copious cups of coffee and ate all the goodies we could provide. It was an interesting experience. When you look back on it it was, I spoke to one of my mates about this well after the war. We were in a cups admittedly, he is dead now. I said it's very interesting that we lived three lives.

18:30 We were kids we grew up, went to war, we came home and had to re establish our lives again. In fact in our lifetime we lived three different lives and this was part of growing up, to me anyway. I found myself. From a child who was dictated to by my father, I was never told anything

19:00 and then told by the teacher that your education begins when you start to think. I went through a period of growing up rather suddenly. Twenty year olds kicked into all this. You either grow up suddenly or you go along with it and I went through a process of growing up and mixing with a lot of people and learning a heck of a lot. It made me who I am today, someone who

19:30 thinks observes and works things out and feels somewhat of an international. I can take my place in any company.

Where were you living in this town?

We were living in a room. It was exceptionally cold, it would freeze every night and we were living

20:00 in a room in a house which we sub divided by hanging a tent around the place. We would use the are, there was just enough room for us to have two beds in, and a brazier and a kerosene bucket full of water. the water would freeze, the side of the can would freeze every night. But we needed this for our

drinking water and ablutions etc and we needed the fire to stop it freezing completely.

- 20:30 I can recall one night we emptied a cup of tea out the door. The next morning it was just a sheet of ice. We had to make ourselves very, very comfortable. We did, again, being Australians, I use that advisedly, it was so cold it was best to go to bed. We found a local tailor and
- 21:00 we had palliasses which normally you stuffed with straw. So we folded our blankets so that we had three underneath, three layers underneath and three layers on top. Then it was put that inside a sleeping bag and sewed the whole lot up and so we had a sleeping bag lined with six blankets. Double each one and they were very, very warm. So
- 21:30 you met the conditions and found an answer to sleeping with three blankets underneath and on top, or something like that. We really made ourselves comfortable, and had ourselves really snug there. Bit of a blow when they pulled us out of it. Really made a nice little cosy home for ourselves. Coffee on the boil when you wanted it, oh yes. That's the secret of survival.
- 22:00 **How long were you doing that job for?**
- Ten days. Yeah, we, they said for ten days.
- What else did you do in Syria?**
- We went to another place then, a place called Kassab, again we made, or I made friends, a couple of us made friends with local inhabitants and they turned the house into more or less a small café and we used to go there for the odd meal. They were Armenians.
- 22:30 And they lived in the shadow of Mount Cassius, below in the valley was the original village of Kassab, which in 1922 the Turks invaded and massacred the inhabitants. So we became involved with Armenians there, two girls there. Yefnegi was the older one and Angel was the young one and they were
- 23:00 like sisters to us. Go there for a meal and these two girls would join us and they were being educated too probably. But again, we involved a family, people of different culture, different attitude. So I met Greeks, Turks, Armenians, Arabs, and
- 23:30 got on all right with them, no problems. Didn't cut my throat.
- What were the living conditions like for locals with a war going on?**
- They were, the poorer people, the agriculturalists were starving. The free, the Vichy French had been through, and lived off the land and they took all the stock
- 24:00 and odd things. We, before this freeze started we were moving up through Syria, and we would camp in an olive grove and at meal time we would have bully beef and biscuits, or a loaf of bread or whatever and each field was walled in by stone wall, and all the local kids would sit
- 24:30 themselves on the wall and being Australians and being what we are, have a mess tin full of food, a couple of slabs of bread, a couple of squares of butter, cubes of butter, jam or whatever, and look at these kids and oh, slap the bread and butter together and
- 25:00 "How much jam have you got left? "Half a tin of tin of jam." "Righto I'll take it and give it to the kids." And they would race off home they go straight back to their parents. This was the level indicative of their starvation period. They were, there just didn't have food. So we'd just look after these kids, and when it started to get cold, we'd find warm clothes that we went using.
- 25:30 We were always getting parcels from home, a scarf or balaclavas, extra socks. We'd give them to the kids. This was not a generous attitude it was just, poor bloody kids are cold, look after them.. So we weren't currying favour or anything like that, but this happened. We did it.
- 26:00 We did, on this reconnaissance I did up to the Turkish border, we were told to discover what food is on the way. How much grain is in the place and so forth. So we would pull into every village and ask and you would also find someone who spoke French or a smattering of English and cruise about, well we wanted to know how
- 26:30 many horses they had, how much live stock and we'd find that they had nothing. Was on this trip that we went right up to the Turkish border and we had two motorcyclists with us and they couldn't hold on their bikes on the ice topped roads they kept falling off. So we left it behind at one of the villages, when we came back we found the bikes stacked up, they had
- 27:00 lived in beehive shaped mud huts with a hole up the top with a fire underneath it, ventilation. We found the bikes leaning against one of the huts when we went looking for them and they were inside and the locals were feeding them on cake, cake that they had cooked on their little stove, and chicken, but that was all the food they had, and they were willingly sharing it with out blokes.
- 27:30 The, I don't know what nationality these people were, whether they were Armenian or Turkish or something in between. But when the, our motor cyclists were coming in they were still coming on their

bikes, the males turned out of the village and through their own sheepskin cloaks over the boys and carried the bikes in for them, you know, just, a mark of respect or a mark of something that these people

28:00 accepted us or something.

When you were travelling north, how were you travelling?

In the back of a one tonne truck. I had, to give you the picture, I had the back of the truck open, the sides open. The score was, the, what

28:30 my task was, was to draw a line which represented the road from point A to point B. Now this could be yay long or two or three things. So I would draw a map say from here to say Mosman, straight line. Now I start off from here and I put a speedo reading against that, a start point and as I went along, there would be a church on the side of the road

29:00 two hundred yards off, I would nominate where that was and a speedo [spedometer] reading and come to a spit bridge, nominate that bridge, speedo reading, and some note on it, that it could be opened or closed or only two cars wide and so this would go on for the entire trip. I'd be observing the road both sides of me for any

29:30 natural situation, like a pile of rocks of a cottage or something like that. Nominate it and jot a position on that line with a speedo reading and so at the end of the day that could be transcribed onto an army map and the way we would do that is lay a sheet of celluloid over the top and draw the road follow the shape of the

30:00 road and then on that look for the thing I had noted. So they would know that that was, say twelve kilometres, along that road. So that would go right along and in the end there would be a complete map of that road and the sides as far as you could see and while either side, only two hundred yards we went through a cutting, all that would be

30:30 recorded on that in detail. Now that was the task I had.

What kind of landmarks were you writing down?

Hills, mountains, rock slides, cuttings, watercourse, dry or wet watercourse. Bridge across it all that sort of thing. All very important at that time.

31:00 Or roads or tracks that lead away from it. Yep.

Were you told what the purpose for that information was going to be ?

Oh yes, in the event of a German movement down that road we knew exactly what was where and so we could put troops into tactical positions on that road. Because we'd know that something would slow down, they would have to bridge a creek or something like that. So that

31:30 that detail would be there and you would know that that would be a possible point of halting it or something like that. It gave our commanders a very clear picture of what the road conditions were like.

On those mapping missions who was with you?

I had a driver and a sergeant and I was trooper, just one of the

32:00 lowest of the low. But we were skilled, that was the whole point, we were skilled and of course when we got up to the end we pulled into a village and the entire village pulled out to welcome us. Took us in to feed us, again, one room, as long as tow of these rooms, with a table down the centre with cushions and a knock on the door

32:30 and wait for a while, let the girls go away to bring in the food and this was interesting because none of us, the four of us could speak their language, and they couldn't speak any of our common language. So we were stuck, so we would offer cigarettes around, drink their coffee. Very thick Turkish, sweet thick Turkish coffee. Then we ran out of conversation and they brought the

33:00 food in and we were down to miming and I know I was sitting up the end of the table and the mookta, the chief of the village, was sitting up the other end and they put this great steaming bowl of stew in front of me or whatever it was and we had Lebanese bread or black bread. So I looked at the gentlemen up the end and of course no

33:30 knives and forks, no cutlery at all. "Ah dawn." And he threw off a piece of bread, rolled in the hand like that, close it down, and like that and we ate. It was interesting very interesting, this clash of cultures. Learning from other people, not wanting what we were used to but living

34:00 with them. When we left we had to excuse ourselves by miming again that we had to go. We couldn't say that, the entire village turned out, dogs and all to wave us farewell. We were honoured guests, beaut. Again, education, something you learn again, and mixing with people and not being frightened of them.

34:30 Just because they can't speak our language it doesn't make them, ah.

Had you been taught anything about the local cultures you were going to?

No, no, it was all completely new to me. But I went open minded, I didn't go with a closed Australian mind. Everyone had to be like me. No I went completely open minded.

35:00 And interested in their culture, interested to learn about them.

Did the army provide anyone with information about?

No, we were the ones that were seeking and gathering information. No one else, we were the spear head, we were up the sharp end sorting it all out.

What other missions did you do in Syria? Was it mainly reconnaissance mapping work?

Yes.

35:30 Gathering information sorting it all out. Going on extended reconnaissance, looking at things. We'd done a bit of a run through there, we had been to Baalbek and Damascus, I went down the street called 'Straight'. What attracted me there was in every bazaar every one of these, they were roofed

36:00 arcades, whether you have seen them on documentaries or not, but roofed arcades with little shops selling copper, brass, trinkets, all the handicrafts. But in every one of these there was a fenced off area bedecked with flags and so I found a bloke in Damascus and said, "What's this?" He said, "St George." "St George?" "Yeah, patron saint." "Righto." But everywhere we went

36:30 in the Levant, back in Tripoli, Beirut, where there was a bazaar there was a tomb or a thing to

37:00 St George. I have never worked this one out yet, but what St George was doing over there I haven't a flaming clue, probably was killing dragons or something. But these little shrines with flags bedecked to St George.

While you were doing these trips were there other troops around?

We were the furthest troops north. There weren't any troops further north than us.

37:30 Mainly the, see an infantry battalion is about eight hundred men. Virtually on foot. So you get a brigade which has three battalions to it. Then you get a division which has three brigades. That's a hell of a lot of men and they are a lot to move and so

38:00 usually they are stationed in a static position where they can move to another static position, in the event of anything, any demand on them, but whereas we were in Bren gun carriers and tanks and we could travel at thirty miles an hour and we were in groups of three. So we were very mobile. So a troop got an order to move

38:30 within minutes you were gone and quite some distance away at that time and so even a squadron where you had twenty tanks or Bren gun carriers could move very, very rapidly. So we could, also, having a tank or Bren gun carrier, it was your home, all your bits and pieces were in that, so where you moved you took that home with you. No carrying anything, that was all in your vehicle with you.

39:00 So you were very, very mobile, so we could go up the desert or up into, up the Turkish border or out into the Syrian desert and you were self contained. So it made us, it was not, like what? A civilian, I can't think of a civilian equivalent to it, but you could do these things and go to all sorts of places and do all

39:30 sorts of things.

What did you have in your vehicles?

Had your bedding, personal effects. Emergency effects, we all had, we'd gathered primuses from various places, we modified to run on petrol and they often burst into flames anyway.

40:00 We had them, you had your radio which was your life line and there was petrol on the vehicle so you had all these things which saved you carrying a lot of junk on your back. You couldn't carry a bed roll on your back, three blankets and the odd things you stuffed in it anyway to be carried. So a pair of boots, all sorts of funny things you stick in your bed roll because

40:30 it was being carried on a vehicle and we were self contained and being self contained we were very, very mobile.

How long would these missions take?

Oh you could be away for ten days or overnight. Depends upon how far they wanted us to go and what they wanted us to do. Mostly they were virtually only a two day

41:00 trip. Overnight and scouting around and you come back again.

What was your base like when you came back?

In Aleppo, in the German and the French barracks, these were two or three story barracks, they had beds in them, latrines and showers, all the things that were necessary for a permanent stay. But yes we had, you had your cookhouse and mess and all that sort of thing. Cold showers, be completely self contained there but if you wanted out on a particular job you went out on a particular job. We sent a patrol out into the Syrian desert just over Christmas. They shot up a whole herd of ...

Tape 7

00:32 **Can you tell me about the Christmas you spent in Syria?**

Where do we start with that one. We arrived in Syria in Aleppo and there was this, pass this book over

We'll look at it in a moment?

We arrived in there, now half our regiment came from Queensland and half from New South Wales.

01:00 And we arrived in Aleppo and it's beautiful weather and I said one day, "I think it's going to snow, there are snow clouds." And ha, ha and we woke up one morning and there was snow everywhere, it really snowed and we were not expecting it, it was as I said before, this was the winter that stymied the Germans in Russia, the coldest winter in thirty three years. It really stopped the Germans

01:30 advance onto Stalingrad. We didn't know this at the time, but looking back in history that's exactly what happened. There we were, there was snow on the ground, Started off we had been on a route march and my mate Carton stopped for a smoko and picked up from a pool of water, a sheet of ice. This was the first indication

02:00 that it was very cold. I've got a picture in there of Carton holding up a piece of ice. So we, from that time onwards we realised that it was going to be quite cold, we didn't expect it to be as cold as it was. So this was going to be over the Christmas period, so our lords and masters decided that Christmas had to be celebrated.

02:30 So we, cooks were all organised to put on a function, we bought in bottles of good stuff and things. So we had quite a Christmas party. But it fouled up because just after the Christmas thing a truck load of Christmas parcels from back here in Australia arrived, the mail had come and

03:00 it was normal sending mail to us overseas, that tins would have been the ideal thing and then you wrap it in calico or something like this, so it was all sealed up. Well I got a parcel, god knows when it had been sent, it had a fruitcake in it, but all the fruit had begun to ferment. But we were unwrapping these and we got the order to move

03:30 to come back to where we were going. Didn't know we were going to go to Burma, because the Japs were in the war by this time and Burma was being invaded and we were going there. So there was consternation between receiving parcels and having a Christmas party and sudden movement when we have got to pack up and go and

04:00 all these Christmas goodies had arrived and we had to stuff ourselves with these because we couldn't carry them. Quite consternation, that was Christmas. A period of good cheer, a period of problems. What do you do when you are over stacked with goodies, and you can't eat it all. Anyway that was the Christmas there, but quite good. I've got a photograph taken in that period, I took photographs

04:30 of events and situation, not of me and a couple of these I will show you.

Was there a visit from Blamey?

He arrived up there yes, but I didn't see him, I wasn't interested in going to meet the gentlemen.

05:00 No, see again, because we were doing various tasks, little groups of people were sent here and there and I'm told that Blamey arrived, I got mention in my dairy that General Blamey arrived one day. My only recollection of that was our hygiene corporal saluted him with a spade, presented arms with a spade to General Blamey when he came through. That's no, we

05:30 didn't mix with the top brass. We were sufficient to ourselves.

What did the hygiene corporal do?

He was responsible for hygiene in the toilets, hygiene in the cookhouse. Ensuring that the area was kept clean, that liberal use of lime to

06:00 stop any, no tinea and that sort of thing. We were always conscious of our feet and getting any infection in our feet. So the army used a lot of lime to disinfect areas that were, wanting to grow tinea and odd things like this were affected. Also he would keep the drains open

06:30 if necessary. Actually in that area he had about four little native men conscripted as his assistants, and all he did was walk around and make sure that they worked. Very responsible job again, he was a lance corporal. Very important job. But that poor fellow he was not the brightest and after the war the presumed his pre-war occupation as a carriage cleaner

07:00 down in the workshops. He eventually died, I visited his widow a few times and helped her with claims on his behalf etc. But oh well.

You mentioned you encountered some German POWs who had goaded the troops about

07:30 **Australia being gone. At that time what idea did you have of the Japanese presence?**

None at all. It was a complete and utter surprise to us that, the Japanese invasion, the change of government following that, when Menzies went out and Curtin went in. These were

08:00 complete mysteries to us, we didn't know, no inkling that it was going to happen or any problems. These things just happened and we were going to take them in our stride. But Japan coming into the war, well it didn't really ring a bell until we came home to Australia in 1942, just how serious this was. I mean we didn't have a clue.

08:30 Then of course when we went up to the islands, the first indication we got that it was very, very serious was that they told us aboard ship that we may have to fight our way ashore. We didn't know at the time, but history relates it, the Bismarck, the battle fleet, that brought the troop ships that

09:00 were going to invade Port Moresby. They sank those ships at sea. But they were on their way when we were going to New Guinea and this was probably the reason we were told we might have to fight our way ashore. Because the Japs may have already beaten us to it. Reasonable surprise to us, we just didn't know what was going on and so we arrived in a state

09:30 of not knowing exactly what was happening. Of course at this stage they fought the battle of, up in the peninsula, and they were fighting the Kokoda Track and we walked straight into the middle of this, we didn't know, we weren't briefed. We were at

10:00 sea for ten weeks coming home from the Middle East. We were completely out of touch for a long time.

If I can take you back to the Middle East, can you tell me how you were told you were leaving? And what your future role would be?

We weren't told why we were leaving, we didn't know when we were leaving. In fact I

10:30 don't think very many people knew what was on. It was obviously an urgent call from Burma that they needed troops there. there was a big problem arriving. We arrived in Port Tewfik in the afternoon, we were told to board a ship

11:00 and there were a group of us headquarters fighting group, and we walked along the wharves to every ship asking if there room aboard the ship for us and in every case they said no we are booked out. Then one ship said, "If you can bring your own food, you can come aboard." And so this goes back again.. We went to one of the warehouses where there was good stored and we

11:30 found what we wanted a took it. The British military police immediately attacked us, that we were stealing food. They wanted us to put it back and get out of the place and we told them where they can go and we eventually got aboard this ship and it had accommodation for a hundred and there were over two hundred of us aboard. So we

12:00 slept where we could and made ourselves comfortable, in the back of trucks, anywhere at all.

Can you explain why you didn't have a designated ship?

Because the Japanese invasion was obviously so fast that it was impossible to organise a reasonable transport convoy to get us there. They took what they could grab and we

12:30 went to India and they tried to assemble the convoy there. Unfortunately, again, this was very rapidly moving war at this stage. They sorted that our and they decided they would send us to Java. Which was being threatened. By the time we set out to go to Java they recalled us because Java had

13:00 fallen. Now we had equipment for the unit had already been landed in Java. So they pulled us back again. See we were originally, what we understood, we were originally going to Burma, Rangoon, down that way and it was too late so they diverted us to Java. It was too late so they sent us back to Australia to sort ourselves out to

13:30 do something about New Guinea which was (UNCLEAR). We had already lost a force in New Guinea, they were taken prisoner of war by the Japanese and that ship they were on was torpedoed by an American submarine and we lost a thousand men there.

I just want to clarify those points on the way home from the Middle East.

14:00 **It was obviously a critical time when the Japanese were about to sweep through. What stops did you make?**

What stops did we make? We stopped at Cochin in India because they didn't know what to do with us then. We were at sea we were in a ship, we were away. Then they decided, it was Curtin clambering to bring us home to

14:30 save Australia. The parallels that appear now, Mark Latham [Federal Leader of the Opposition - Leader of the Australian Labor Party] carrying on wanting a hundred and fifty men to come back and save Australia from the possibility of invasion from the north, they were clambering to bring us home and the ridiculous part was they wanted roughly eighteen thousand men were in the division, they wanted us home to save Australia against a

15:00 Japanese, victorious Japanese army that occupied most of Asia anyway and we came home we said, "What the hell can we do?" We were being hailed as saviours coming back to Australia. But we came back via Cochin straight home. Straight back to Australia. Then they had to sort us out, we came home, as we left in 1940 with no equipment. We had nothing and so

15:30 we had to be filtered out, re-equipped with what Australia had here at that stage, which was nothing, because we hadn't prepared ourselves for a war, let alone a war with the Japanese. So we spent quite a bit of time in South Australia and in Queensland being re-equipped and retrained to go to New Guinea. So although we arrived home in April

16:00 1942 we didn't go to New Guinea until September 1942 and that cut time, Milne Bay had been invaded and the Japs had been defeated there. The Kokoda Track was well on its way and we arrived in Port Moresby and we were immediately put on the high ground, like out here looking down onto the lake.

16:30 Over Warrants Inlet which would be a landing ground for invading troops and we were up at Moresby up on the site. So things were completely and utterly chaotic at that time.

You had left Australia in 1940 at a time when the war was a long way away, what changes did you notice in the climate of Australia, the people, now that the war was on the back doorstep?

17:00 We arrived dirty, scruffy after being ten weeks at sea. Two hundred people on the ship built for a hundred. With all the hygiene facilities were virtually nil. No chance of having a shower anywhere, we compromised by getting a forty four gallon drum and getting a hose and hosing those who could get in it.

17:30 So we were dirty dishevelled and lost at sea. We arrived in Adelaide and the local population fell on our necks that we had come home to save them. it was frightening and terribly dramatic to think that these people were going to depend upon us

18:00 with nothing. We'd come home virtually empty handed, all we had was experience and we had to be completely re equipped. It was a frightening sight of panic. The Japs were up there and we were down here and we were being invited to have a look, come and inspect their bomb proof shelters and things like this. But on the other hand

18:30 it was a civilian thing, the army thing, we were astounded that it was a bit like Cairo, the hotels were functioning, the night life was going on, officers were well dressed and their ladies were well dressed, they were enjoying the high side of life. We just couldn't reconcile this

19:00 this was completely wrong. If you are in danger you do something about it, you don't carry on as if it's a holiday. The further north we got into Queensland the more sober people were. Because the American troops had begun to arrive. Not that they were much good at war at that stage of the game.

19:30 But they were bringing equipment with them, and the sight of heavy equipment coming in was more for bolster than seeing unarmed Australians coming home again. Anyway.

Can you tell me about that retraining when you got home?

Well we had trained for open warfare, as you can see for miles, you could send troops

20:00 well for orders. We had done these things we had trained for open warfare, such as it happened in Europe, France and Belgium and later on in Germany. It was an open type thing. Suddenly we had to change to train for jungle warfare, as close undergrowth, like walking through national parks, you are waist deep in shrubs and

20:30 rubbish and trees and we had to completely alter our tactics to meet this. We overdid it. We set up in New Guinea a training thing where we had pop-up targets - suddenly a target would stand and so forth. But when it came to the actual fact

21:00 many, many soldiers, our soldiers were killed by, they had never seen a Jap. They were killed from specially sighted points where the Japs were completely concealed. So we evolved a tactic of a point man, you would have troops moving up a track but

21:30 one bloke up the front and then two or three behind him and eventually the whole group rolled back. so

that the bloke up the front might get shot, but he was, the warning would be given, the rifle shot was given. The warning that something was up there, so his group immediately behind him who was machine gunners and a couple of Bren guns and things.

22:00 And they would be able to move up to that ambush point. You following me?

How was it decided who would be point man?

The luck of the draw. But most cases the Japs would let him through, they would wait until the bigger party behind, and collect more casualties.

22:30 **How did your equipment and uniforms change in your new training?**

Didn't change, we still had the same equipment, we had dyed uniforms by that stage, dyed green. The equipment was the same, the Bren guns and rifles and Tommy guns. It was the method

23:00 of using them that normally, and prior to the Japanese invasion, immediately if you were attacked or fired upon, you'd go to ground because the ground would provide cover. Here is you went to ground you had that much visibility ahead of you. So the strategy was, immediately you were attacked, go to the flanks

23:30 and work around you, you then start working around. So find out what is there, again, you've got to find out what's there before you can do anything about it. So you go out to look for this and see if you can find their flanks or their rear then come in on that. So completely different training.

How was it that you could acquire this knowledge seeing as up until then Australia had not participated in that sort of warfare?

24:00 It came about by those who had been there and had been caught napping, passed the information back, that if anything like that happens you find you are being attacked from the flanks and so when

24:30 when we came back to the training point, they said, "Righto, this is the way it can happen and this is way you will counter it." So it was, then we go out and we try it out on ourselves, and learn how to do it.

Where you able to find jungle conditions in Queensland?

Yes, yes. They established the general training camp at Canungra and this

25:00 was developed, it was over developed into ways that were completely unrealistic but the point was that they were getting some training. Putting some learning from the input that had come from various points.

What do you mean in overdeveloped?

Well they had barbed wire entanglements and people were crawling under the barbed wire. Well this was completely overdone

25:30 because there was no barbed wire in New Guinea. The jungle itself provide the problems in getting through. But we did this sort of thing, firing machine guns over people's back so they would crawl underneath machine gun fire. Well up in New Guinea there is no such thing as that.

26:00 When you went to ground, you went to ground and stayed there.

What were you told about what sort of soldier the Japanese enemy were?

We knew by this time the Jap was fanatical. That his whole concept was based upon Emperor worship and he would die in defence of his emperor.

26:30 He had no misgivings about death, and the only good Jap was a dead Jap. You just didn't trust a Jap who was laying, many times when though a group of Japs who were allegedly dead and one of them would be holding a hand grenade even though he was probably badly wounded, only to take another

27:00 bloke with him and so a whole group of Japs like that, you irrespectively shot them, you didn't take chances.

Was there a difference in mood in Queensland? Did it seem like there was a bigger threat there compared to South Australia?

27:30 Well again I can answer that by giving an illustration. Before we went to New Guinea in our role, which had changed completely, we were then divorced from our vehicles because we didn't have any. We did take vehicles to New Guinea but we chained them to trees we didn't use them there. In the role we had already previously done, we sent a patrol

28:00 a big patrol up to Cape York Peninsula, right up the east coast and back down the west coast searching for signs of Japanese occupation. Of the Cape York Peninsula, whether they had landed troops there, whether they had landed isolated post to test that. Because we were anticipating at that stage, if the Japs did land he would do what he had done in Syria he would live off the land.

28:30 And we sent this patrol up to find out would it be possible for the Japs to live off the land, is he there, what's going on. They went up the east coast, west coast and no sign of Japs. So there wasn't that fear that the Jap was already there. That was our job at that stage.

29:00 **What sort of signs were you looking for of the Japanese presence?**

We looked for camp sites. Now a camp site has to have a central fireplace or cooking facilities

29:30 has to have tracks leading from and to it. Where food or things are brought in. It has to have a water supply, has to be on a creek or a river. There were telltale signs of human habitation. The rubbish that is left even if they bury it there is the

30:00 burial area, disturbed soil which brings you to it straight away. So all these things all add up to a trained eye to say that there are people there.

How likely did you think an invasion of inland Australia was?

No didn't think so. Because we had done this preliminary reconnaissance.

30:30 For them to live off the land, now in New Guinea he could live off the land. The yams, the bananas, quite a lot of wild food, none here. A shortage of edible vegetables in Australia and so to live off the land he would, well we cleared all the cattle out of that area, moved the cattle out. So take that source of food from you.

31:00 There would be no rice or anything like that. So the possibility of him invading the country was pretty remote. Unless he had a very good fleet and supply lines of sea vessels to support him. Because he needed, until he brought vehicles in he would need petrol, oil and that sort of thing. So there would be

31:30 no vehicles come in originally. But you get troops, you get Japanese troops who would be infiltrating coming through, cleaning out villages, so you would be looking for disturbed Aboriginal communities. Who had been robbed of all their food, all this sort of thing, so you get a pretty good idea of things like that.

What did you do while on leave?

32:00 You're joking? In New Guinea?

In Australia before you went to New Guinea?

Well we only had what seven days leave or something like that. I got married and then Shirl moved up to Queensland with us and we went from camp to camp, not very far from Brisbane. She had quite an interesting time, living in farms and within towns and things while we

32:30 did all our training and re-equipping.

What sort of a wedding were you able to have?

Very, very sparse. Shirl had bought a wedding gown well in advance. We only had small wedding, mostly only family and it was quiet small and then

33:00 we spent our first day of our honeymoon in Taronga Park Zoo and then I took her with me, I went back to camp at Landsborough up in Queensland. I went back a day early to settle her into Landsborough hotel and then my skipper, the boss came out and said, "What are you doing back here?" I said, "I brought my wife up." And he said, "Well you best go back to her. I don't want to see you for a couple of days." So I went back there.

33:30 It was very disjointed but quite interesting.

How was that farewell with her different from the Middle East?

Farewell? Didn't have a farewell, we had a Christmas dinner in camp and the towns business people and the towns provided the fair, fruit and vegetables, and goodies and a couple of kegs of beer. But it was Boxing Day we left to go aboard ship. So there was no great thing

34:00 about it all. It was material, too much movement, too much of everything. It was emotional and all sorts of things, we were off, yep.

How was it emotional?

Well we were going away.

34:30 And there was the emotion of sailing away from Australia, the emotion of going to strange places, the emotion of leaving all this behind. Nostalgic songs of the day, 'Goodbye Little Darling, I'm Leaving' and 'Maori Farewell' and all that sort of thing and

35:00 these were very, very nostalgic at the time. Sort of really tugged at the heart strings and of course there was the excitement and the support of all your mates. It was, it was a period of very, very mixed

emotions. But we survived it.

35:30 **When you left for New Guinea, how prepared did you feel as a regiment?**

We weren't prepared at all. We arrived there for the second or third time completely unprepared. We didn't have any. We were taken out to Ward's Strip, which was four miles out of Moresby, to a bare patch of ground, and this is

36:00 where you lived and my first night was under a mosquito net hung between two saplings. We then had to prepare our own latrines, prepare the cookhouse, cooking facilities, there was none of this prepared for us, we were virgin troops on a virgin piece of land. We had to organise ourselves.

What were your first impressions of New Guinea?

36:30 What's this? When?

When you arrived in New Guinea? When you first saw land?

First saw land there, oh matter of fact it was just a matter of get yourself organised so we can go ashore. No the instructions, the information was very sparse. Because when we got

37:00 to Moresby the whole town had been bombed and there were no civilian there, the houses, they weren't wrecked, they were blown apart. There was sunken ship in the harbour, all paraphernalia of war, it had happened and so the obvious thing was to get ashore and get the hell out of here and make ourselves safe somewhere and don't

37:30 stick around because you will get your head knocked off. So it was self preservation. Go as soon as you can.

What did you know about the Owen Stanley campaign?

Nothing. We were, when we established ourselves in the camp and information started to filter in. The first information we got was laid down instructions. Don't go out of the camp area by yourself, take

38:00 a mate with you, take your rifle with you, if you go to the toilet or anything like that. Always take a mate with you because there could be Japanese infiltrated in, they were only forty miles away at Rabia, Mailu area. There could be .

38:30 Japs who came down the rivers and could be in the area. The Americans went further than we did we just take your rifle in case a Jap rubs against you. The Americans when they arrived, and they put up picture shows in the valleys and things and they put on the screen, look at the bloke beside you he could be a Jap and this was probably very, very good because there were

39:00 Japs known in the area, that had infiltrated it. They were very, very passive because they were unsupported, they were there. Also they were looking for food, so there could be Japs anywhere in the area. There was a warning to us to just be careful at night because you could run into a Jap. As I said, they were only forty miles away, come down the river forty miles is not terribly hard.

39:30 **How far way was your camp from Moresby?**

About four miles. It was on what they call the four mile strip. It was the only strip that Moresby had at the time. After we arrived there they started to build the Jackson Strip and the 12-mile Strip. There was nothing there when we were there, absolutely unprepared.

You had been warned that the Japanese could be around you, what sort of visibility did you have to the jungle?

40:00 The native villages were all on the coast, there were no villages inside. But there again we would rely upon the native there to give us any warning of anything untoward. Because they were hunters and they moved into the lower parts of the hills. There again they,

40:30 the, a couple of the, a group of the native people were building a couple of huts for us and a couple of these blokes up on the top were thatching a roof. They were only native huts, just for our stores and things we wanted to keep under cover and I approached these gentlemen, and miming things I told them I wanted to get a

41:00 grass skirt to send home to Shirl and this chappie looked down at me and he said, "We are not womans." And I said, "You speak English?" and he said, "Yes." And I said, "Well why didn't you tell me?" and he said, "You not ask." And I said, "I want a couple of grass skirts." And the next day I had a couple of grass skirts. But what struck me was the logic of natives. "You didn't tell me you spoke English." "You not ask." All right then.

00:32 **Can you tell me what life was like in that camp outside Port Moresby?**

Very primitive. We had no amenities, just the basic things that you need in a camp. To me it was an eye opener of why a lot of people

01:00 went a bit off the edge in various places. Have to relate it back to the Middle East where we were operating from towns and cities and there was always a town or a city to come back to for recreation. Always somewhere you could go to get a feed that you wanted as a change from iron rations.

01:30 in New Guinea there was nothing, nowhere to go, no town, not even an amenity. The Americans tried hard by putting up movies, but that didn't fill the need. Being in New Guinea was like being in a foreign all male land.

02:00 There was no opportunity to mix with women, to get that tender touch. There was nowhere to go to change the sameness of life. There was no where to go to

02:30 do things, to go to a picnic, a waterfall. They were there but you weren't game to go anywhere like that. You were confined to a, we were confined to a stable area, a campsite, three meals a day, toilet, showers. Eventually they did set up a tent where they

03:00 canteen services flogged booze, odd goodies, nothing very much like biscuits or chocolates. They would give us a bit of a change of diet. There was no change of diet. We got, we were living on dehydrated meat, dehydrated vegetables. One a week we would get fresh meat which would end up as a stew anyway.

03:30 Because how to you get a carcass and break it up to feed five hundred men. You just chop it up and send it out to three or four squadrons and make a stew out of it. We were plagued by mosquitoes, plagued by malaria, black water fever,

04:00 the mosquitoes just generally. There were centipedes and scorpions and odd things like this that one had to be aware of. They would get into your bed and you didn't have much of a bed anyway. There was no reading matter, none of these amenities at all. It was a strange

04:30 and very hard isolated from of life. Not very conducive to holiday making.

How was the cooking done in that camp?

Two ways. One was to dig a hole big enough for a four gallon drum in an ant hill and provide a flew out the back of it.

05:00 And so you would make a camp oven in there. Put your fire in the drum and it would ventilate out the back. Or the other was the very primitive way of hydro burners. These were a container containing petrol. A primus stove, you know, or blow lamp, heat up the ring, which vaporises the fuel. These were built in large containers and

05:30 were put in a trench so you would have the flame running along in the trench and you would cook in the dioxies on top of that. The ones closest would burn, the other one wouldn't cook. They were the only two ways of cooking up there.

What was your water supply like?

06:00 Water supply was shocking. Because the local natives from the ground, the shore upwards always built their villages on a water or creek or river. The water was definitely tainted. I can recall my first morning there I filled up my water bottle from the water cart and the next morning I wanted a drink and I uncorked it and

06:30 it was foul which it smelt foul. Now that was our first problem, was purification of water. You couldn't drink from the streams or anything like that. We were issued with water purification, a white and a blue tablet which you put in your water bottle, which purified but it didn't taste good. That was a real problem, water. As far as washing is concerned, ablutions, we had these little creeks running through.

07:00 I found the first time I went for a wash I stripped off and got down and before I even got myself wet I was covered in mosquitoes. So the answer to that was you race down, throw some water over yourself, soap yourself all over, the mosquitoes didn't like the soap. You get clean that way. But then you had to

07:30 wash it all off and get dry and the of course the mosquitoes were inside the tents, we had tents at that stage. They like the dark corners as you may well know. So we had that problem and we had malaria, we all, all of us had malaria. There was the problem of, worse than malaria, was dysentery which hit a lot of us. Generally

08:00 trying to live in a primitive condition up there was just awful. It was bloody awful to try to get yourself into condition there. We moved up into the mountains a little later on and that helped a lot. There was less mosquitoes and the

08:30 ability to prepare all the sanitary arrangements that you needed and the cookhouses were, we near a rubber plantation, there was firewood so you could cook a little bit better. I again, this I bit, it worries

me now, things that happened. I noticed before we went off the mountains that in one place there was a dump of sugar which I had been condemned.

09:00 The sugar in bags had been wet and had hardened. the bags of the sugar had a coating of about an inch or two, it was completely hard and had been condemned. So I had seen this so I borrowed a vehicle and went down the mountains and got four bags of this, one for each squadron. Brought it back and the only way the cooks could use it was to open it with an axe. But that was

09:30 we were very, very sweet hungry, starving for sweet and this answered a problem, cookies managed to produce custards and things with sugar and whatever. that helped a lot. But again even up in the mountains we were starving for, well in this case it was sweet, we needed sweet and suffered lack of sweet for years after the war, I could eat a quarter pound

10:00 block of chocolate in no time flat and it was just one of those things we were terribly short of.

Why was the decision made to move from Port Moresby up into the hills?

Because Moresby was in swamp country and a mosquito breeding area. Up above a certain level the mosquitoes didn't breed, it was too cold. Now you

10:30 think this is odd, in the tropics it gets cold, it really does, very, very cold. So we went to McDonalds farm; it was (I...UNCLEAR) and there was a native village there. But the main reason to go up there was to get away from the malarial swamps. We still got malaria and odd things up there but it wasn't. Another place up there Koitake was a malarial free area. It was

11:00 used as a rest camp, if you got malaria you would go to Koitake for a few days get over your shivers and come back again and get malaria again. You just keep on, bastard of a place.

What was your role during this time?

Well I didn't go into battle with them. I had malaria, I was crook. I was

11:30 an unofficial quartermaster looking after the equipment. In between trips to hospital. That was it, unofficial quartermaster. A chappie from Dee Why here, he was my driver, he died, he was killed up there and his friends came to me and

12:00 said, "Can we get..." I knew he had bought a Leica camera in Tel Aviv, and they said, "Can we get this Leica and get it home to his mother for him?" I knew where his equipment was and it was all stored. So I took myself there and recovered his Leica and a couple of other things, personal things. Because he would never come back, he was dead and gave them to these blokes to send home to his mother.

12:30 I find in retrospect I was involved in quite a number of odd roles that were never specified. Just why or how I don't know. However I did.

What was your job to do at that time?

I was a wireless link, radio link. I was maintaining a radio link from our camp.

13:00 That was it, wireless operator, maintenance of. See we had our radio links were in groups of three, linking back to the squadron. the squadron is their little headquarters. We had four squadrons so you had a train of linkages back to the squadrons, the squadrons had links back to

13:30 headquarters, and they were all on different frequencies. So the control was there all the time. So you had one set in control of all these and you could go, pull any of them in that you wanted to. But the control to the squadron headquarters, three of them, then down to the individual troops, and there were four of them in each squadron. So

14:00 it was a very workable but very complicated network all based on radio.

Where was the radio set up?

Underneath a tree somewhere. See we had no, this is where it's very difficult after the war to talk to civilians. Because they had no concept

14:30 of an area like this, with no houses and trees on it and five hundred people living in it. In their own little hootchies, built their own little compound around themselves, in very primitive conditions. You say, where was the radio set up? Underneath the tree.

15:00 We had a couple of boxes and a radio and that was it.

When people were setting up where they were sleeping were their ways they made it their own little space?

Oh yeah. You are always within touch of the other bloke but you made up your own bed and your own little hootchie the way you wanted it.

15:30 "That tree is mine," sort of thing and from that tree you would hang your mosquito net, and under that

you would have your bed up as high as possible that you would find a couple of logs, lay them alongside and fill up the centre with ferns or something to make up a bit of a mattress and so you would make up your own little cot and

16:00 have a little fireplace beside so you could make a brew of tea when you wanted it. Yeah, you could do this sort of thing. Of course you couldn't do this in battle, you slept where you lay down sort of thing. But in a base camp you could make yourself a little bit comfortable, you were never really comfortable. Just try to sleep with one eye open, one ear open, which is, you never knew what was happening.

16:30 Never knew what was happening.

You said you had malaria, where did you go?

Ended up in hospital. There were two major hospital set up by this time, they were mainly treating wounded people who were coming back from the Kokoda Track. But they also had a malaria ward and a dysentery ward for treating these two very debilitating problems and

17:00 in the end they, when thing got too bad up there, they sent us home. I came home on a hospital ship. I complained to the medical officer onboard that I was suffering badly and he said, "That's why they are sending you home, lad. You've had it." And of course when we got home, stacks of us came home, all suffering from the same problems, malaria.

17:30 Sand fly fever, you name it you had it. All tropical, as a matter of fact, when eventually, when they found out what my major cause was, and this is not self depreciation or anything, but I had suffering from, ulcerated colitis which, the medics tell me was

18:00 an untreatable tropical disease. It has a thirty to forty years incubation period and there is no known cure for it. So I am still on medication for it. So how many other blokes died from it, I wouldn't have a clue. But the first thing they said was, "You need checks every now and again because it can turn cancerous" The ulcers in the colon.

18:30 So you are stuck with these problems, and oh you know.

Where was the hospital based you first went to?

There was one in nine mile, nine miles out of Moresby in a valley. Another twelve miles out of Moresby in a valley. The valleys was protection from air raids.

19:00 They were staffed, later on, not in the early piece, they were staffed by pure males, later on they brought sisters up there and the sisters were prone to the same diseases that we were unfortunately and the doctors were too. I know the doctors they suffered the same problems as us, the dysentery and it wasn't a very pleasant life up there,

19:30 as we say it was a bastard of a place. There was no where you could go to get away from the war, the army. Your immediate mates who were, they were your strength, but it was like living in a close closed household continually.

20:00 Nowhere to get away from things. This is what I say, you couldn't get reading matter, there was nothing. All the material that was going to New Guinea was war material. There was nothing to give you a break from it. So it was a most nerve racking existence. It really shattered men's nerves, and I put myself

20:30 in that category too. It was just a nerve shattering experience, you were never free of the war.

What kind of signs of any activity were there when you were in the hills?

Signs of enemy activity? Port Moresby had been bombed to a standstill there was wrecked ships in the harbour. Right at the end of our camp was a

21:00 half buried mercury engine with two blades of propellers sticking out of it, bent and twisted and a whole stack of human vertebrae scattered all around. We found a flying boat with a foot skeleton in it, signs of war there, they were there.

How long did you stay in the hills for?

In Moresby? I went up there in September I came back in February, so about six or seven months.

While you were on duty as a quarter master, what was your unit doing at this time? Were they going out?

They were up in Sanananda fighting the Japanese

22:00 they took tremendous punishment up there. This was the battle of the beach heads, Buna and Gona had been attacked by Americans and the Australians and the Japs had been chased out. Sanananda was their headquarters, the Japanese headquarters for the Kokoda Track action or thingo.

22:30 It was terribly strongly defended. It was estimated there were twenty thousand Japs there. Our little unit of four hundred went in there to try to get rid of them and got stymied. Then they had to regroup

what troops they had to eventually take it.

23:00 And that wrote off our unit, our unit was disbanded after that. It was, couldn't reform, there were only forty seven people left after that action.

When the men were going out were they coming back to base camp?

No, see we were on Moresby on the south side of the Owen Stanley Ranges, which was

23:30 far, I don't know the height, but it was above the level that planes could fly. They couldn't fly over the range and they could fly through an area which was known as a gap of about five miles wide. It was a lower level of the range. All there action took place on the northern side of the range, Buna, Gona and Sanananda, the whole thing. So they

24:00 had to fly the troops over to a place called Popengetta or down that way. Where there was a landing strip, they had to construct a landing strip, it wasn't there really and so everyone that went over the range stayed there unless they were flown back by, casualties and so forth. There was no way of getting them back other than that you couldn't get

24:30 across, that was the whole thing with the Kokoda Track. There was a misconception that the Kokoda Track was a roadway, it was an impossible way of getting across, except by foot and then it was very, very precarious. A lot of people have done it since then, but they are doing it under sanitised conditions.

Who remained in the camp with you while you operated the radio?

25:00 Well there was no traffic at that stage. The base camp had to be maintained it was the only way, right, the troops were over the other side of the range. Now any communication between the troops and the headquarters which was back at Moresby was by plane, they had to fly it over. All food, all ammunition, everything, clothing, everything they needed had to be flown over the range

25:30 so you had to have a base at both sides. One outside Moresby, one near the strip and then from there onwards was either jeep track or carry it by manpower to the areas where they needed it. So it, as I say this is very, very difficult for people who have no idea what the place was like, to get any concept of what it was like.

26:00 This was the way it worked, you could get the stuff by ship to Moresby. You had to get it over the range to this other landing strip and to get it from there to the troops who needed. So it was a very complicated thing to have to have these bases and have them manned continually. Because supplies would come in at any time anyway and you had to sort out anyway what was imperative to get up

26:30 the front or what had to stay behind and you always had to have your spare stuff because if troops were coming back to you or being sent forward to you, you had to be able to supply them. So you had to have uniforms and blankets and all the amenities that they needed to come in and send them forward. All complicated.

How were the supplies getting through to you where you were?

By plane and by

27:00 native track, back packs, by jeeps, any way at all. If the road was passable the jeeps did it, the jeeps quite often got themselves bogged and had to be manhandled out. They brought casualties back on stretchers on jeeps. Where the tracks ran out they

27:30 were manhandled and so they, right back to where they had the airports, and of course the airports were, the air strips, if they had heavy rains, the air strips were out. They brought the metal strips to put down to render them useable but when there was heavy rain it was impossible to move planes in or out.

28:00 And there were all sorts of problems.

Can you explain the metal strips?

yeah, I don't know what they call them, they are about three foot six long, a metre or more, about ten inches wide of steel perforated into many holes to reduce the weight of them.

28:30 They were interlocking both at the ends and the sides so that you could lay down a whole mat of these. They provided a firm base for planes to land upon. Because you can appreciate a plane coming in on a boggy ground, its wheels get stuck and straight up on its nose. So these provided a firm base. But they also

29:00 provided a water brace. It was just as difficult for a plane to land in twelve inches in water as it was to land on wet soggy ground. Because the props would blow up spray everywhere and the pilot would be blinded and also he couldn't have full control of the direction the plane was coming once it hit the ground. So they were problems but after the war a lot of these were used as substitute fencing. People

29:30 bought them in large quantities and used them as fencing. Also some of them in their original idea of laying on boggy ground, provide transport for ordinary cars and what have you.

While you were at the base what kind of news were you getting about what was happening on the other side of the bridge?

Virtually nil. Virtually nil.

- 30:00 A little bit of filtration would come through about casualties. But even that from one point to another, it would be very little information within a mile of what was happening. They wouldn't know. Because it was jungle and kunai grass and you wouldn't know what was happening two hundred yards away from you.
- 30:30 And communication was so bad that just trivia would never be broadcast over the radio and telephone lines were laid but they were very, very rudimentary and everything was bloody wet all the time anyway. So you were never ever dry, and that precluded information coming through. Who would go out in the rain to walk a mile
- 31:00 to tell someone something, no way. So communication was a big problem. The only things that would come through were what were known as sitreps, situation reports. Number of casualties, number killed, the demand for more ammunition or things of vital importance. so you wouldn't get trivia coming through.

31:30 What kind of impact did it have on you not knowing what was going on?

Well you accepted this after a while. I can tell you one thing regarding my darling wife. Regarding communications. She was nursing in Concord Hospital and she got a call one night that a convoy had come in. Now this clarifies the lack of communication and Shirl walked into the ward

- 32:00 and she was spoken to by name from one of the beds and she went over and found four of the blokes that we knew. Now she had travelled with us up in Queensland and she knew all my mates, she knew all my squadron and there were these four blokes, two of them with a bullet through the lung, one oft hem, his leg shot to pieces, reckoned he would never walk again and it was Mel who called her by name. So you can imagine
- 32:30 Shirl walking into a ward to look after a convoy and find four of my mates in critical conditions, been flown home to hospital. So no communication, she didn't know that the unit was in action. She knew we had gone to New Guinea but that's all. So that answers your thing about communication. Here was Shirl not knowing a thing until these four blokes, another one in the
- 33:00 Masonic homes and he was pretty badly shot up and she used to go and visit him.

Having seen those friends of yours, did she know where you were at this point?

She knew I was in New Guinea that's all. Well from both points of view she didn't what was happening that the unit was in action

- 33:30 didn't know what had happened to me, had no clues at all. Psychologically it was shattering. So anyway, that's just a human element of how little communication there was. I came home on a hospital ship, my father received a telegram with apologies that they couldn't let him know sooner. I was back her in Bathurst Hospital. But
- 34:00 no warning, nothing to say I was being sent home and I spent most of a year in hospital.

You had had malaria once already, what prompted you to be sent home on the hospital ship?

I had malaria, I had dysentery, I was

- 34:30 just plain sick and the, and there was nothing to be done for me up there. The hospital were purely rudimentary, there were tents and get rid of the sick ones because you can't do anything for them up here. There is no real hospital, it was an AGH [Australian General Hospital]. But there was no real hospitalisation, no treatment, no specialists
- 35:00 no equipment to, see I came home and they said, the doctor walked into the ward to see a few of us that had been sent home. There was one, well we all had malaria, there was no two ways about that. But he just looked at each one of us, there was a whole group because the hospital ship had come in and he just walked in and said
- 35:30 "These men are all vitamin deficient, we have to do something about it. We have to give them good food" We couldn't handle good food. The system wasn't up to it had been on a hard tack for too long. But this was the first indication, all vitamin deficient, we were. We had been living on bully beef and biscuits, dehydrated meat, dehydrated vegetables. We had had no vitamins input. So we
- 36:00 were all a heap of rubbish really. Matter of fact, when they brought the remainder of the regiment home they all spent a lot of time in hospital. Into hospital with malaria, get them over the attack, send them back to regiment. Before they had even caught the train to go back to regiment, they were back in hospital. I reiterate it was a bastard of a place it killed
- 36:30 men.

How did they treat you for malaria in New Guinea before you came home?

Up there? On quinine, that was the only thing we had. They eventually introduced the substitute for quinine, ah, yellow stuff,

37:00 anyway, all they could give us was suppressants. There was no, of course you had to get malaria out of your system and sometimes it took years. the microbe was in the bloodstream and affecting all the white cells. There was nothing they could give you that would kill the microbes. It had to work its own way out of the system. So all they could give us was suppressants and

37:30 for years after the war, men were, civilians by this time, were having attacks of malaria.

What did it feel like to have malaria?

38:00 An attack of malaria, shivers uncontrollable shivers, very high temperature, perspiration, if it was bad attack you would pass out. That would be it, just terribly high fever, uncontrollable fever, nothing you can do about it.

38:30 You could collapse in various places, anywhere at all. It was a very, very debilitating disease.

Could you describe the hospital ship you came home on?

Yes, it was SS Katoomba, and she was a vessel that lied on the

39:00 coastal train. She was just a passenger ship, we went up to New Guinea on the SS Katoomba as troop ship, we came back it was a hospital ship and all they did for us on that trip home was feed us and bed us. I reported crook, very crook to the medic onboard, and he said, "That's all right lad, that's why they are sending you home"

39:30 And there is nothing I can do for you sort of thing and just stick I out and so you had your attack of malaria or whatever and you stuck at it.

Do you remember what some of the other injuries onboard were?

No I barely remember the trip home, I barely remember, I don't even know where I slept or where I lived aboard that ship on the way home. It wasn't for long because we pulled in at Toowoomba.

40:00 Puled into Townsville, I don't know if we called into Brisbane. My strongest memory is the pine trees at Manly beach. When we came back to Sydney Harbour we were put straight on a train and taken up to Bathurst and we were all a sick lot of men, very, very sick.

40:30 So you are asking what malaria is like. While I was in hospital at Bathurst we used to sneak out at night in our uniforms and Shirl was up, had got leave and had come up to Bathurst to see me and my mother walked passed me three times on Bathurst railway station and did not recognise me. That's how crook things were. Anyway Shirl come up there. This night we retired to our room. She was booked into one of the hotels up there and a knock on the door and the girly outside said, "Mr Grenadier?" Well that's near enough, "What's the matter?" She gave his name, one of the chaps I came home with on the hospital ship, in hospital with, she said, "He is in a real bad way in the bar down below, sir." I said, "Right." So I raced down and he was in the middle of an attack of malaria, thrashing around on the ground, unconscious with tremendous fever. So we got him back to the hospital, tucked him into bed and they looked after him there. Just a group of us had gone into town for the night and he copped a dose of malaria just like that, he was flat, nothing he could do for himself ...

Tape 9

00:32 **You were describing the conditions of a living hell. What were your impressions of how the Americans were adapting to the environment?**

My first involvement with the Americans, there were a few trucks driving along the roads, just outside Moresby and the alarm signal

01:00 for an air raid, there were three rifle shots fired in the air and as soon as the rifle shots went off you see the Americans left their trucks and they were three, the driver of the trucks going down the road, they just took off in the scrub. This, nothing against them except that they were completely, this was something completely new

01:30 and they just didn't know how to handle it. So war was completely new to the Americans. We had become inured to air raids to fire and our training was such that you take cover but you don't abandon things. But the Americans hadn't learned this yet. This was their first

02:00 involvement in a shooting war and to them it was terrifying. "Someone's shooting at me." And this was quoted up in there, a group of Americans were sent in to recover an Australian body, and brought it back, "There is some bastard up here shooting at us." They had

02:30 to send an Australian team to get the body out because it contained vital information. But that was the beginning, in the end the Americans became inured to war and the fact of being shot at. They had a lot to learn and they didn't learn easily.

03:00 **What were their camps and facilities like?**

I don't know I do know that they were being fed on chicken and ice cream and all sorts of things. In the most ridiculous circumstances and I do know that a lot of them asked our blokes to give them their sort of rations because they quoted, "The food we are getting doesn't stick to you."

03:30 Chicken and ice cream is not very sustaining over a period of time. Whereas the harder rations is more sustaining. That was that. They did have lots of amenities which we were jealous of, yeah, I'd say we were jealous. Also very

04:00 sceptical of it. We didn't have much to do with the Americans.

What was the feeling amongst the men about the leadership of MacArthur and Blamey?

You don't have much to do with that side of it when you are up in the thick of it. There were only two occasions when

04:30 MacArthur and Blamey went up to New Guinea. They were derided because they didn't go to see what conditions were like. They were basing their assumptions on assumptions. As I said before there was a belief that there was a road that went across the track. There wasn't there was a track

05:00 that wide. The, no they didn't see enough of their leadership to make any real opinion. Just two occasions when the Blamey and MacArthur made horrible errors which the troops did not appreciate.

05:30 **Did you have any contact with militia forces?**

No. No. I knew people who were in the militia forces. No I have very high regard for some of them. Some of them who made a mess of it up there, was the fault of command. They were

06:00 very, very badly lead, not trained, and they couldn't handle it because they weren't trained. Just, it was not with the militia fault, it was the leadership. See what happened here, let's face it be quite honest with it, there was a major panic back here in Australia. We were caught with our pants down, the whole thing was wrong,

06:30 the Japs were coming, "The Japs are coming! The Japs are coming!" And these three, four battalions, four battalions from Queensland mainly, well one from New South Wales, they were hurriedly put aboard a train, sent to Brisbane, put aboard a ship, and sent up there.

07:00 With no psychology behind it at all. They were sent, they were there. They were unhappy because they were sent up there, their morale was extremely low, their leadership was negligible and they were committed. Now they were virtually civilians, they were not soldiers and the 39th Battalion came through it very, very well. But

07:30 the 55th, 53rd was just hopeless. They were only boys plucked out of school with no training and put against a vicious very efficient enemy. They just collapsed, they couldn't handle it. Our blokes were bad enough. I felt very, very strongly, I was bitter with it up there, I felt that

08:00 they are not sufficiently, sufficient fortitude for their own, to fight for their own country. But you realise the things that were done, that I felt very, very sorry for them, they were up there as Aunt Sallies, they

08:30 grabbed us and we were seasoned troops and because we were seasoned troops we were pushed into the forefront. The first defeat at Milne Bay was by troops who had been through Greece and Crete. Seasoned troops, fighting soldiers and they held the fort there and they pushed us up to New Guinea, we were seasoned troops. But we had been at sea for ten weeks, we were

09:00 well, we hadn't had a decent feed for ten weeks and they raced us up there. We could have had, our troops, and this is me too, because we were weakened before we got up there. We should have had three months in conditions where we got three good meals a day to build up our resistance again. But we went up there and we were prone to every bloody disease that was possible.

09:30 We had no resistance at all. But it was all, "The Japs are coming, the Japs are coming. Save us." So sent up for what we can, the militia were the bunnies, we were the second bunnies and then after that they brought the 9th division home and reinforced the others. There were camps back here full of troops who were getting three good meals a day, a bed at night

10:00 and nothing to do all day, but they had no equipment. They had no training. But with some, well they could have put the training in and relieved us but it was a case of, panic stations, the government panicked and, "Save us." As far as we were concerned it was a bloody shambles.

10:30 **Who do you hold responsible of these tactical errors?**

Government of Australia, the population of Australia, and no one thought. there was, we were, at that stage, 1942-43, we were dependent upon America to give us equipment we didn't have any ourselves.

11:00 When they wanted to build airfields up in New Guinea, we didn't have any bulldozers here. We had to wait for America to send bulldozers across. To prepare the ground. No we were living in a little comfortable paradise here in Australia then and some one had woken us in the middle of a horrible dream, and had to do something quick. Well not beyond, might be just my impression but

11:30 I certainly believe that, that had the government had the foresight that we were showing in 1939 that we could have prepared ourselves. We weren't even building aircraft here and when we did we built the bloody Boomerang. Planes that the Japs shot down out of the sky because they were using cannon in their Zeros and we were firing a machine gun. It

12:00 was a terrible, nine planes shot down over Darwin, one after the other, of our planes, nine of our pilots killed. Because we didn't have the aircraft but we had been at war for four years or three years or something but we hadn't

12:30 prepared for it. So there we are.

What do you think we've learned from those mistakes made in the Pacific conflict?

Not a thing. People say now, "Bring our troops home to save us from the danger up north." They are saying the same things as they were saying in 1942.

13:00 There you have it and even in parliament now, arguing about arms and equipment for our fighting soldiers. If you don't give them arms and equipment you may as well give them a piece of stick. Just as good. It's, ah, a little paradise here, we are Australians and we are safe.

13:30 **When you were back in camp and the regiment went off to Sanananda, What was it like to be separated from your regiment while they were engaged in that conflict?**

Very demoralising. It was a feeling of desertion.

14:00 Very mixed feelings, you want to be with them and you realised you couldn't, you couldn't desert your post because what you were doing was important for them anyway. It was a very mixed feeling.

14:30 No there's, a feeling I have never tired to analyse. It happened, you did everything you could, your support everything there. Don't analyse it. You are talking to a man now with very

15:00 mixed emotions.

I can only imagine what those emotions were like?

Yes. Well, yes mixed emotions, yeah. Next question.

15:30 **Can you tell me about the contact you had with native villagers outside Moresby?**

Yes we had an amicable relationship. As I said, we traded with them to get fresh fish. Because as I say our diet was extremely limited, dehydrated stuff. There was no

16:00 cattle or anything up there, you couldn't go and knock off a sheep or anything like that because there wasn't any and the only alternative was fish, and the natives were good fisherman, they all lived on villages, and they could get fish. The theme was to supplement our diet. The only problem was that whether it was tropical fish or whether it was because we got them by explosion, the flesh would not keep overnight.

16:30 We had to, feast or famine, we had to eat it while we could because by morning it had gone off and I think this was probably because it was caught by explosive in the shock of explosion had damaged the flesh anyway.

Can you explain how you fish with explosives?

Go out in the lakatois or their canoes, these were

17:00 outrigger canoes and the natives would swim around and they would pinpoint the school of fish. So we would go over the top and drop a couple of grenades in there and five seconds later there would be a couple of explosions and up would come all the dead fish, on the surface, scoop them up and that was it. Very inefficient way of fishing but very effective.

17:30 it fed twenty or thirty blokes, we'd bring home enough fish to feed them for one meal anyway.

What did the locals think of this form of fishing?

Oh they thought it great fun. Yes, primitive people get great joy and amusement from very mundane things.

18:00 Because they have no sophisticated form of entertainment that we have. So you find that these

unsophisticated people get great joy from very mundane, simple things. Not, thinking of other things. But no they could, talk about the Aborigines, they are very happy people

- 18:30 because they can laugh at themselves. We laugh at someone else, we don't like laughing at ourselves, we use a comic to laugh at. But they find amusing things within themselves and so they are very happy people.

What were the arrangements with the locals? Did you trade or were they paid?

We traded with them.

- 19:00 Mainly with money, but they valued the coins because they would wear them as a sign of wealth or status. Because New Guinea, the Papua New Guinea coins are all perforated in the centre so they can wear them. They wear cowry beads in some areas, and these are a sign
- 19:30 of wealth. Well the introduction of people like ourselves who value the coin rather than the shell, they converted to wearing coinage around their neck as being a sign of wealth or status.

What impact do you think the war was having on those villagers?

- 20:00 I think psychologically the fact that man was killing man that was very distasteful to them. But in the long term it created sociological problems within the village. They couldn't understand,
- 20:30 technology was so far advanced as far as they were concerned, they did not understand it. An airplane became a 'baloose', which is a bird and the 'baloose' brought goodies and all sorts of things in their belly and they saw this. There is no idea of the origin or
- 21:00 the development of the goodies, all they saw was a silver bird that disgorged all these good things and that meant that these people who were here were magicians. They were extraordinary people, they could summon these birds out of nowhere and bring all these goodies to them and psychologically it destroyed their
- 21:30 simplicity. Out of this came a couple of cults. One was the, anyway, it was a cult which worshipped the birds or the bird. Because the bird was a god that produced all these wonderful things.
- 22:00 I forget what they call it now, it was a particular type cult up there. Because this was a primitive mind, out of the sky comes a silver bird and people get out of it and they open it up and all these things. Psychologically it was ruination of them because they lost their simplicity and it was not replaced by realism. That these things were
- 22:30 produced by other people. Anyway, that's that question answered.

How did you communicate with the local villagers?

Well most of them had a smatter of English through the religious groups that went up there and so

- 23:00 they had enough, we could also communicate with them with some concept of pidgin English. Which was a, I don't know if you know pidgin English, it's a combination of German English, native, so on. So you can provide the native doesn't talk too fast. You can get the gist of his
- 23:30 conversation. Because there are words which are mutilated but they still maintain a basic meaning.

Had those villagers had any contact with the Japanese?

When the Japanese first went up there they treated the natives well. They used them

- 24:00 for labour and as they became more involved the Japanese tended to abuse their women, which is a big no-no in a primitive tribe. They also abused the men, driving them like cattle to do work for them. Now
- 24:30 the native bloke he doesn't understand the ethos of working. he does what he wants to do and what is necessary. He doesn't believe in spending eight hours working and the Japanese were forcing them to be labourers and to carry loads, that's when the native decided that time was up, that was it, and he was belted and forced into further work and so the
- 25:00 native in the end could not stand the Jap. He went against him although in the early days he was willing to work for him and help him. But in the latter stages he rebelled against the Jap.

What did you see of how the Americans communicated with the locals?

Americans were very, very superior.

- 25:30 They were white Americans and these were niggers and this was their attitude. So they didn't get involved with them to any extent. Americans treated their own American Negroes with contempt and so these were just plain niggers
- 26:00 no value whatsoever and no sophistication not like the Americans who had all the goodies.

How did those villagers respond to the Americans?

The American money was good. American food was good. You get the throw back there of exploitation in the opposite direction. This

26:30 happened. Americans would splash money around like it was going out of fashion and also their food, they would trade their food for what the native had. the natives had souvenirs, grass skirts, lakatois, carved shells, carvings, and flog them for good American money. You

27:00 can't buy friends.

Did you have any experience with Tokyo Rose [Japanese Radio propaganda broadcaster]?

No, no, no. We used to listen to, what was the name, the German bloke, no I can't think of his name.

27:30 **Haw Haw [Lord Haw Haw - German radio propaganda broadcaster]?**

Haw Haw yes, oh yes he told us magnificent tales. The things he said on radio that came over to us, I'll quote a couple, "The only difference between the AIF and Worth's Circus was that the AIF had more tents." He said that the, "Australian digger was issued with a groundsheet, all the officers were issued with a

28:00 nursing sister." Things like this, completely off the beam but to us he was just a ratbag carrying on, the statements that had no foundation, and to us and to our, to the Australian sense of humour, they were just ludicrous. He was just a laughing stock, but we used to tune in to listen to

28:30 Lord Haw Haw. When we were in the Middle East, listen to him on our radios. Character.

Can you tell me what happened when you got back to Australia?

The first thing we were astounded

29:00 at the attitudes back here, we were fighting troops. We came back here and the attitude, laid back attitude, you know, there is a war on over there, we are not involved, right through. It was a complete non attitude towards the war and

29:30 its repercussions. It was an unreal attitude back here, completely unreal.

What do you mean the repercussions?

The shortages of things, there were shortages of cigarettes, shortages of beer. These affected people more than anything else.

30:00 Shortage of housing, brown outs, shouldn't happen. This was the, one of the repercussions, these were the repercussions of war. These restrictions on people, couldn't see why it should happen, why should we suffer. That was the attitude, right through, right through from when we came home back to civilians. It was an

30:30 unreal attitude, it was as though the war was your concern, not ours and well as much now, same as all the, history repeats itself. There is a war on in over in Middle East, it should have no affect upon us.

31:00 We shouldn't be involved so keep us out and it's a very, very narrow Australian opinion or attitude that this has no affect upon us at all. It shouldn't affect us, we are more worried about the possibility of

31:30 sabotage or destruction of our goodies here. As I said just recently to a friend of mine, the lessons are here at the moment for terrorist activity. The lessons, three times, in a very short time. They had a fire in Victoria in the petroleum refinery, they had a fire at Moomba, in the gas thing, and we had

32:00 a smoky gear box that paralysed the city business districts by closing down the underground railway. Three things that happened that they still don't mean a thing. We are looking for something totally different that might happen. They might blow up the Sydney Harbour Bridge. They might blow up the Opera House.

32:30 There's three things caused consternation in the cities, not just one city. Moomba fire, Victorian fire, what would happen to you if we lost Kurnell in a fire. What would happen, and I quote this one I said to my wife, "If there was a big explosion on General Holmes Drive where the road goes over the airport..."

33:00 You know there's a runway over, what about a big explosion underneath there, and the airport sort of crumpled a bit.

Can you tell me about your medical treatment?

I was X-rayed I was checked out internally, externally.

33:30 I was treated for nervous stability, or nervous disorder, and let loose.

You mentioned that when you got home to Australia there was a non attitude amongst

Australians about the war given that you had been discharged

34:00 **because of your physical condition. What was it like living out the rest of the war?**

Well I was out of communication with the general public because I had been away for three years or more and when I went back into industry, back in the printing game,

34:30 there was no, no basis of conversation. I had been to a war, they had been there. I was back working hard. But there was no communication and I found basically that there was no one to whom I could speak anywhere who understood

35:00 the things I've been talking to you about. So there was this tremendous feeling of isolation. You are isolated from everyone else. You get on a train there is no one could talk to you, no one you could talk to. Everyone was very busy with their own things. So you tended to migrate to ex-servicemen, blokes of similar calibre

35:30 to yourself. There was a tremendous urge, it caused a lot of problems, to meet your contemporaries at a pub and bat on. So you would spend more of your time in a pub with your mates than you would at home with your family, or with people of your same type.

36:00 This was so easily organised you could do it. I was working with a group of ex-servicemen and it was so easy to say, "Right let's go down to the pub tonight and bat on." And I would have to say, "No, I must go home." And it was a physical thing to go back home and try to pick up the

36:30 threads of life rather than bat on with your mates, have a basis of communication which is service life. The girl attitude, girl group get-together and natter about girl things and if you

37:00 came back, you had been away for three years, and you came to that girl group and they were talking about fashions and things, but you had been out of touch for three years. You become isolated immediately, and this is what happened to us. We were all away for that time and just couldn't reorient ourselves with civilian life and the pettiness of it, that's what got us, the sort of

37:30 things that concern them, "Couldn't get a beer last night," and this sort of thing. Couldn't get a beer? I couldn't get a beer for months. We were in the desert and you'd hear beer was on down at the local canteen so you raced down, a bottle of beer, and it's warm. That was

38:00 marvellous. "Couldn't buy a beer last night, only had bottled stuff on." "Oh, big deal!" This was the thing that got to us, the pettiness, the lack of realisation. There was bloody war on, people were getting killed. But no, "I couldn't get a beer." It still rankles after all this time, this pettiness that people weren't big enough

38:30 to... Oh, I'm on my hobbyhorse again.

Just one last question. You talked about the attitude in Australian society towards the war. What are your reflections now upon the necessity of World War II?

39:00 The necessity of it? Oh obvious. Germans were out to, oh, this goes back for hundreds and thousands of years. There has always been a nation at a time which believes implicitly that it is the master race.

39:30 If you study history, this is, even in primitive societies, that one did not, dominate society at a particular time or try to rule all the others. So Germany wanted to rule the world. Well if you like being a slave nation. Of course you have got to look at Germany at that point in time, Germany had come through the Depression years

40:00 Germany was trying hard to rebuild industries. She needed coal and steel, she needed water and these were all in the hands of France.

We have only one minute left. How seriously did you regard the threat by the Japanese to Australia in the necessity of World War II?

40:30 They weren't interested in Australia as such. But they wanted to keep Australia away from the wealth which was in the Dutch East Indies and in the Malayan peninsula and we were a threat because we controlled the Southern Pacific Ocean. If we could be subjugated, Japan would move without any problems anywhere in south-east, south-west Pacific area. We had to be neutralised, not eliminated but neutralised.

Can you explain what the patch of the 7th Divvy Cavalry Regiment is?

It's a diamond which was the 7th Division. Its colours were formed, based on the Royal Tank Corps colours which were accepted in 1917 in the Battle of Cambrai when the order was given to advance through the Hindenburg, like through the mud and through the blood to the green field beyond. So those three colours are embodied in our colour patch, the brown the red, the green. Mud, blood and green fields and this is still the colour patch of the British Armoured Corps and of course we were armament so we had those colours.

