

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Raymond Rudkin (Ray) - Transcript of interview

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**Some parts of this interview  
have been embargoed.**

The embargoed portions are  
noted in the transcript and video.

### Tape 1

00:48 **Ray, could we perhaps start by, could you tell me a little bit about where you were born and brought up?**

Yes certainly. Yes, I was born in Nyngan on the 4th of July

01:00 1920. I'm a Yankee Doodle Dandy [American] and I was born on an experiment farm, my father was the manager and I was there for 14 years when I was at school in Nyngan. Went to the Primary School in Nyngan, I rode my pony to school when I was probably about six years old and subsequent to that, subsequently I moved to another place

01:30 in Temora, where my father was, became manager of the experiment farm in Temora but Nyngan is fairly well known I think to people in Australia, particularly New South Wales because it's either drought or flood and we were subject to that, just as all the farmers' graziers were. It's a very interesting place to grow up

02:00 particularly on a farm as a boy you know.

**What sort of schooling did you receive in Nyngan?**

It was primary school. It was quite a good school, Nyngan Public School. There were stories of in the early days there of course students were not necessarily of age as we understand them to start school

02:30 being out on properties some distance away they didn't get education at all, some of the children until they'd grown up and capable of getting to the school. There was a, one story where one of the students who was by that stage about 18 years and what he used to do, he'd ride his horse to the school, he'd put it in the garden you know in the yard

03:00 and then they tied his kangaroo, dog up to the bell posts then put a couple of brace of rabbits into the porch and then go into the classroom, so it wasn't quite like that in my time at school there although there were other boys, three or four that used to ride their ponies to school, it was a very good school.

**Did you have responsibilities on the farm from a young age?**

03:30 Not really, no I didn't. It was an experiment farm and there were quite a big staff there you know. There was a groom who looks after the ...obviously looks after the horses and so on and then there was a sheep man who used to look after the sheep. There was a foreman who did all and sundry administration

04:00 and so on and an occasional academic that would be there. There for example there was a... it was a blowfly research station and that's going back to 1920 and there, there's still plenty of blowflies in the sheep areas and I don't think they've accomplished eradicating blowflies so far as the sheep are concerned even to this present day. They still

04:30 have the problem.

**Just tell me a bit about your dad?**

Oh my father was, he was a war veteran. He immigrated to Australia before the war, he and his brother. His brother, my father's, was named, he was always known as Syd. His brother was Percy and they, when they first arrived went as far as

- 05:00 Urisino station, which is 150 miles west of Bourke or something like that. That was their first introduction to Australia but when the war came out, when the war began my uncle, he was in Queensland, he was cane farming and my father was in Wagga, he was on an experiment farm at Wagga which was also a teaching institution and they were both
- 05:30 very quick to join. Think my uncle had a regiment number of 85 in Queensland in the 5th Regiment Light Horse regiment and my father was 1185 in the 3rd Battalion and went into camp with the early recruits at Kensington Race Course.
- 06:00 Both of them had a very distinguished really record during the war. Do you want me to continue on with this? My father was, he was wounded four times and my uncle twice. They were both Gallipoli veterans. Actually, my father landed on the first day of the landing at Gallipoli and he landed again twice
- 06:30 at the Anzac Cove because he was wounded twice and he was evacuated in the first place to Limus Island and the second time to Malta, so and my uncle, he was also wounded twice but he didn't go to France because he was in the Light Horse and continued
- 07:00 under Allenby in the campaigns at Syria, Palestine and Egypt and so on, so they... My father was, he was in the Department of Agriculture was very highly regarded both in western New South Wales and in the Riverina. He finally
- 07:30 had an accident with his vehicle and which, whilst he was mending a puncture or rather changing a wheel then it, the utility he was driving rolled back on him and he was crushed to death, which at the age of 60 he was looking forward of course to retirement at 65 but
- 08:00 was incongruous really after all the shock and shell that you know all the Germans and the Turks tried to kill him, that he died in that way, very sad.

**Did you know much about his...? What did you know about his war career when you were growing up?**

Well, he didn't talk a great deal about it. I asked him once what war's like?

- 08:30 And he said, "It was horrible." That's all he said. He, another occasion he said, "That wounds were very, very painful," and of course there was no penicillin in those days, so they had to put up with the pain of hot water as near to boiling point, as hot as human flesh could stand.
- 09:00 So that was something which sort of influenced me and the fact that he had some injuries which affected him for the rest of his life really. He had on his hand, he had part of his hand shot away and he was hit in the face too.
- 09:30 So as one grew up and sort of later on the early stages of Hitler and his movements in Europe, one became pretty conscious of warfare in that respect from, cause after all it was only 20 years after the First [World] War, wasn't it, where Second [World] War was effective?

**10:00 How did he feel about ....did he carry any feeling about the Germans?**

Have any, what I'm sorry?

**Did he have.... did his feeling about the Germans as enemy?**

No, no he never said. I think much the same when we fought the Germans. They were fighting for their country in the Middle East and so were we.

**10:30 Tell me when you were a little older in your teens, did you have an idea of what you wanted to do as a career?**

Well, it was the depression, so one really took what you could get. I mean you were lucky to have a job. When I was ...when I left school at the age of 16 and in Temora this was.

- 11:00 There were to give people work in Temora, at that time they dug out the series trenches and men in Temora, so many are out of work that they were given this job and some of them of course were just incapable of carrying out the task of digging whatever the length was.

- 11:30 I think it was something like six feet long or and so far deep and so far wide and that was their daily task. Well they used to, I remember they used to, I mean when one individual sort of started on this job, there'd be bets in town as to how long they could last. Well, of course those that are used to manual they would last but people with soft hands who

- 12:00 perhaps used to clerical work and so on just couldn't stand it, so and I applied for a job in the rural bank and I was lucky I got the job. I had a reasonable pass I suppose. I know there is a, I found out later that

I was just a...

12:30 had finished the Intermediate Certificate they called it in those days.

**This section of transcript is embargoed until 1 January 2034.**

13:20 **Could you just hold there for a second? So Ray could you tell me a little bit about your decision to**

13:30 **join the CMF [Citizens' Military Force]?**

Yes, well the war was developing, wasn't it in Europe and one is, growing up was quite conscious of this occurring. As a matter of fact I can remember there was a Professor Black that used to speak on the radio,

14:00 was a regular program and we were kept informed of developments, the German (UNCLEAR) and later into Czechoslovakia and Poland and so on and my father of course being in the First War, he didn't encourage me in any way but

14:30 on the farm in Temora, there was a foreman also, a veteran he was a Military Medal winner in the First War, who was in charge was captain of a company formed in Temora in the militia. There were two platoons in Temora and I think if I remember rightly there was another platoon at Junee

15:00 and another in Wagga and one thing and another I felt that I should join the way things were. As a cadet I was only 17. I was the only cadet actually and I went to camp without being paid and because obviously the

15:30 foreman of the farm knew my age, I just left school at the age of 16, I couldn't very well put my age up, so that's how things happened.

**Tell me where were you when war broke out?**

I was in camp in a three months camp at Wallgrove and, no I'm sorry, no

16:00 I'm wrong, there I was in camp at Cootamundra when the 6th Division marched out. I think it was a month's camp. There was a series of camps that we attended in those days and I quite remember, quite well the 6th Division Batts [Battalion] fellows marching out to go to Sydney to join up.

16:30 Was a band of Roll out the Barrel. Can still recall it.

**And how did you feel about the possibility of going overseas yourself?**

Oh, thought perhaps it was probably inevitable, particularly the 6th Division had gone, one of those things.

**Were you keen to join the AIF [Australian Imperial Force]?**

Oh yes,

17:00 yes. When the 6th, when the 7th Division was being formed, by that time I remember, if I remember rightly the France had capitulated, things were more serious. I was in my 19th year then, 19 so I had no, not that I would have had any problems having permission to go. I thought, felt it was my duty to go.

17:30 **How did your family react to your decision to go?**

Oh, I think they expected me to.

**Did they say anything or do you remember anything they might have said to you?**

No, I think they knew I would. They would have been pleased I'm sure.

18:00 **Was the sense of duty important to you?**

Well, I'd been training for that purpose. I'd been over two years' training you know as an infantry soldier, so would seem strange not to

18:30 go to war if it was needed.

**Tell me about when you actually enlisted?**

Yes, well then I was in Wallgrove Camp, which was a three months' camp and they're forming the 7th Division and there was a Captain Brian who was two 2IC [Second in Command] of the company, I was in the militia and he was he was given a commission

19:00 in the 2/17th battalion as a 2IC of the company and he was recruiting for this company and getting those he knew as soldiers in his CMF situation, so he came to Wallgrove and there were about six of us if I recall rightly. We all

19:30 went in two cars to Paddington and joined up. I was in a sergeant I think, I might have been a lance sergeant. There were three or four others sergeants and a corporal and a couple, two or three privates, I think, what that's more than, it's two car loads, anyway I remember.

20:00 I know the names of these people. I could recite them but I won't and I remember though we were, I was in a car driven by Major Maxwell, who later, he was a doctor in Cootamundra and he later became brigadier in the 8th Division and he was captured

20:30 as prisoner of war and saw out the war as a prisoner. He was quite a well-known and very highly respected soldier. He gave me some words of advice on the way. I mean he gave us all words of advice, I suppose. He said, "Never volunteer and

21:00 and never call for volunteers," which I thought was sort of good advice from an old soldier and followed his advice to the letter.

**Did it serve you well, that advice?**

Yes it did.

**Tell me where you went for your training?**

We did our

21:30 basic training in Ingleburn Camp and after that we marched to Bathurst as more or less a toughening up exercise I suppose, preparatory to going overseas and also in Bathurst camp there was field training . There was plenty of room there for field exercises. We didn't go into anything more

22:00 though than a company, we didn't get any up to the battalion level. We actually embarked in October 1940 without having had a battalion exercise apart from on the move, the battalion on the move and that's about all and involved with anti aircraft

22:30 training on the move and things like that and gas training. We had gas respirators which we had to put on while we were marching sometimes.

**How did they do the anti aircraft training?**

Well, there were dispersals yeah, but no aircraft, there was, no it was only sort of a form of bastardy I suppose

23:00 you'd call it yeah, having a gas mask on.

**Could I ask you now about embarkation?**

From Sydney? Yes we were on the [HMS] Queen Mary. It was a, our company commander Keith Marnier. Captain Marnier, he was in charge of the allocation of quarters

23:30 on the Queen Mary and I think the 2/17th battalion did reasonably well on, I mean there about, I've forgotten whether there was F or G decks on the Queen Mary and I think we might have been on B deck, so as sergeants I remember I was company sergeant major then, there were,

24:00 I think it was four or six in the cabin all the, anyway all the sergeants of C Company were in yes that, you know it was a drill well performed. We all had our number and followed the sequence up the ramps and away we go sort of thing.

**Was it a memorable voyage for you?**

Yes it was, really. Well it's the first time going overseas but it had to be memorable really. I mean we were only young.

**Were there any incidents along the way that stick in your mind?**

I think we stopped the Mary, stopped in the middle of the Indian ocean once, which was quite strange because it was a report that there, someone was overboard - a man overboard,

25:00 they didn't do it a second time. I don't know whether there was a second time, there was a man overboard but I doubt whether there was a man overboard. It was reported as such but it's very dangerous to stop a ship like that in the middle of the Indian Ocean with German submarines about. Not known as being about but nevertheless.

25:30 **Was that on your mind at the time, the possibility of submarines?**

Not really. We weren't concerned. No doubt the captain of the ship was but and the escort captains would have been the destroyers that were went with us. HM[A]S Perth, I think it was with us. We called at India at Bombay on the way because the Queen Mary wasn't capable, well it was too big to

26:00 go up the canal, you see the Suez Canal and so we had to get moored out of Bombay and whilst the transfer to smaller ships was going on the availability of transport we had, the Rhona, which was a much smaller ship of course and nevertheless it just carried the battalion and during that time they were assembling sea transport, we

26:30 went to Deolali, which is a hill station out of Bombay and our first introduction to India and you know the mystery of the East.

**What impressions did India make on you?**

India? Well Bombay of course is with the people sleeping in the streets and all that sort of thing. We'd heard of this sort of thing

27:00 but to actually see it and the masses of millions of people you know and you know it's quite an experience but it was better in the hillsides and we went by train. Actually, the train was an open sort of a thing. It's a bit like a cattle truck although built for people. It was all open of course, it was hot enough, it didn't

27:30 matter, you didn't get cold, it was quite pleasant even though we were travelling at night and we had a tented camp and gilly gilly men came around and rope, Indian rope trick was performed and all the soldiers had a bearer. You know what a bearer is, I suppose? And so

28:00 they, with their few annas it cost, they could have their washing done instead of washing themselves, their own washing clean, their boots, things like that but that was of course a novelty particularly for the soldiers. I mean the officers of course normally had a batman but the troops

28:30 didn't, so and as the novelty of going into the village, an Indian village. The smell of India you know is something. It's something about it. If you've been there you know that I mean and the noise of the villages in the distance. It's quite

29:00 an experience to go there for the first time.

**Tell me your next port of call on your trip?**

Well the Rhona, the Rhona took us all the all the way to El Kantara, which is on the Suez Canal sort

29:30 of half way along on one side Egypt and the other side Palestine.

**And this is where you disembarked to?**

We disembarked there and then by train to Gaza, to a tented camp in Gaza or along the, you know it's quite an area there of camps more or less

30:00 along a road and the railway line of course. There were sort of sidings all along the railway line, which were used by the authorities in the way of transport facility.

**And what were you sent to do when you got there?**

What did we do there? Well they did training up to a point as

30:30 I said before. I left there to go to officers' cadet training unit in Cairo. I was with the second batch of three potential officers went to the school and whilst I was in Palestine at that stage there was not more than say company exercises.

31:00 I'm not sure whether there was after that a battalion exercise but possibly only one before going into an operational area. That is to say going off through Egypt to Libya, so it was sort of toughening up and

31:30 **What was the difference between the training you did in Palestine and the training you had done in New South Wales?**

Well, it was different country of course. Was a good deal of route marching done as well for toughening up and you'd follow the tracks or the not much in the way of roads, not much in the way of roads. It was

32:00 we're off, we're still in Gaza.

**If we'd just like to continue, I was just asking you?**

I went to the OTU [Operational Training Unit] in Gaza.

**When did you move into your first operational area?**

It was in June, myself, my unit left before but I was in Cairo for three months on this school, so I  
32:30 left in June of 1940 to rejoin my battalion, which was then in Tobruk.

**And tell me how you got to Tobruk?**

I went by destroyer in a destroyer named Hotspur and it was scheduled of course to go into Tobruk  
33:00 at night, that was the only, I mean, dive bombers were the problem during the day time. There were very extensive dive bombing, the German Stukas and also for following the ships in, so it was quite a quite a hazardous business as far as the destroyers were concerned and the ship's captain.

**Well, was the Hotspur attacked on the way in?**

33:30 Not that I know of, no. We didn't, we were all right going in. Coming out I had a different situation but going in we, as far as I know, I don't recall being attacked.

**What were your first impressions of Tobruk?**

Well, if you've seen Tobruk, it's rather a desolate place. Getting there at night of course, my first impressions were at night and we got off in a hurry.

34:00 The ships stayed only a very short time. I mean if they hadn't off loaded all the stuff from the ship all the requirements and all the wounded hadn't been embarked within a certain time, the ship just went and they had a very, very severe timetable in that respect

34:30 and so there was, that was the first part of it, then going out to the staging camp, which is place called Wadi Auda I'll never forget that because of the bumpy road. We were in the back of a truck and it was the most bumpiest road I can ever imagine. It was Tobruk, of course is a, not like

35:00 some people might have thought. It's rather rocky and not much dirt on top sort of dirty sand anyway and you had to have trouble digging into it but this didn't stop the road being potty, pot holes sort of thing.

35:30 **Can you tell me a bit about the duties you were, you had there?**

Well, I was in charge of the carrier platoon. I was posted to carrier platoon, that was my first task as a platoon commander.

**And what were they doing?**

Well we ...a carrier is an armoured vehicle you know which carries, it's only a small vehicle, a tracked vehicle, which was quite nippy. On a road it could go about 40 miles an hour

36:00 and across the desert of course it also probably retarded it a little bit but in some places and it also didn't get bogged. I mean in the sand you could, hadn't any trouble. The only trouble was likely to throw a track if you didn't drive particularly well and turning the vehicle could throw a track. That was

36:30 the main problem with it but it was a vehicle that was intended to cross bullet swept ground you know. It had protection from bullets, that is to say small arms but not from anything greater sort of anti tank weapons. This was you know, it had its

37:00 protection in speed more than anything else and dodging about too, so that the artillery and the anti tank guns were, couldn't get a steady target sort of thing.

**So what sort of things were you transporting?**

It was used sometimes to rescue soldiers you know in operations that you had to get out quickly but

37:30 the original idea of a Bren carrier was to transport the Bren gun which was its weapon, main weapon and it had an anti-tank rifle as well but from one place to another across bullet swept ground that was the idea. It was also capable of firing the Bren from the vehicle on a sort of a post inside the armour plating but it was quite a

38:00 low vehicle and was very good at getting into folds of the, in the ground hiding without being seen from distance sort of thing.

**And how many of the vehicles were attached to your platoon?**

Well we only had seven if my I remember rightly. There were two sections and my own as the platoon commander but later on in the war they had many more. They expanded the carrier platoon,

38:30 they even used carriers for machine guns, machine gun platoon and also the mortar platoon in later battles. Battle of El Alamein, the carrier was used much more but it was used for patrolling. In the early stages of Tobruk the enemy in places were quite a distance away, so it was used in patrolling in daylight

39:00 but towards the latter stages the battalion was there, the enemy had closed in and in another area they called "the salient," the distance between the enemy and our troops was not far at all, I mean there was

no way you could use a carrier there. Quite apart from the mines getting out or through the mine fields and so on there

39:30 just wouldn't be on but at night we used them. I remember on one occasion

## Tape 2

00:34 **Ray, could you continue with that story you were starting to tell when the tape changed?**

See the idea was to, of course the overall plan in Tobruk was to keep the enemy away from our own positions right away as far as possible, so that they didn't have observation of our, for defences

01:00 and to dominate no man's land, to make no man's land our land and Australian forces were 9th Division we, were then 9th Division by the way, when we went, when our battalion went to the desert it became a 9th Division,

01:30 20th brigade was transferred from the 7th Division to the 9th Division, which was a new division formed in the Middle East and the 9th Division always had a very proud record of dominating no man's land, which was achieved by patrolling day and night and it reached a stage

02:00 ultimately where it was difficult to use carriers in the daytime because the proximity of the enemy and anti-tank guns which were the problem you see. As I say, as I said, in the early days they were used a lot but as the siege was more secure as far as the Germans were concerned in keeping this bottle in, we weren't going to be bottled in

02:30 to the extent of dominating no man's land, so we went out at night with the carriers and the other thing about going in the daylight is of course you had to cross over through the, our own positions and this is, the companies or the soldiers in the forward defences didn't want that to happen because the carriers blew up dust. There was always dust everywhere sort of thing and

03:00 they would what is known as drawing the crabs. In other words the enemy's artillery would be brought down on our own positions quite needlessly just because they wanted to have a go at the vehicle, which obviously vehicle or vehicles which were crossing through our forward defences, so you know at night we moved through the defences through the gaps in the mine

03:30 fields and out into no man's land, and on one occasion we went out to shoot up the enemy in daylight you see, so you get into a position where you could shoot them up when and surprise them shaking their blankets in the morning when they get up and getting the dust out of their blankets and so on deciding

04:00 they might have some food into groups and so on. There were Italians in this particular time I'm thinking of, so I had been in daylight patrolling myself on foot, I had done it, didn't mean that just because I was a carrier commander, I didn't do my stint on foot patrols out into no man's land at night.

04:30 Daylight's foot patrols were out in daylight. I mean they're not the norm at all. So I had decided on a place to take the carriers which was suitable to firing on the enemy along El Adem Road. It was a interesting thought to

05:00 sort of drive at night in a carrier. It's not like when you're walking. I mean you can measure your distance very accurately by the number of paces, you always count the pace as you go out and you know where you are sort of thing but when you're in a carrier it's not as easy, so what I remember doing on this occasion was counting the ...along the El Alam Road, there was telegraph poles, so I knew

05:30 how many when I got out there, I knew how many telegraph poles there were, where it would be quite hazardous to take the carrier any further because the anti-tank guns, so we got into a depression and quite secretly there was no trouble about it, and the three yeah, there were three carriers, myself and two others and

06:00 fired on these fellows that were shaking their blankets and whatnot and of course they disappeared smartly. Whether we hit any or not, well I suppose we could have hit some but we wouldn't know whether we killed any and but soon after there was an anti-tank gun. Fortunately it missed us. We were down in a bit of a depression and just what

06:30 sort of target they had, I don't know but anyway they missed us, so we took off in a hurry of course 'bugged out' as the Americans use that term, don't they, but we took off and we zigzagged our way back to our own lines to the gap in our own lines but as it turned out one of the carriers was left behind and I sort of looked over and it wasn't coming and

07:00 I'd just turned around to go back and give it a toe or something and I hadn't got very far before it started up and came to follow us. But the story of that is that the driver of this particular carrier, his name was Granny...Granny Matthews. He died not all that long ago and I remember when I was doing inspections on maintenance

07:30 times Granny always had his carburettor out, dismantled his carburettor, was never satisfied with his carburettor, so it sort of, I thought, "Well, goodness me surely his, and after all this time on maintenance keeping his carburettor right, he wouldn't stall in the middle of no man's land when he wanted to get away in a hurry," but

08:00 yes that was one instant that I remember, yeah.

**What well, we'd love to ask you more about Tobruk perhaps later on but for now could I ask about your withdrawal from Tobruk?**

Yes, I left because I had jaundice and it was quite a common thing, health, with the troops after all that eight months they were in

08:30 Tobruk but bully beef and biscuits and not much in the way of fresh food at all you know. Tinned food makes and also it was a very unsanitary place. When you think about it was originally occupied by great many numbered Italians than we were in number. Well I think Tobruk started

09:00 off with a siege of about 30,000 but there would have been who knows how many hundreds of thousands of Italians there because the main posts, the concrete posts could take 50 people you know underground. They didn't have the same area above ground I suppose, there's still concrete areas for fighting from

09:30 but nevertheless they were and then of course the 6th Division, they kicked the Italians out, they captured Tobruk and they were there for a time and there were always troops there coming back to, it was April 1941, the 12th of April I think

10:00 the siege started, so as a matter of fact it was well known to the destroyers that they knew when they were approaching Tobruk because they could smell it and the sanitary situation was such that even in places you couldn't dig deep trench latrines. They had to be sort of rather shallow trench

10:30 latrines because you'd hit rock, particularly in the Salient where that, this was so. The area, the Salient, which was very close to the enemy.

**So tell me about the day you left Tobruk?**

Yes, I that was on the, I started to say it was on the destroyer and

11:00 well, we left in darkness of course and we were bombed on the way. It was I suppose not far out of Tobruk on the way to Alexandria, we were followed by dive bombers. You couldn't see any of course but to what the captain of the destroyer knew of where they were, I don't know except

11:30 that they always went zig zag, did a zig zag course and when the dive bomber was approaching you get a violent zig or a zag whatever it was to you know, so much so that if you're on deck and you didn't have a rail, it would throw you into the sea. I knew that because I kept down under above deck. I didn't

12:00 like the idea of being below deck and I got away with it anyway up on deck and I never ever saw a dive bomber approaching. They were following the wake and that's when of course the ship did a lurch across and they missed the ship. Oh it was, it must have been half a dozen times before

12:30 they gave up.

**Did you hear ...did you hear them?**

No, no, it was the pop on the Oerlikon guns were going so fast you know 'bomp bomp bomp bomp' and there was more than one gun. All I knew about it was that they were firing at them. They were firing at something. They weren't you know, whatever their drill was I don't know. Whether they had a, whether they, seeing whether they had sights

13:00 of the plane or not I don't know or whether they just sort of had a barrage, which all of the Oerlikons sort of covered an area where the plane might be approaching.

**Tell me why you didn't like being below deck?**

I just didn't like the idea of being sunk below deck. It's probably thoughts of claustrophobia. I'm not terribly

13:30 claustrophobic. I'm not you know, I'm not any more than the average person I suppose but I thought, "I'd rather be up there," and...

**Was that for safety purposes too?**

Pardon?

**Was that the worry of being trapped below if the ship was sunk?**

Well the thought of it, not the worry of it but the thought of it. I mean there's more danger on top probably because you get hit by a bomb but there's some protection,

14:00 the armoured plating, to what extent it would stop bombs on the top, I'm not sure. Usually it's the torpedo that gets the destroyers and the ships and then of course you're below deck and the torpedoes were, that was on too you know. You wouldn't know where they were, where the enemy subs were or know anything about it. We wouldn't, travelling on the ship as infantry soldiers, we were just being carried, we

14:30 didn't know anything else, yeah.

**Does that add to the tension sort of not knowing what could happen?**

Oh, it wasn't a great way, no it wasn't a great way.

**So you were taken to Alexandria, were you?**

Yes.

**And tell me about what you did there?**

At Alexandria?

**Yeah.**

Well, we didn't last there very long. We were, I went into hospital, went into the Greek Hospital, which was

15:00 run by the British.... Hospital, I've forgotten what the name of it was except that it was a Greek previously, a Greek Hospital and it was run by the British. It wasn't Australian. Australian Hospitals were in Palestine, they didn't ever go to... oh was one they went to Tobruk later on, but I think there was AGH [Australian General Hospital] there or a part of it.

15:30 **Tell me a bit about the Greek hospital then?**

Where I went?

**Yeah, just a bit, tell me about that Greek hospital.**

I don't remember much about it. It very quite a, in those days modern hospital. Was you know quite a large building, a number of storeys and the main thing I remember about it was that we weren't allowed to eat potatoes we, and they gave us sweet potatoes,

16:00 had something to do with, it was diet, we had to have the right diet because our enlarged spleen, which also is hepatitis, known as hepatitis now we know, we only knew it as yellow jaundice in those days. Whether it was just two types of hepatitis (UNCLEAR) it wasn't a serious type obviously because we recovered.

16:30 **How long was it before you rejoined your battalion?**

Say I was in hospital a fortnight. I can't be sure of that. Then we had a fortnight recuperation, a very pleasant situation in a house boat on Gezira Island sort of moored up against Gezira Island which was not

17:00 very far away from the country club they call it, where there was tennis, there was golf course in the middle of the race course and squash courts, pink gins and very pleasant indeed. We had a nice time

17:30 for a fortnight.

**What happened after the fortnight?**

We went back to the unit in Palestine. Actually the, yes I'm just trying to, gee in the timings, but I think I got to Palestine, back to the interests to the training battalion for a while, I'm sure I did now I come to think of it for a while

18:00 before the battalion came back, yes, I did but not long. Battalion came back in September and I think it was late October when I left Tobruk.

**This is '41?**

Yes 1941.

**Tell me about what happened going into 1942, what were you doing then?**

Well 1942

18:30 **So you're in Palestine after Tobruk and then, so were you in Palestine over Christmas?**

No, we had Christmas in Palestine. We had Christmas in Palestine, then we went in into Syria, Lebanon and Syria

19:00 for training and for recuperation too you know to, we could get more strength cause the soldiers were

pretty thin when they came out of Tobruk you know. They needed it time for recuperation as well as, initially in Palestine it was recuperation but then we went up to Lebanon

19:30 and for more training, quite some extensive training for a time and then into Syria to the, up as far as the Turkish border. There was thoughts at that stage or possibility of Germany, of course Germany had taken Greece and Cyprus you know, that coming across and landing

20:00 in across towards Aleppo and in Syria. That is also the possibility of Turkey coming into the war, so there was a defensive situation in places, like viaducts and railway tunnels and things of this kind. This is where the Berlin to Baghdad railway went. A place called Afrine was the headquarters of

20:30 our battalion and the companies were out in various areas different spread out in these defensive localities and looking after, see that they didn't blow up tunnels or you know that sort of thing yes, and it, we were there in the winter too. We went there a second time actually but yeah that's before we went to,

21:00 back to the desert.

**And just tell me briefly the sort of duties your platoon in particular had in Syria?**

In Syria?

**Yeah.**

Well, we were the carrier platoon. We went on exercises. There's always maintenance required in carriers and also I was, I became assistant adjutant there

21:30 not for long. I was given the job of trainee adjutant I suppose you'd call it. I always remember this because Arthur Newton was the adjutant and he was quite a character Arthur. He was a regular soldier and had a sense of humour. When I went in to report to him, I had a message to report to him

22:00 as I was to be assistant adjutant, he showed me the in drawer. "That's the in drawer," and then he pointed to and said, "That's the out drawer." And then he pulled out the drawer from underneath and he said, "That's the too hard basket," and that's about it all he taught me really of being adjutant because he was sent off to a

22:30 School, a Staff School, Staff College School, oh it wasn't a college. I don't know what they called it but anyway it was a Staff School and that was the time that the 9th Division was called to, back to the desert because Rommel and his forces were about 70 miles from Cairo or from Alexandria rather about 100 miles from Cairo.

23:00 **And how, where, so where precisely did you move to when you were recalled to the desert?**

When we were called to the desert?

**Yeah.**

Well I was fortunate because I went with a CO [Commanding Officer] and the intelligence officer in a staff car. I was terribly fortunate and we went in advance of course of the battalion which came by vehicle and by train. It was quite dispersed, so it was

23:30 the adjutant, the new adjutant was Colin Pitman because Arthur had gone to school and we went by train most of the way and part of the way by vehicle but I went by staff car.

24:00 **And so were you in the battalion HQ [Headquarters], were you working?**

Yeah, I was assistant adjutant at that time.

**And how long did that post stay?**

It didn't last very long. I went back to the carriers because the carriers' strength was increased. Originally it was lieutenant's command and in Tobruk we had a limited number of carriers anyway

24:30 but it increased to four sections, I think it was four sections of three carriers and the commander was made a captain and they had a, also had a lieutenant second in command, so I was too junior to be captain anyway, so I stayed with them nevertheless as second in command although for that

25:00 matter when it came to the desert when we got to operations, I was really in charge because the captain became battle headquarters company sort of battle OC [Officer Commanding] headquarter company at that time.

**So what was it like assuming command?**

25:30 What of a carrier platoon?

**Yeah.**

Oh it was one of those things you were sort of trained to accept. You don't think about it very much, I

don't think. I didn't think about it very much. Obviously I had responsibility you, that's the first thing you think of.

**Well, was it the same men that you had, were working with?**

The same what?

**The same men?**

Yes, they were pretty well. They, there were more because they expanded

26:00 in numbers, yes the same fellows. Later on in El Alamein when the battle as I mentioned before they gave the mortar platoon, they gave them carriers to transport their mortars and also machine gun and they gave, they introduced a new machine gun platoon, which with Vickers machine guns, which we didn't have in Tobruk.

26:30 The machine guns in Tobruk were the British...we the battalion didn't have any machine although they had captured weapons. This was something that happened in Tobruk, captured weapons from the enemy all sorts of different Schmeisser and Italian German weapons. They bolstered

27:00 the fire power up. They had plenty of ammunition because they'd captured ammunition going back to the Italians when they occupied, yeah.

**So I was going to say, how was the work of the carrier platoon changed at El Alamein?**

They were limited there because of the occupation

27:30 of the enemy, the proximity of the enemy. The enemy was reasonably close. They were used, there was one operation which was the forerunner of and more or less a test of enemy defences and locations of enemy positions and so on, a battalion raid that was before the battle of

28:00 El Alamein, came off by the 2/15th battalion, which was one of our sister battalions in the 20 Brigade and they of course were used there in that operation by the battalion and they withdrew from this raid, it was a raid, so they hadn't intended to stay there you know forever sort of thing, it was only a raid. They came

28:30 back actually before it was intended but nevertheless our battalion, I remember our captain, he took off with a number of carriers to help them bring back the wounded and so on and I didn't go. I didn't get it was a case, I wasn't asked to go, so was one of those things. He went off with them and

29:00 I was left behind for that particular operation but as I said they weren't normally used out in front of our location except on only, on one occasion I went out overnight with

29:30 three carriers. That was brought on by, there was a position which was fought over by the Germans and the, our 26th Brigade backwards and forwards on the coast side and the north side of the front at a place called Tel el Eisa and where there was a East Tel el Eisa

30:00 and West Tel el Eisa. Yes, there was a story regarding the taking the three carriers out on this occasion to West Tel el Eisa or in a concealed position on the east of west Tel el Eisa.

30:30 I had gone out with a, one of the intelligence section a couple of times into no man's land, just the two of us to West Tel el Eisa. We went out at night and hid in holes on the enemy side of the, overlooking the enemy positions all day.

31:00 We couldn't move of course. We had to keep there quietly and inconspicuous and we had a range finder and field glasses and compass and we recorded all the movement of the enemy that we noticed, whether a person moved from, one man went from point A to point B or three men went

31:30 from point A to point B or whatever and there was quite a deal of act, well quite a deal of activity of the enemy moving about and in the daytime, so it was decided that they'd send an artillery observation post office officer out and to harass the enemy with gunfire throughout the day

32:00 and he was there for, I suppose a matter of, oh could have been a week doing this, and whether the enemy sort of cottoned on to the idea that maybe there was somebody, someone on West Tel el Eisa doing this, most likely they did and they,

32:30 he got worried because he could see sort of large, larger numbers coming towards his position you see, patrols, and no doubt he would have shot them up I suppose. He was safe to that extent but he got worried, so it was decided that the carriers should go out and if required take him back in

33:00 to, into our own lines, so we went out at night. We had to go at night and here again one was aided by telegraph poles, which because they went at an angle we had to go, we didn't go straight out the front, we went out the side sort of thing and then went out as far as the telegraph poles and then to...

33:30 **Could I just interrupt, so you're on... are you on a road?**

Oh no, it's all desert.

**But you have telegraph poles in a line?**

Yeah, there's telegraph poles. They weren't next to the road, the road was in a different place. It was to the north actually, it ran to the north of Tel el Eisa going east-west to the north of Tel el Eisa that featured in later operations. Oh no, there was no road where we went

34:00 but it was a sort of a short cut I suppose that they took, somehow they had these telephone lines. Of course there was no lines on them and there were a few poles missing too for that matter because they would have been used by, to make overhead cover you know for the troops, so we sort of followed those out and I knew where they where to duck away from them and counting the poles and

34:30 tucked ourselves with our three carriers just in behind Tel el Eisa, West Tel el Eisa and nothing happened. We listened to tank engines all day. We could hear these tank engines of the enemy just wondering, "Whether they're coming our way or not?" and but we came back after dusk soon as we thought, "We wouldn't be heard or seen." We were actually

35:00 chased in at the back, I think it was an armoured car or something. They didn't fire on us but the rear carrier told me that they were, just as we approached, changed our direction towards our gap in the mine field, there was this armoured vehicle in the, you know it was dark, they knew, nevertheless they knew it was there, yeah so that was an activity of the carriers

35:30 that we carried out whilst in the front line in no man's land.

**Tell me, so how long were you doing this sort of work in that region?**

How long? The battalion in its place in Tel el Eisa was the longest time that we were ever

36:00 in an operational front line position and I think it was about three months. I did know this. You know these are things that I, you know are finding a bit difficult to remember.

**That's ok, I just wanted a general impression. I wasn't after exact times.**

I think it was that long. I think it was that long.

**Well, did the carrier platoon suffer casualties during this period?**

36:30 No, not in that earlier stages. We were in a sort of a static position. The enemy was there but all we were doing was patrolling and the carriers as I say did limited patrolling, that's about the only time in my, while I was there that we went out with the carriers but the

37:00 carriers also did patrols on foot. I mean they kept occupied. They weren't just tucked away looking after their carriers. I mean they had to do their share of patrolling on foot as well. That was done yeah, and as I say I did some patrolling myself. I went out and but that's two, just myself and another

37:30 looking back on it. I don't know whether that was terribly wise because the artillery OPO [Observation Post Officer], we always had a section of infantry that went out and put in a position. Well that was fair enough, I suppose he was artillery, he's not meant to be, he's an OPO, he was meant to have some infantry protection from infantry soldiers yeah, know what I mean?

**So how did the Alamein campaign end up for you? Where were you?**

Well I ...I didn't the Battle of Alamein as such was 12 days. I was there in a build up period gaining information of enemy positions and just before they went back the battalion, went back to train

38:30 for the actual operation you know, they did these training exercises so that they knew exactly what they were about to do and every soldier knew what was happening and they trained for this operation by rehearsals, not one but a number of rehearsals. Before that came into being

39:00 I was sent back to the infantry training battalion as adjutant and the, all the soldiers and officers that were back at the infantry training battalion doing this, doing the matter of training reinforcements were changed, so I changed over with the adjutant of who was adjutant of the 20th Infantry Training Battalion, which was

39:30 the training battalion of the 20th Brigade for the whole brigade.

## Tape 3

00:35 **Ok, where we left off you were working as the adjutant in the training battalion, so could you tell me what you were when you moved from that position.**

When I moved from that position, well I was made a made a captain for, temporary captain by reason of the appointment, which was

- 01:00 beyond my seniority in the battalion sort of thing, so when the battalion came back from the Battle of Alamein for a time they went, they stayed in the area and did some training there because there were quite a number of reinforcements that had arrived
- 01:30 during the battle and they didn't send them up green sort of thing, so they hadn't had any battle experience these fellows, so they left the battle area eventually. But it wasn't all that long after it and went back to Palestine and at that time the training battalion was closed down too because the battalion
- 02:00 or the 9th Division was going home, going home to Australia, so I rejoined the unit and went back to my, to a platoon, purpose of the exercise of going back home.

**Did you join the platoon as a captain?**

Our platoon, oh no, no, that's, what I'm saying I would have. I

- 02:30 relinquished the rank because it was a temporary rank for the job that I was doing as adjutant which carried the captain.

**So tell me about coming home?**

I had as a matter of fact I overlooked earlier I had a short time as a mortar officer actually before I took on the carrier platoon when we went, when the battalion went back to the desert

- 03:00 and we did a trip out to the desert to block a hole, which the general officer was concerned about. That was only for a short period but I also had mortar platoon, yes.

**Well tell me about coming home to Australia?**

Well, we came home on

- 03:30 the Aquitania. We kept fit mainly I suppose. I can remember that yeah it was quite pleasant, obviously we, the thoughts on going home were on the Aquitania. It wasn't quite the same as the Queen Mary. Course the Queen Mary went, hadn't been properly converted into troop carrying when we

- 04:00 went over, we still had the dining room and we still had as far as the sergeants were concerned, we're in the main dining room after the officers and we had whatever the ship carried for the civilians in their luxury, you know they had to eat, we had to eat their food, which was

- 04:30 very pleasant indeed but coming back of course the Aquitania was a troop carrier well and truly converted but nevertheless it was certainly a lot... quite comfortable considering what we had later to put up with, I won't say put up with in the south west Pacific. Oh, it was a case of we had some officers' classes and things of this kind related

- 05:00 to the Pacific area you know, was lectures and so on what we had need to expect in going to New Guinea and there were some officers, one in particular who was a gold mine miner in New Guinea before the war at Wau and we were introduced to

- 05:30 amphibious training as well. Some of the officers of the battalion there were just, a couple of them I think had been to amphibious training.

**Now where were we..... we're coming back to Australia? You were telling me about your amphibious training?**

- 06:00 Yes it was, there were a number of, a few officers who had done amphibious training in the Middle East obviously, I suppose in anticipation of when returning to Australia, that's what we would be about or possibly that's what

- 06:30 our division would be about and it was only by way of lectures on the ship, obviously I mean they passed on some of the knowledge that they had of this, which they acquired at the school.

**Tell me when did you first hear about Japan entering the war?**

Where were we at the time?

- 07:00 **You would have been in the Middle East presumably.**

Yes. It would have been in Syria.

**I'm just wondering were the troops keen to get back to Australia on hearing news?**

They were very upset about it, yeah.

**Can you tell me a bit about that?**

They were very concerned about, particularly those, the married ones of course although

- 07:30 I suppose hard to say who was more concerned than who, but was very hard for them to settle down. Of

course what the battalion commander obviously was and for that matter division commander and all right the way down would be concerned to keep the troops occupied, so that they couldn't think about it too much,

08:00 so they sort of kept up the training but where we were up in Syria spread out looking after viaducts and tunnels and things then there were certain restrictions on what training could be done but nevertheless it was carried out. Officers and NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers]

08:30 did tactical exercises with, without troops and I can remember the temporary CO, we had a temporary CO at that time, he had the NCOs doing appreciations you know, if you know what that means. You're given certain situations military situations and you come to certain conclusions

09:00 and consider all the pros and cons of course of action and so on. Everything that affects the course of the operation and come up with a plan, so they were doing, they were occupied doing those things but it was at the time when it affected the morale of the troops because here they really were sort of in such

09:30 a situation, but then the battle of El Alamein came about and that kept them occupied. They realised that you know it was necessary, very necessary that you know the 9th Division helped to send back the Germans you know in the desert,

10:00 was a very serious situation there because Rommel and his forces 70 miles from Alexandria you know. If they got to Alexandria who knows, they could. Who was it? Some suggested the plan that the Germans might go right through you know to Iran and the oil and so on.

10:30 **Could you tell me about when you came back to Australia you saw your family?**

We had a brief leave, yes two weeks' leave they called it the 'Liddington leave' and then we assembled at, in Sydney was two camps actually Narellan and Wallgrove camps where we reassembled and went by train up to Atherton Tablelands,

11:00 a long train trip took quite a time.

**What was it like seeing your family after all that time?**

Oh, to be truthful it was emotional.

11:30 We were away two and a half years. I shouldn't be emotional. I shouldn't be emotional.

12:00 **You can be whatever you like, whatever happens that's ok. What did your dad say to you?**

I'd rather not be.

**How long were you with your family?**

Oh, only just this fortnight, I think two weeks of leave before we went up. I think it was two weeks, either two weeks or three weeks, some of these things I forget, however I quite remember at the time.

**And what was it like going away after such a brief reunion?**

Oh, that was all right. I mean

12:30 it was a job to do, the war was on, we had to go and learn how to fight the Japanese.

**Did you feel differently about the Japanese to the Germans?**

Beg your pardon?

**Did you feel different about the Japanese enemy to the German enemy?**

Ultimately, yes.

13:00 **In what way?**

Well, they didn't take, they killed all the prisoners didn't they, killed all our prisoners.

**Tell me about the trip to the Pacific then when you?**

Well, when we went to the Pacific

13:30 on, let me see first of all, we went to New Guinea and then we went to Borneo you see, so the first time we went from Townsville in, not in any Queen Mary's or anything. We were in Liberty ships and

14:00 although part of our battalion went on a Dutch ship the Van Hertz but I myself, I mean went on a Liberty ship, which were just tubs, you know, they're made by the Americans, mass produced for the purpose, so they were just tubs virtually and

14:30 very hot and terribly, terribly steamy. You couldn't go up on deck on them. I mean that was a time when I had to stay down below, I mean there was, the no cigarette, smoking or anything like that. There

weren't any for that matter on the Queen Mary or the Aquitania I mean, but the hatches and those were covered with blankets sort of thing you know,

15:00 darkened out, just as you were doing here, they would have two blankets you know, not just one, I mean you couldn't carry just out one, otherwise it would show a light, so you know go out the first one, first yeah.

**Was there a threat of Japanese submarine?**

Oh yes, yes. Didn't take long, it only took four days. We went from Townsville to Milne Bay.

**Tell me about arriving at Milne Bay?**

Well Milne Bay was a dreadful

15:30 place. It was raining, it rained every day in the middle of the monsoon, you could set your clock on the time it rained about one o'clock whatever it was and it rained and rained and rained and rained and you did your training in the rain, it didn't stop you and you slushed around with, in the mud, yeah.

**And where did you go from there?**

We went to Lae. We

16:00 landed an operation at Lae.

**Can you tell me a bit about your duties and activities there?**

I was second in command of a company on the landing at Lae. We called at Buna on the way. We left in daylight and we arrived at Lae just well, it was planned to arrive there at

16:30 just after dawn in Lae. There was a bit, question of the timing of that the, we had the American navy, the commander Admiral Barber and our own division commander of course had to agree. They didn't come to a great

17:00 satisfactory agreement as far as I know but I shouldn't enter into this, I'm not sure of all these things, but it was after dawn we, soon after that we landed in Lae. It was unopposed as far as the troops were concerned, as far as the infantry were concerned but not by the Japanese aircraft. There were seven Japanese aircraft. They got direct hits on two of the barges

17:30 and 2/23rd battalion had their CO killed and was quite a number of casualties as they were approaching the beach head.

**And so you came in on one of the barges?**

On what they call a landing craft infantry. It was

18:00 no, yes a landing craft infantry. I mustn't get confused because we landed later at Finschhafen and we went in on a destroyer, what we call an APD, Armoured Personnel Destroyer, but at Lae it was a landing craft infantry, I was on, yes. Carried about a company of soldiers and they had ramps down

18:30 on either side of the vehicle or either side of the ship, so you disembarked along the ramps sort of thing.

**And what was different about fighting the Japanese?**

What was different? Well the tactics were different. We had to change, learn new tactics. The principles of war were the same but the tactics were different because of the jungle. You can imagine that for to begin with we had

19:00 to change our organisation. We didn't have anywhere near as many vehicles as in the desert and the artillery situation was different too. They had to whilst they still retained the 25 pounders, which was the field gun, the divisional field gun, they also used some dismantled ones that were able to be dismantled

19:30 and I'm not sure, I think they probably start using those going over the Kokoda Trail and it's a problem with, of being also air lifted. You could air lift them as well and re-assemble them when it was the appropriate time and there weren't as many, we didn't have as many mortars

20:00 and we still retained the machine guns but they didn't have as many anti tank guns. They still retained some. They used them mainly for on the beach heads you know against seaboard landing by the Japanese.

**And were you still involved in carrier duties?**

No, no they didn't have any carriers. The carriers

20:30 were, they actually, personnel was a change, some personnel went to what they called a carrier company that went to New Guinea and they were part of the 9th Division. They, but they were on foot. They couldn't use them very well. It was possible to you know on narrow tracks and so on,

21:00 they used the Jeeps on the narrow tracks of course and the Jeep was a wonderful in just as it was in the desert. You could hide it in the desert so easily and scoot around in it. It was more useful, even more useful in New Guinea because its size and because its four wheel drive and low ratios. It would go get

21:30 up steep slippery hills, you wouldn't imagine possible to do it with good drivers and also through the mud and slush and gullies and things like that. Wonderful little things, yeah.

**What was the morale of the troops like at this stage?**

Oh morale was good very good.

22:00 Our CO or I think it was our, at that time our second in command he, when he wrote about this Lae operation, he said that we went into the operation with morale as high as it was at El Alamein, which is saying something. No, morale was always good.

22:30 **Tell me then, your daily activities on this campaign what were you, your platoon, you and your platoon doing day to day?**

Well, it depends whether you're in what you're doing in the operation, obviously I mean whether you're in advance towards the enemy or whether you'd contacted the enemy or whether you were in defence

23:00 as the enemy was concerned. There were always, I'd actually went back at one stage in, when we got further on to Finschhafen, which was a different situation, a much more, as far as our battalion was concerned anyway, a much more difficult situation as far as

23:30 the enemy was concerned. When I say difficult, I mean there were more, many of, more of them and more fighting going on rather than chasing after them and in Lae we walked many, many miles and through the jungle and through the kunai and through swamps and everything without contacting the enemy and ultimately we thought there was that situation but we were more of a

24:00 defensive situation on occasions when we were looking after artillery and see that they didn't, weren't attacked by the enemy foot soldiers, who were the enemy. No it, different situation but as 2IC you're second in command of the company, you were required to ensure that the company was

24:30 properly supplied with its ammunition and all, everything they needed in regard to fighting a war, which includes food of course, cigarettes, tobacco which they didn't always have. Depended on the supply but it was always shouted for from the back of course, the battalion quartermaster was responsible to make sure that it goes forward

25:00 to the companies and then the company's company quartermaster sergeant's [CQMS] responsible in what they call a B echelon area, whilst the F group, what they call the F group or the fighting soldiers, went forward but they still needed no matter how far forward they are, they still needed to have their food be as what it may and their

25:30 ammunition and if necessary their water. Cause water wasn't so much of a problem in New Guinea as it was in Tobruk. In the desert, water was a very big problem but it rained, so it usually rained so much in New Guinea that you could collect it if you didn't have it. You could collect it in your ground sheet or you see and it's,

26:00 strangely though you wouldn't think in New Guinea that you'd need, you'd have a problem with water but there was one situation in Finschhafen where it was and you keep, catch it of course if it's not supplied. You catch it in the, with the showers at the rain, yeah so that was, that's what a 2IC's responsible for

26:30 but I wasn't for long as a 2IC. As I say, I went back to a platoon in Finschhafen and subsequently a company commander in Finschhafen, so you can ask me what I did all the time I was a company commander.

**If you'd like to give me a brief outline**

27:00 **I'd be very happy?**

Well as I say, it virtually what the operation is. I mean if you're in a static position I suppose you have to at some stage be in a static position, you can't be on the move all the time then you're concerned for the welfare of your troops but having ensured that they've been properly trained and trained

27:30 as best you're able and in accordance with what the circumstances are, they should be then, they have a daily things which they know they do without being told you know. They've got to keep their weapons clean, haven't they and they've got to make sure that their, if they're in a defensive position, that their slit trenches or whatever they're occupying are properly completed and

28:00 that the, you know. Likewise, the second commanders are responsible to see that these things are done and that they dig their latrines and maintain their hygiene and keep their listening posts in operation.

28:30 This is when, as when they are on the move and you can't move forever. You have to stop you know, you usually have regular stopping times, then you have to immediately, they put out their protection that

their listening posts are quickly put out, so that the company can, the company can't be ambushed.

29:00 **So how long were you involved in the operations in Papua New Guinea?**

In Papua New Guinea, we went, we arrived there in July and we left there in January.

**And where did you go to?**

We came back to Australia, yeah. We went up as far as a place called Sio, where that's as far as the division went. We, my company was

29:30 the company that reached the Sio mission, which was the, as far as the divisional went, division went, 9th Division. It was taken over by, as far as our battalion was concerned, anyway was another battalion, yeah.

**And tell me what you were doing back when you went back to Australia the second time?**

Well, we went back to the Tablelands

30:00 and we didn't have any leave. We were there for a year.

**With no leave?**

Yeah and we were training. It was train, train, train.

30:30 **Was that frustrating not being able to get any leave when you were up there?**

Well you want to ask me a question again, are you?

31:00 **Just asking when you were doing, you were returned to the Atherton Tablelands after Papua New Guinea, I'm just wondering what it felt like to spend a year up there without being able to see your family?**

No, I was single,

31:30 there were other activities. I mean I went to a tactical school for example in Brisbane as a break. I also had malaria a few times, which was a break in hospital.

**Where did you first get malaria?**

New Guinea, I got it from New Guinea, most people got because we didn't have

32:00 protection from malaria. We took Atebrin pills and when you knocked off as a suppressive but when you knocked off taking the Atebrin then the malaria came out you see, it came it was in the system.

**So just tell me then just a little bit about what you were, you were doing more training, were you in Queensland?**

Yes, we were training. We were

32:30 doing quite extensive exercises. We were doing training with live ammunition you know, it was a case of here again keeping the soldiers occupied, so that their thoughts weren't about so much about having leave and the morale was ok. There were obviously some would have compassionate leave. There would be compassionate leave

33:00 given in some circumstances of course, serious requirements of family requirements back home but generally it, there was no leave and as I say, I was an officer. We were training, my mind was occupied. We were doing exercises. They went right up battalion exercises, brigade exercises and so on, so they were, they all need

33:30 preparing and we were all being tested all along, so that as I say I had no cause to go home. My parents were all right. As a single person it didn't worry me at all.

**So you were preparing to go to Borneo, were you?**

Yeah.

**Tell me about Borneo then?**

Yes, well Borneo, we went to,

34:00 here again we had these craft ships you know, which weren't all that wonderful for travel and we went as far as Morotai, which is jumping off place for Borneo, for all the Borneo operations. The 9th Division conducted

34:30 a number of operations on Borneo and on the first fought on the east side, then on the west side and they were known as the Oboe Operations. Well, they went up as far as Oboe 6. All of these were, all these operations were amphibious and had as an operation

35:00 base Morotai in the Halmaheras.

**So which was the first landing you did at Borneo from Morotai?**

So far as was it Tarakan or? Oh dear, I have an idea it was Tarakan as far as our division was concerned, 26th Brigade but ours was

35:30 20th Brigade, we were on the west side with the 24th Brigade on the west side of the island. Our 24th Brigade was Labuan and we were at Brunei on the mainland, Labuan Island that is and so our battalion captured Brunei and we were also involved with the

36:00 5th, 2/15th Battalion that landed at Muara Island, also part of Brunei but they didn't have much in the way of fighting at all there and the 2/13th battalion was the other battalion, the brigade well they were initially reserve although later they did a landing further down the coast too.

36:30 **Tell me about... how did you find the Japanese resistance at Labuan?**

Well, we didn't land at Labuan, we landed on the mainland.

**You landed on the mainland?**

Yeah, at what they what they call Green Beach. It was in

37:00 an area of a place called Brooketon, was on the mainland and it was an advance to Brunei, the town you know, the city of Brunei which of course is much bigger, it's the capital Brunei, you would know that of course, and so it was an advance to capture Brunei, that's initially, that's what it was, the town and it was like a

37:30 tactical exercise until we met the enemy, then it was a bit different because we had some enemy and they shot back at us. Otherwise, it was still an exercise and it was my company that struck the main resistance there. It was quite a, as I say an exercise. It's the usual thing that happens when you're advancing towards the enemy. You have your protective

38:00 forces out, you have what they call the advance point, who meet the enemy first and you don't commit all your forces at once and you don't get, you're designed that you don't get ambushed by protective forces, either flank guards or first of all if necessary and so in this case the section that was, you had

38:30 the organisation of our infantry companies, that you have, they have, you have a section, then you have a platoon, then you have a company you see, so the section, the enemy they started the enemy, and the enemy fired on the section and actually a private soldier, who was a very senior soldier

39:00 took initiative in this case whilst the section commander was there, he nevertheless he put in the charge and whatnot, they destroyed the enemy, this section destroyed the enemy. Largely responsible was this soldier for his action, a soldier named Frank McGrath, he got a military medal for that and they went on but the platoon

39:30 destroyed the other enemy that were on the feature, it was sort of a hill feature ok, and without any casualties you know, they destroyed them all. It was a very well done exercise virtually, but that was insufficient because there was another feature on the right of the road you see, rather, the first one was more or less on the left of the road taking in the road

40:00 such as it was it was, really a track you know and then I committed another platoon to the right of the road. They were held up sort of thing, so we turned on the machine guns and the mortars and the artillery and they did the attack. They killed the enemy and in, I don't know that any got away. If they, it was sort of a lot of long grass

40:30 there though and you know it's possible some of them got away but some of them, I, we having, sort of this was coming on dark sort of thing, so we took up defensive positions for the night and we had some harassment. The enemy harassed us during the night but nevertheless we had some casualties

41:00 in the morning actually from enemy harassment. But that was the last main opposition to the battalion, which went on to capture the town and the ground around it, the high ground around the city. It was really a town actually.

41:30 **Could you just tell me what happened between then and the end of the Pacific war, what you were doing?**

Well, that wasn't the end of our operation in Brunei. For that matter it extended down to Sarawak. The next was an advance to the Seria oil fields, which had been set on, set alight by the Japanese and we did a rapid advance. As a matter of fact

42:00 my company was involved in this by using some.

## Tape 4

00:34 **Could we just back track a bit? Could you tell me going back to taking of Brunei and just, if you could recap for me what happened after that?**

After that?

**Yeah.**

Then, we advanced to this south through the country of Brunei on a

01:00 macadam road, which was only narrow, one vehicle. You'd have to slow down to pass on it, a very narrow road to a place called Lotong and then we had to cross a river and as far as my company was concerned, we went as far as Lotong and as I say, we were the mobile company. It was

01:30 our speed, our distance we travelled to some extent was restricted by our artillery for being within range but then another company took over and advanced further down the coast to a place called Seria, which was a very rich oil field which had been set alight by the Japanese after we landed

02:00 and by the time my company got there of course there were many of these, oh dozens of them, probably 20 or so and I did know how many, but blazing alight you see. Some were raising gas, roaring you know, gas. Others were with oil, just billowing with

02:30 oil and we took...

03:11 **Tape finishes**

## Tape 5

00:31 **Ray, I'd just like to take a couple of steps back and while you were at Milne Bay preparing for the Lae landings, what were your main duties as company 2IC?**

Well, we had to prepare for the invasion or not so much the invasion as a landing in Lae, that was first thing to do and there was a period, bear in mind that we're in the mud and slush and working

01:00 during the day, when there's a monsoon every day, it didn't make any difference as to... we didn't care about our conditions as such, we just continued on and got wet, thoroughly wet and eventually of course we, at night we'd be able to get dry again under our tents but there was a lot of preparation in Lae, Simon [interviewer]. We

01:30 had to decide just what equipment each soldier would carry and overall what armament we would take into the operation and this, yes I'm sorry.

**So what were the considerations for what they would wear, was it what they would take, was it a weight versus practicality issue?**

Yes, well weight this was it, weight was a big factor and that was practised over and over again

02:00 during the period we're in preparation because you're going through the jungle of course and the heat and going distances and humidity and so on and also the swamps and climbing hills. All that sort of thing and it's no good a soldier being exhausted when he gets to the enemy

02:30 and it's a very important factor, so we had to be properly trained in this sort of thing and we didn't, quite a lot of toughening up in that respect but down to every little item that the soldier was carrying and where he would carry it was important and it became standard in that respect. Also in Lae for the first time we were issued with the Owen gun,

03:00 which you might be familiar with. It's quite a famous weapon and useful gun in the jungle where you didn't have long distances and you'd come upon the enemy very suddenly and you have to be 'quick as to the draw' as the saying goes and fire from the hip

03:30 and get a target, so we practised that. There was a lot of practise in that respect.

**What were its major pros and cons, the Owen gun?**

The Owen gun? Well it was very light compared to for example the Tommy gun, which is an American Tommy gun, you know. In the desert, it was a limited number of Tommy guns were used in the desert but they had problems with weight.

04:00 The ammunition too is a .45 ammunition was heavier. The Owen had a .38 calibre and it that was a consideration. It, the most important I suppose of all was that it, even though it was immersed in mud and slush and water and so on, it would still fire the

04:30 round and it didn't stop at an important time. I think it only had one as far as I remember, only one drawback, that if you didn't put the safety catch on you neglected to do this and you dropped it on its butt, it would fire the round, so of course that's a matter of neglect on the part of the training the soldier. That if you dropped it on the butt whilst it had the safety catch

05:00 off, yeah.

**Did the enemy have a comparable weapon?**

No, I, not really. No, they had a, they had a light machine gun the same as we had the Bren gun, a comparable one and they also had a, what they call the wood pecker, which was a heavy machine gun and they'd obviously sound like a wood pecker

05:30 when it fired, very distinctive sound and no, they didn't have a, you might say a carbine such as an Owen gun. Well I didn't see one myself.

**Was there a close interaction with American forces during this preparation time for the landing?**

Very much so in the amphibious training, the boat and shore battalion

06:00 of the Americans. We trained in Cairns on the beaches of around Cairns. Trinity Beach was the main one we trained on. We camped nearby, attended camp in the scrub in that area and we trained with them. They had their own SOP or standard operation procedures in regard to an

06:30 assault on a beach and they had this small craft with the ramp that fell down, dropped down and you assaulted across the beach sort of thing as well as the LCI [Landing Craft Infantry], which was a larger craft and which would carry a, virtually a company round about that anyway,

07:00 but the initial assault is, you know in these assault craft, which carry about a platoon, be about 30 men and also can carry light vehicles as well but usually the vehicles come on the larger craft, the landing craft vehicles, you know those sorts of thing.

**07:30 Did the Australian have Standard Operating Procedures for landings because we hadn't actually had a beach landing since Gallipoli, had we?**

No, it was the first since Gallipoli. We were very conscious of that to carry on the

**08:00 Ray, did the Australians actually have Standard Operating Procedures for beach landings at that point?**

Yes, we developed our own standards but these things were supposed to be flexible and this particularly applied to what the Americans, their standard of course and this is one of the things that by cooperation, our higher commanders sort of worked out. I know I remember that

08:30 it was said that our brigadier had in talks to the Americans, "Found them rather sticking very much to the, their procedures and not having them to some extent flexible when a case arose," but these standard operation procedures must be flexible. You can't, you know if it's necessary to depart in some way, perhaps some minor way then

09:00 you had to do that, that's only sensible, yeah.

**Did you experience any tensions at the company level between the Australians and the Americans?**

Not so, no. No, we got on very well with them and they got on well with us. Course as far as they were concerned the 9th Division was, we had a good name.

**09:30 What were the significant cultural differences between the Australian and US Army?**

Well, we didn't live with them, so this is hard to say. I think about the only time I remember when in, one of our soldiers when we landed at Finschhafen they were, happened to be not nearby,

10:00 were one of the American units, which were near the beach head sort of thing soon after the landing and the Americans invited him to have breakfast with them, which was tremendous because they had flap jacks and all sorts of goodies, which, where the Australian was bully beef and biscuits sort of thing, and our Australian soldiers were when they had to move from that, that situation

10:30 you know, they noticed the difference in that respect. Course they took they it, was said that they used to take their ice cream machines in one of the early waves of their assault but oh no, perhaps it could be said that they were fed better. I don't know, I didn't receive any of their, personally receive any of their food.

**11:00 I'm trying to get an understanding of the distinction between the higher levels of command and what you as a 2IC company level, what were you dealing with, what decisions did you have to make in that preparation for the Lae landing?**

Well, there as I said, there was a matter of the equipment. We had to make sure that the soldiers were all properly equipped in terms of the instructions that'd come down from the from the

11:30 battalion headquarters and also by the company commander.

**Was that, you, the company commander and yourself in consultation establish what equipment they would take?**

Oh yes, we were in the same tents you see, just the two of us would be in, that would apply in all cases I would say that the company commander and the 2IC had a tent and of course you'd

12:00 be in conversation pretty well all the time, if they say required in the whatever manner, whether they're talking about things quite not to do with the army in the way of change of you know, so as not to get terribly bored with one another.

**Do you recall what pieces of kit you did decide on for each soldier in?**

Well, most of it

12:30 was dictated anyway, really. I mean

**Well, I'm trying to get an understanding then what was your individual contribution? What individual decision making did you have to make leading up to Lae? Were there any bits of kit that you guys decided were essential that weren't standard issue?**

Oh these things were usually self evident as to what a soldier was originally equipped with, then it's a matter of cutting

13:00 down the weight is the main consideration there and there was consideration also of malaria and we even had started off with cotton mosquito nets and of course the,

13:30 a blan, a bed roll or they called it a bum roll, which was strapped to your, around your belt, carried just in the small of the back sort of thing. Now it so happened in Lae that after we landed there, these were dumped and some of the soldiers that had been on the

14:00 APDs, there was one company of ours that were on APDs, that's the Armoured Personnel Destroyers, they were the ones that landed first in these smaller assault craft you see. They were well and truly entertained by the Americans. They gave them cigarettes and cartons of cigarettes and so on, which they'd put in their

14:30 bum rolls and of course you put the, soldiers perhaps had other things in there too. They had their photographs of their family at home and this sort of thing and any other personal things that they felt they still wanted to carry notwithstanding the difficulty of keeping them dry and all this sort of thing but the situation was such that the

15:00 priorities of ammunition and essentials or other essentials and rations and so on and the difficulties of supply in the jungle were such that these bum rolls never caught up with the soldiers, so the soldiers lost all their cigarettes and other things. They were never, they were probably pilfered

15:30 if anyone knew what no one knew, what happened to them. They didn't, we set off on our and the next operation which was the landing at Finschhafen, we didn't have time to be concerned about them anyway and also the cotton mosquito nets, they were absolutely no good because they sucked up the water and became so heavy that there's no way you would carry them... and oh the other

16:00 thing is too that they are quite impractical to have when you're fighting, in most cases fighting Japanese nearby to be in a mosquito net that's not you know, not very good when you have to get out of it. The Americans had, they sort of a, what do you call it? A hammock type thing but with a mosquito net incorporated

16:30 in the hammock and they of course weren't terribly practical. If you had to get up in the middle of the night you had to get out of this thing and then try to deal with the enemy who was at close hand.

**At the company level did you have any influence or input to the tactics of the company in the Lae landing?**

During an operation? No, my concern would be to make sure that

17:00 supply was kept up and whatever was necessary.

**We were just talking about the responsibilities of 2IC being the maintenance of supply lines?**

Yes, well of course, it has not a great deal of control over it. Once in an operation you don't,

17:30 because it comes from supply, begins at the top and from the rear in other words. It's pushed forward from the rear. The responsibilities are there and the 2IC of the battalion and which is usually designated for example as far as rations is concerned to the quartermaster and other requirements

- 18:00 such as if it's water or and the RSM was there, the regimental sergeant major, he's responsible for the supply of ammunition for example and there might be other things such as batteries for the walkie talkies. It's pushed forward from the rear. There's that responsibility, so if they don't come of course well
- 18:30 the second in command is, it's his job to make, to get in contact with the rear supply and make sure that they bring it forward.
- So at the company level your job was to determine the needs of your men and to communicate those, the supply needs back to the battalion HQ [Headquarters], is that right?**
- Well, these things are anticipated. The rear echelons are, B echelon
- 19:00 knows what the unit normally wants. It's a standard thing.
- So what then are you doing on a day-to-day business or a day to day basis?**
- Working on operations.
- In these preparations for the Lae landing?**
- Yes, well there are exercises which you need to, certain requirements in the way of materials would be required in exercises and you might make, ensure that
- 19:30 all the requirements of the exercise are forthcoming and are required and then distributed.
- Could you tell me what your role was in the actual landing at Lae? Were you part of the forward unit?**
- I was on an LCI which is
- 20:00 a landing craft infantry and which has around a company on it and we disembarked down side ramps, a ramp on either side of the ship as such, yeah.
- 20:30 **And what were your responsibilities? Were you ordering men from within the LCI?**
- Well they know what to do. I mean the... your responsibility only occurs if the thing's not happening in terms of the operation. Obviously, they've got to get off the ship and deploy under their own individual commanders, that is the section commanders and the platoon commander and so on.
- 21:00 **Could you walk me through the landing then from your perspective, what you did in the landing? What the conditions were like?**
- Conditions? Well it was only a narrow beach and we soon got into the scrub, which was jungle and swamp and that sort of thing and that's all it amounted to really, it is to get ahead and get your objective, go forward to whatever your object is.
- And what was that objective?**
- Well, it was certain distance into the jungle,
- 21:30 there were, it's hard to define these things. It's more a matter of a number of yards unless there's some obvious landmark you know. In Lae for example there is very, very little in the way of landmarks at all. I think there might have been only one track exit
- 22:00 sort of thing from the beach head area but there was no opposition and so the next part of the plan, the overall plan was put into effect very, very quickly. They didn't have to wait around and that was the advance on Lae and the battalion was the leading battalion to advance on Lae but the battalion was, had their tasks
- 22:30 there. It was split into two commands, the battalion commander on one approach and then in the hinterland the second in command. He had a command with two companies, which was an approach along, as I said, along what they call the government track, the natives
- 23:00 call it 'Government track', you see, the track used by the government employees, the Kiaps and you know you know the Kiaps, who collected the taxes and whatnot and had responsibility of the natives in New Guinea, so that's how it happened and of course it was... we
- 23:30 initially had to get over the Busu River, which was running pretty strongly because it's a rainy period although it wasn't any great obstacle, you get through it. Not so some of the later ones, there was more rain and so on and a lot of kunai, we had to sort of bash our way through kunai grass. The intelligence officer
- 24:00 had trouble finding what was on the map, a track through the kunai, which was about I suppose six or seven foot high and very, very hot when you're making a track through that sort of stuff and so they didn't get very far. We didn't get very far the first day, where by reason of the
- 24:30 terrain, so that that's what really happened on the first day. The other group that went into hinterland

ran across vegetable, a native garden which had logs cut you know just in preparation to make a garden. They, they'd cut these trees or saplings or whatever they were. No, they were more than saplings, they were quite heavy logs and they had trouble sort of getting

25:00 through these things because it's a matter of going under or over sort of thing and they're carrying their equipment or some of them are carrying machine guns and other mortars things of that nature. They had their problems but they eventually, it just slowed them down. They didn't expect this to be the case and eventually they ran into a native who was able to guide them to

25:30 where this government track was to follow sort of thing and from there on it was plain sailing. They set out along this track and they didn't run across anyone in the way of enemy. I think for that matter the natives either there out on this track on the direction in the direction of Lae. That's for the first day of course, yeah.

26:00 **Sure. Had the period in Milne Bay adequately acclimatised you for coping with those conditions?**

Well, it was certainly helpful and is all part of the scheme I suppose for as the higher commander is concerned there would be a period of acclimatisation. It was definitely a big difference in the monsoon and the humidity. You know you're, if it wasn't

26:30 for rain that made you wet, it was the perspiration and you just lived with it.

**What were the main problems that the wet caused?**

Well, what shall I say? Obviously, it was the mud and slush that you had to go through and then the biggest problem was the coastal rivers, these

27:00 fast running streams. There were many of them. There were four or five on the way to Lae we had to need to cross and one in particular was a very big river, the Busu River and the battalion that, this is the 2/28th Battalion that needed to make their crossing. They did a tremendous job getting across

27:30 against enemy opposition and they lost a lot of men sort of washed away and with weapons just strewn.

**What about in terms of your personal comfort or physical health? Did the wet cause significant problems in Lae?**

Not really, you just got used to it. You just put up with it.

28:00 **Ok just...**

We were wearing at that stage, we got rid of our steel... Summer land. Got rid of our steel helmets and so the water wasn't dribbling down your face for that matter, getting in your eyes and so on. I mean you learned to live with it.

**With the focus on your group that you were in, could you could you take me on from day,**

28:30 **from day two and how your progress was made towards Lae?**

Day two? Yes, well on day two we were relieved by another battalion and we got as far as a one of these smaller rivers actually,

29:00 we got as far as that and the other battalion at first light sort of moved through and ran and they ran into Japanese that were, that had come from Lae to meet the assault you see, and they had a, an operation there and we got some of the mortars and things that.

29:30 Obviously, they knew where the track was and that there would be soldiers on the track where we were and so we were mortared there and we lost, had casualties there along the track but the leading battalion they had a, oh they, I think they ran into a, probably about 30 soldiers or not too sure of this, there might have been a company strength

30:00 and pushed them back, you know, had a successful operation and destroyed them.

**So you were relieved. Where did your group move to then?**

Well we were in reserve then. We still on the way to Lae. We still

**What does being relieved mean then?**

We were in a reserve situation.

**You just weren't in the front lines?**

We weren't the advance guard in other words.

30:30 We had duties in one place with the artillery protecting the artillery, with the artillery was 25 pounders were move up, moved up via the...by boats you know along the coast and taken in along one of the rivers on the banks of

- 31:00 a hard bank of, actually it was a sort of a stony area where they could drive along with their vehicles, their jeeps and their trailers and so on and establish their guns. That would be the only place really they could with the jungle, it was the only place that they could support to get the proper elevation and not sort of
- 31:30 hit into the trees in front of them, if you understand what I mean. So we had a job there of protecting them at one stage, which was very noisy I can tell you. We, at one place there we were in front of the guns and they just firing over our heads from a short distance and that that was terribly noisy but not as bad as situation
- 32:00 with the 28th Battalion, who were sort of fighting the Japanese. We didn't have any Japanese to worry about directly although we had area bombardment and we had big casualties with our what they call the B echelon, which was, had moved up closer to the battalion area.
- 32:30 **Can you describe what went on the introduction of the B echelon.... the engagement with the echelon?**
- Well, only that we knew it was a little distance away. It would have been probably a mile away from where we were. Only that we knew it was happening were their bombs. They were high level bombing, it wasn't low level bombing. There was low level bombing at the landing you know, initial landing
- 33:00 which were attacking the craft.
- Could you tell me about the aerial bombardment you were experiencing when defending the gun, the 25 pounder?**
- It, we didn't receive it, we didn't, they didn't, they obviously had the target. They were looking for the guns
- 33:30 obviously but they must have got the, probably the smoke of the B echelon if they had. I'm not saying that there was any smoke because there shouldn't have been any but they must have had some idea. They must have seen something at the B echelon to drop their bombs obviously. But they as I say, a little distance away. We didn't get the bombs on the guns or our own positions
- 34:00 but we nevertheless knew that it happened because we could hear them and you know some little distance away.
- So advance towards Lae continued without engagement?**
- No, we, I mentioned the Busu River. We eventually got across that by small craft going around the mouth of the river not by crossing it as such.
- 34:30 It was quite a big obstacle this one, a very fast flowing. There'd been a lot of rain and it was very, very, very swollen.
- Were the LCIs implemented again?**
- Oh no, no, these are small craft. We're talking about the LCVs [Landing Craft Vehicles], the small assault craft you know with the ramp that drops down in front you know, the type of thing.
- How many personnel could that carry at a time?**
- That was to carry a platoon around
- 35:00 30 people, up to that yeah, so
- So you're quite vulnerable at that point trying to get around the mouth of the Busu River?**
- That's if there are Japanese on the other side of course but by the time we got there of course that had been cleared and the bridge head had been made and we were still in reserve and we had a task of protecting a head
- 35:30 on the other side of Lae, which was being used at that time for supply for the forward battalion and in that situation we, one of our company's in moving forward towards an airfield, ran into the Japanese and they...one of the
- 36:00 very highly respected company commanders was killed and others in the initial encounter with the enemy and they put the company, put in an attack against them and they killed about 30 I think, it was in that situation of the enemy but they were really a delaying force at that stage because the
- 36:30 Japanese had plans to evacuate Lae. There was, it was a, pincer is a nice sound in army terms isn't it, operation with the two divisions. There was the 9th Division and the 7th Division. You see we were advancing on Lae from the north along the coast and the 7th Division landed at an airfield
- 37:00 along the Markham River. It was a distance of about I suppose 20 or 30 miles.

**Nadzab, was it?**

Nadzab, yeah, yeah I'm glad, that's good and they approached, the 7th Division approached from that direction in the direction of Nadzab. They didn't have so much of the jungle because there were more of an open area but nevertheless and

37:30 the 9th Division approached from the north along the coast and all the jungle and so on, yeah.

**Were you surprised to discover that Lae had been evacuated? Were you expecting a confrontation there?**

We hadn't any thought of their evacuation. We weren't thinking about that. We were only thinking about getting forward and getting to grips with them but

38:00 yes, I don't think we were quite happy, I suppose that they did leave although some of them which tried to cross the mountains got as far as Finschhafen subsequently but they had a dreadful trip over the range apparently, a terrible time.

**Had you been making preparations for**

38:30 **the movement onto Finschhafen from Lae when you were back at Milne Bay or was it something that was established once you got to Lae?**

It was in the minds of the higher command, yes to go onto Finschhafen. They didn't necessarily expect that the Japanese would evacuate Lae because you know it was quite a big force of Japanese. You know that

39:00 I think the general, I think General Wootten, whose a 9th Division, I think he had instructions to look forward to Finschhafen. To what extent planning was made, I wouldn't know. It was put on at a very short notice about five days after

39:30 the capture of Lae and by that time of course the 9th Division had to send more, although it was only one brigade initially that landed at Finschhafen and this is a matter of controversy as a matter of fact between the higher command at whether it was sufficient, but the American intelligence had a much smaller force at Lae at Finschhafen

40:00 than our own intelligence indicated and it was really a boy in a man's errand and had repercussions later on, very much so. Ultimately it had to be reinforced and General MacArthur wasn't keen to do so.

**Can you tell me about your**

40:30 **personal preparations, what you went through between finding out that you were headed for Finschhafen and the actual departure?**

Well here again, it was a matter of making sure that troops had all the equipment that was necessary and checking all their equipment and weapons and all this sort of thing. We didn't have very long to do that, wasn't very long at all. They had to assemble,

41:00 also had to move to G beach, which is the assembly area to take off you know to embark. Time was very short.

## Tape 6

00:33 **Ray, could you tell me about becoming company commander, the circumstances under which you became company commander in Finschhafen?**

Well, I was you see second in commands, don't always be in operations in the front line. Sometimes they would be echelon

01:00 and that is where they can ensure that the supplies go forward and in that respect you see and there's also a left out of battle personnel. There's always a nucleus left out of battle in case that the unit gets virtually annihilated in some way, which is possible, then there is a nucleus

01:30 to, for the battalion to continue with new reinforcements, so I had ceased to be a second in command to take over a platoon of which the officer had had been removed and for a time I was a platoon commander, back as a platoon commander,

02:00 just a rifle company platoon commander, then in due time I was due for promotion. I was next senior and I was given the B Company of the battalion. It was, I was the next chosen anyway, whether I was senior or not. It didn't necessarily follow that

02:30 that you were the most senior that you were given the position. In any event I had been promoted as a captain for quite some time before the battalion knew about in our situation of communication you see, a long way from the powers that be, so it was just a matter of stepping up and taking over the company.

03:00 **And you didn't have any concerns about your abilities to do so?**

Oh no, not really, I mean no, one was quite confident that they'd had a lot of training over the years after all and by that time it was, we started off in 1940 and this was in September, October

03:30 1943, so if I didn't have any confidence by then having been an officer since 1941 then there was something wrong, wasn't there?

**Were there any parts of the job that you discovered once you were in there that you weren't aware of beforehand?**

Not unexpected. I can't recall, no, Simon.

04:00 **Was there any particular part of your Finschhafen campaign that you wanted to emphasise or that you thought was worth?**

Yes, I suppose the most important parts so far as one of the most important parts of the battalion's activity in Finschhafen was the capture of Jivenaneng, which was a feature

04:30 some distance away and on the approach to the main dominating feature in the area, which was Sattelberg Mountain and the battalion initially had a platoon in D Company, went up there whilst the battalion approached Finschhafen itself, which was sort of a franking situation, and to take care of the

05:00 enemy threat from that direction to the beach head, which they were, the enemy was building up on this Sattelberg area and moving down from Madang, building up their forces, the whole division you see. So it was very important to this company position, well actually it was only two platoons of a company and they were, they had trouble with the enemy trying to remove them and

05:30 so ultimately the whole battalion was established at Jivenaneng and the Japanese had a plan of counter attack to retake the beach head and Finschhafen, which entailed a movement down from the Sattelberg area with two sort of prongs down the track leading out to Jivenaneng

06:00 and Sattelberg, which is the main track and also even a landing by sea onto the beach head and the holding of Jivenaneng, the position was most important. And we as a battalion were isolated there, when I say isolated we were cut off on three sides and cut off from

06:30 the normal supply route along the track for 21 days. There was an alternative means of supply by native transport that is protected of course by soldiers about 50 native carriers came across a deep re-entrant on one side our... from another ridge line where they could get jeeps along a place called Kumawa.

**How was that negotiated with the native population?**

07:00 When we first landed there was a Colonel Allen, who was a New Guinea you know, had a gold fields in Lae, not Lae in Wau, and he knew the area well and he was given the task of recruiting the natives. They'd all gone bush of course.

07:30 They'd all disappeared obviously when the landing took place and what is more they had been told to by leaf by letter dropping you know, leaflet dropping, to get out of the way, so he had the task of getting some of these back to alleviate the supply situation, carrying of supplies. So he set out and

08:00 brought in the natives or gave messages to bring them in whatever his message... was very much at his own risk, I would think knowing him, what he might have done to go into areas to contact the natives and send them, send these messages. As a matter of fact on a patrol towards Sattelberg I had, did a patrol on one occasion and

08:30 ran into a couple of natives. The enemy wasn't far away either. I was surprised what they were doing there, whether they were on the natives or the enemy's side. It's quite possible they could have been but I talked to these, you know a little conversation and I didn't know any pidgin really. I knew a little bit I suppose and said, "You maram master blue,

09:00 master blue?" Said, "Oh yes lua master blue." This is Colonel Allen, you see. They knew of him, so this is how the messages got out.

**The native populations in New Guinea were well respected. Ok Ray, I'm just going to move onto these campaign**

09:30 **questions for New Guinea. The first of them refers to... it says MacArthur was notorious for minimising mention of the Australians. Did the men feel they were given their dues in this respect in New Guinea?**

In the long run, I don't suppose they were. I don't think we were greatly concerned about it at that time. We were too busy fighting the Japanese.

**Did you think the mopping up campaign was worth it?**

Which

10:00 do you mean in, later on in Wewak and around in New Guinea at that New Guinea campaign you're talking about?

**Yes, they've included Lae and Finschhafen in?**

Oh, Lae and Finschhafen, they were important because was as a base for further operations towards the Philippines, most important. There was a very big base built up there. That was one of the things that was noticeable, see

10:30 after capture of Sattelberg, which we weren't, another brigade was involved in that, the division's task then was to advance to Sio, which is the, virtually the rest of the Huon Peninsula you see and airfields were required to support further advances towards the Philippines. Morotai for example was

11:00 a, it was a jumping place as well, but when we finally moved towards Sio, the General Wootten was, wanted to make sure that Finschhafen was secure and that, that's why there was

11:30 this understanding between, I suppose some of the senior people, that he should get on with the job and go chase the Japanese to Sio but there was a bigger task of clearing the Japanese from Sattelberg and also from a place called Wareo, which was the supply line for the further to the north,

12:00 yes.

**Conditions were also, as always in PNG [Papua New Guinea], an issue. What illnesses, diseases and discomforts did you have to deal with?**

Well, malaria of course was one of the problems although we had, we took Atebrin tablets and it was, if a person was evacuated at that stage with malaria, it was really a question of whether

12:30 it was an offence that he hadn't taken his Atebrin and he was under very strict supervision that Atebrin tablets were distributed every morning by the administration of the platoon sergeant to see that every soldier not only put it in his mouth but swallowed it, didn't keep it under his tongue. The other requirement was typhus, scrub typhus which was very, very severe and it wasn't very

13:00 general but nevertheless there were soldiers that had contracted scrub typhus, which was and they didn't always survive. They died from that and it's a very, very severe complaint. I suppose the only other one was dengue fever which - I had dengue - and there was no protection from that really.

13:30 It was very similar to malaria in that symptoms, you know very severe headache and so on but you had it once, you didn't, it wasn't recurring, yes. I remember when I had it because it happened to be, we were waiting

14:00 in a more or less an assembly area ready for an operation going north associated with the Wareo operation and the generals changed their mind. They had apparently had a, the corps commander who, General Morshead and the divisional commander General Wootton, they

14:30 eventually changed the plan and so we were waiting in this more or less assembly area for several days I think it was about three or four days and the whole plan changed and I contracted dengue fever. We weren't moving. I just laid down in my tent and for that three or four days whatever it was and

15:00 if we were moving, I would have had to have been evacuated. I just couldn't possibly, you know couldn't have gone forward. I just, I was just too sick and I recovered over the period of the you know, whatever it was. Some of these times I forget but I did recover before we had to move on

15:30 in the direction of Sio, the long marches to Sio.

**In hindsight, it appears that Japan was sliding inexorably to defeat. Did the soldiers feel this at the time?**

They were what, I'm sorry?

**Sliding inexorably to defeat?**

Oh

**They may be referring, I guess to those later on in New Guinea campaigns?**

They might have later on but I mean they weren't, certainly didn't think they had

16:00 a tremendous amount of resilience considering what they had to put up with our, particularly our abundance of artillery. They hated our artillery and they had problems with supply, big problems with supply. They, some of them I believe were eating at the end of the Finschhafen campaign, were eating grass. They, further inland of course they,

16:30 they had emaciated all the villagers' gardens, native gardens and so on. They would have taken all they could from those what there were.

17:00 **Can I ask, by Finschhafen you, the Japanese advance had been halted and there'd been quite a**

**few battles where they had been continually forced back. Did you have a sense that that momentum was going to continue? Did you have a feeling that it was simply a matter of time?**

We never thought that we wouldn't win. The Japanese as I say were on three sides of us at Jivenaneng but we didn't just sit on our, in our holes. I mean we went out to them and we where, had the policy of our battalion, of "What we have, we hold."

17:30 **Hindsight also tells us that a Japanese invasion of Australia was not seriously contemplated but soldiers at the time did not know this. Did you think you were defending Australia and was this used as inspiration in battle?**

Oh I think so, of course, yes.

18:00 **Men of the 6th, 7th and 9th AIF divisions may have some comparative points to make having served in the western desert under British command and with British equipment. How did you rate differences in command, clothing and weapons in PNG as opposed to North Africa?**

Well, our 9th division initially were, when we went to the desert were certainly lacking in equipment. We didn't for example, at one stage they had wooden anti tank rifles

18:30 you know in training. I can't say that we in New Guinea, we were lacking in equipment. We had this new Owen gun, we had too the Bren, a very serviceable weapon. We had the Vickers machine gun, which came into their own and anti-tank guns were only used occasionally

19:00 to get rid of in case of Finschhafen, to get rid of a Japanese gun, which was giving trouble at close quarters. They also used when the Japanese landed at Scarlet Beach at Finschhafen area, they really did over the assault craft in company with also the Americans that had some,

19:30 that type of you know anti-aircraft guns and things of this nature in the beach head, a few of those, yes. Oh no, we had good equipment in, I don't think we could complain about the equipment. Whereas, there were deficiencies initially in the Middle East, which were made up by

20:00 in the case of Tobruk with captured weapons you know, Jap [Japanese], Italian and German weapons, machine guns and some artillery Italian artillery, which... there was a famous bush artillery. Some of our own infantry soldiers were using captured guns, which they fired as they were very, as to how good

20:30 they're at it of course. It wasn't very technically proficient, they, but nevertheless they fired these guns and at least they felt better by firing them.

**How did you cope with shortages of supply in New Guinea?**

How did we personally 'cope'?

**Cope?**

Cope? Yeah, well

21:00 just put up with it. There was nothing you could do about it. If you were in the forward positions you just made it known that they were required and shortages weren't all that bad. I mean we weren't fed over much obviously, you know. When we left New Guinea we were pretty lean

21:30 and I suppose we really didn't have enough, we really would have been better to have more in the way of food. There wasn't any great problem with ammunition. I can't recall that we ever, I think one of the companies initially when they went to Jivenaneng, well they had to be careful with their ammunition because they were isolated rather and they had a problem

22:00 but otherwise the battalion as such as we built up at Jivenaneng, we built up reserve supplies of ammunition and rations and water and there wasn't, apart from you might say the food, well we could have had more and we were sustained.

**What were relations like with other service personnel?**

22:30 **Did you have any significant interaction with naval or air force personnel while you were in New Guinea?**

Well, we were with American navy. We were involved with those and the, we had a very good relationship with them. There was a boat and shore battalion which was small boat supplies, sort of coastal supplies. We had very, very good relationship

23:00 and the same with the navy and the APDs, we had very good relationship with those. We were landed in the wrong place at Finschhafen, which we had to accept. I suppose it was like Gallipoli. I was on one, only one boat I think that, oh there was two boats actually,

23:30 only two boats that landed in the right place, in the right one on the beach. The others were landed up on a little cove, a little beach, and also the rocks. And so that was a navy, that was the coxswains, was to do with the navy. It was nothing to do with us the Italian rather the American

24:00 navy.

**Did you get homesick while in New Guinea?**

Oh, not really not really, no. We were pleased when it was over of course but we were too occupied to get homesick.

**Ok, that's those set questions. I guess now we move up to, I'd like to ask you first about the challenges you may have faced in the Atherton Tablelands upon your return from New Guinea.**

24:30 **There was a long period of inactivity or lack of combat, I guess. As an officer what were the main challenges you had in keeping the men busy?**

Well to keep the soldiers occupied and it wasn't inactivity, it was just that we were there for a year whilst the generals made up their mind what they were going to do with the Australian Army and you know whether it was going to be part of the recapture, the Philippines and

25:00 Japan or what. And of course, we ended up going to Borneo, the 9th Division. Oh no, we trained and trained and trained and we trained with live ammunition and you know under artillery barrages and leaning on the artillery and no, it was a matter of obviously of keeping soldiers occupied. When they're occupied

25:30 and they were doing interesting things too. It was a retraining period doing interesting things and higher, we had battalion exercises. We had companies - one against the other. We had brigade exercises and of course there were breaks. I had a break when I had contracted malaria

26:00 I went to hospital for that period of time and also I went to the tactical school at Beenleigh near Brisbane, so they were welcome breaks I suppose, interesting breaks for that matter.

**I just wanted to ask you specifically about that time at the Atherton Tablelands, we've spoken to I think three different soldiers who all went AWL [Absent Without Leave] for under**

26:30 **28 days - they spoke about this magic barrier of 28 days - and the fact that they'd go AWL for you know often two weeks or a few days to go and visit their girls, got sick of waiting around. As a company commander, did you turn a blind eye or were you empathetic to small lapses in those rules?**

Well, you don't turn a blind eye, you can't. I mean the soldier's, if he is absent on leave,

27:00 he's recorded as such and he's punished when he gets back into the unit, if he does get back. There, when we re-embarked to go to Borneo, it was a bit of a surprise to me, there was a number of soldiers who went AWL just virtually you might say, the night before we

27:30 had set off to go to the boat and we found their gear neatly stacked up as was the drill, as you kept your things tidy left in the tent, they'd gone and one was a corporal I remember, but they all had their reasons. There was one soldier I know that had a problem at home because he

28:00 you know, keeping his, he had his father was ill I think and his mother and he had a property to look after and so on and they had opportunities to apply for compassionate leave in most circumstances.

**Was compassion an important**

28:30 **quality as a leader as an officer?**

Oh yes, yeah.

**What were the other key qualities to being a good leader that you learnt for instance?**

Yes, oh well you can read books on this I suppose, can't you?

**From your personal experience?**

Well, you had to be strict and fair. Those I think were probably the most important.

29:00 **Did you have any incidents?**

Strict discipline but also fair with it, that's important.

**Who was your main significant mentor as a leader? Who did you really respect as a leader?**

My initial company commander,

29:30 original company commander, he was obviously, I was only 19 and I was the company sergeant major. He was,

30:00 I suppose in his early 30s, so he was a little bit in the sense of a father figure you know.

30:30 I'm being emotional I know but it's partly due to the... I've had three heart operations.

- 31:00 This is very hard because he was killed at Alamein. Could we have a rest?  
**Ray, just while we're discussing leadership, I just wanted to ask you what impact your father's**
- 31:30 **military background, what purpose did that serve as an inspiration for your military career and your leadership?**  
Of course.  
**qualities?**  
Oh yes, Simon, yeah.  
**And I'm also interested in the civic duty he installed in you. Did you have a strong sense of service to the community that came from your father?**  
I think so yes,
- 32:00 he was a role model.  
**Your brother was on the RAN [Royal Australian Navy] and your sister was a VAD [Voluntary Aid Detachment], wasn't she?**  
She, yes that's right.  
**Could you tell me what they were doing during the war?**  
Yes, well my brother, he was on a frigate, river class frigate and he spent a lot of time on the, in the South West Pacific, sort of convoy duties and things of that nature and supporting the landings. He
- 32:30 supported the landing at Tarakan for example with the 26th Brigade and later on in doing the surrenders, his ship was involved in the, I think two or three surrenders you know in that area in the Borneo area, the Halmaheras.  
**What was his rank and specialisation?**  
Oh, he was a,
- 33:00 what do they call it? Asdic I think they called it.  
**Anti submarine work?**  
It's an asdic, yeah anti, particular submarines I think, that's what his main task although he got put into the water a couple of times it seems. On one occasion, rather a funny story because
- 33:30 there was an American ship, was something happened about this one that they had the sailors in the sea. They were you know tipped into the water not exactly. They didn't really know exactly what happened and he was rescuing them with a little craft whatever it was. A dinghy I suppose, I don't know what they had, rescuing craft anyway and
- 34:00 he got left there by this parent ship, so he was absent. Talk about absence without leave. He and another chap were absent without leave and eventually got on another river class frigate and were returned to their ship after some time and to find that they'd been on the charge sheet, see because they absent without leave.
- 34:30 So they fronted the captain. The captain seems had a bit of a smirk on his face when he dismissed their charge, so as I say he was put in the drink twice but it was fortunate of course in the Pacific, the nice warm water. It must be terrible you know for those sailors in the Atlantic that knowing if they were put in the drink that they were would die,
- 35:00 cause it's just impossible to live for a matter of two or three seconds longer.  
**And what was your sister doing with the Voluntary Aid Detachment?**  
She was one of the first VADs that went to the Middle East. 200, they were throughout Australia and they...  
**She was on the hospital ship, was she?**  
Yeah. No she, they were in Palestine in the 6th, what they call the 6th AGH, Australian General Hospital.
- 35:30 She spent her time there and I think she came back on a hospital ship, yeah. I remember she went not long after I went there, I can't remember when but we were in Palestine. At the time they arrived these VADs caused a bit of a stir
- 36:00 amongst the soldiers you know these and their hospital wasn't all that far away from where we were camped, so I went to see her the first opportunity and I was, came to the guard gate. They had a compound around it, you know barbed wire and whatnot,

- 36:30 which was around their quarters it seems, which was a bit unusual because all our camps sites, see we didn't have any wire around them, we just had an open camp sites, so this fellow sort of pulled me up the gate whatever and I said, "I've come to see my sister," and he said, "Oh we've heard that one before."
- 37:00 **That's great. So you found you made really quite a significant contribution to the World War II effort?**
- We were very fortunate. We'd, I wasn't even wounded. Neither was Jim, my brother or my sister Kathleen, they, well she was in Palestine. They didn't go into the desert.
- 37:30 Yeah, no we were very fortunate. We in a way feel guilty, we were very fortunate.
- Can you explain that?**
- Not very well, I couldn't explain it quite. It doesn't worry me over duly.
- But there is a sort of lingering sense of guilt?**
- Well, in a way you know families, a lot of families that had a very sad time.

## Tape 7

- 00:32 **Ray, I'd just like to ask you if you'd give me an overview of your landing at Brunei?**
- We landed at Brunei off the ship [HMAS] Kanimbla, the troop ship Kanimbla by scramble nets and into assault boats, small assault boats, which are part of the ship, onto Green beach. That was the code
- 01:00 name, Green beach. Previously, we were involved with reds and scarlets, well this was green. There was also a white beach somewhere in the operation too, one of the other battalions, and secured the beachhead without much trouble. There was a few Japanese around I think but no consequence, and then proceeded along. The task of the battalion was to capture
- 01:30 the capital of Brunei, which was named Brunei also, as you well know. They were along route six it was named. We were getting closer to Brunei, so it was a surprise as far as the Japanese were concerned. We know because the first night the battalion was more or less in
- 02:00 bivouacs or in defensive positions, temporary defensive positions sort of thing, for the night. Then a Japanese truck came tearing down the road with its lights flashing and of course they ran into machine guns and that that was the end of them, so the whole operation as far as we were concerned was a surprise to the Japanese. But
- 02:30 closer to Brunei along a feature which provided some tactical advantage to the Japanese, there we ran into the, I suppose the strength wouldn't have been more than a company I imagine, but nevertheless they were in defensive positions they had prepared positions and
- 03:00 my company was the advance guard to the battalion. The forward scout ran into the enemy and they were fired on and the section put in its attack, destroyed the enemy and immediate posts of the enemy and as I say the one of the soldiers, Private McGrath got a Military Medal
- 03:30 for his exploits and his determination and leadership. Then the platoon took over, captured the whole of the feature which was sort of a hill feature, not a large, but a hill feature. The rest of the enemy, positions on that, and there was another feature on the right of this, on the right of the road, which needed to be cleared. The enemy were occupying
- 04:00 this feature, so I launched another platoon, the 2nd Platoon with that task to capture that feature. They ran into opposition and it was necessary to launch a company attack, that's to say with support weapons... battalion weapons brought mortars machine guns and so on and they successfully captured
- 04:30 the feature, destroyed the enemy on the feature. It was rather difficult there. They had tall grass to go through and you know it was a little bit steep too, they had to go up onto this, they had some casualties but it was only one man killed fortunately. There were quite a number of wounded but only one man killed.
- 05:00 We occupied that area. We had support of another platoon from the anti-tank platoon to secure the feature and of course the 3rd Platoon of my own company and we had harassment by the enemy overnight but survived that all right. We didn't have any further casualties till the early morning when we
- 05:30 sustained quite a few casualties but the enemy, you know, tempted infiltration from one flank, but the enemy were driven from the feature. In the morning the next company just moved through C Company, moved through towards Brunei and moved towards, into the town and other companies moved in

06:00 around hill features dominating the town and so on. So the next day Brunei was virtually captured so it was, as I say it was a good exercise with a real enemy.

**Did you face any particular personal challenges amongst it?**

Oh no, as I say it was a good exercise. We had to use the battalion weapons

06:30 to coordinate the attack.

**What did you receive your military cross for?**

Well, I received it for that, that operation actually. I can think of some obvious, in the battalion a few that were more deserving. Not in Brunei but

07:00 in other situations in the Middle East.

**What's your opinion of decorations?**

Well I suppose they're, you need to have them but there are so many soldiers that are equally deserving that don't have, that are not recognised for various reasons, it might not have been

07:30 noticed, or many reasons why. I mean the highest award is the Military Cross of course. There are soldiers that earn Military Crosses that don't get them. There are officers that earn Military Crosses.

**08:00 Was that your finest hour?**

Beg your pardon?

**Was that your finest hour? Did you think that was your most fitting?**

I didn't know anything about it until long after, it was a very late. It was more of a, it was a, what you call a periodical award. It was for other service as well. It wasn't an immediate award. You know awards are given immediately soon after they

08:30 happen but there are also periodical awards after a campaign. Well, this was one given as a periodical award after the campaign, yeah.

**Well, while you're in Borneo you're also responsible for helping to protect the rubber and oil or oil and gas facilities, is that right?**

That's right. We need to reclaim the oil fields in

09:00 Seria, which are very important oil fields. It was pure oil actually running out of those wells. It didn't need refining and soon after our landing in on in Brunei the Japanese set alight the Serian oil fields, which were which were down the coast, I can't remember how

09:30 many miles, but may be 30, 40, 50. I can't remember and it was virtually too late to do much about them and but when we arrived there of course, they were all blazing. It could have been quite a number, when I think of it could have been about 30, I still don't know. Some of them were burning gas, you know, making a terrific

10:00 noise like big blow torches. Others were just oil, sort of billowing flame and so hot that you know you couldn't get within 50 yards 100, you know, 100 yards of some of them. And when we first arrived there was an operation to cap, there were Japanese near to them and the leading company

10:30 at that time was C Company. They destroyed them but the Japanese had, you know, they'd gone into the jungle, they'd you know disappeared into the jungle mostly, so we didn't have much trouble re-capturing them all. But there was a lot of trouble putting them out and a number of our companies went into the hinterland up the rivers and so on.

11:00 One place in particular is Marudi, which is the centre, sort of a, one of the regional centres there and a company went up there by gun boat and re-established the civil administration with you know the area. Or actually they were the military side of the

11:30 civil, of re-establishing the civil administration. The company commander was put up his rights on the notice board, you know, taken charge, but my company stayed on in Seria. We defended the, still had defences there. At one platoon I remember I put it, was on a crossroads on the outskirts

12:00 covering the enemy approach from that area and I used to go down to them every morning to see how they're going make their, you know regular visits to... And it transpired that every morning I went down there it was raining. Wasn't raining anywhere else but it was always raining, it didn't stop raining in this place. Well the platoon was really cheesed off of course, this

12:30 continual rain. But the updraft of the heat you know from the fires caused condensation at certain part just above them, so that it always rained where they were, so when I, their trenches were filled with water and the brigadier happened to come along, had an inspection at that time and wondered what they were doing, why they weren't in their trenches.

13:00 So I moved them to another place.

**Were army personnel tasked with capping the burning oil wells or did they have to bring in specialists?**

The engineers attempted it. Engineer attachment had attached to the division set to put them out and knowing nothing of it, they were able to do this, or not all of them but they

13:30 used various methods. Of course the trouble was getting to them and the system is, I don't know whether you know what the system is as to... the piping going down has a special cap on the top of it but then that goes down and it's a sort of a dual pipe, one pipe inside another so what they do,

14:00 the recognised method is to pump mud down in between the cavity of the two pipes you see, so that eventually having the mud will come up in the centre pipe and put out the fire. That was the method but they have to, they get close enough to do this and close enough to take off the contraction pipe

14:30 cap on the top of it and they used shields of galvanised iron sort of thing and bulldozers to stack the oil, sorry rather stack the earth up against as far as they can with the bulldozers and also aeroplane engines to

15:00 blow away the heat as much as possible. So these were all improvised things that they and they also used the anti-tank guns to blow off the top of the cap. And in one case which they were quite successful in doing, so these were all improvisation and they got out quite a number. It's all written up in our history book. There's an annex on our history book.

15:30 But the officer in charge, he was a lieutenant, he received some recognition military rec [recognition]... he was an Englishman actually. He received a decoration for it, his job and he also later received a job with the Shell Oil Company,

16:00 continued on with the company. He died not long ago actually. He came back to Australia, he served with Shell Oil. Got a good job out of it.

**Ray, do you recall hearing news of Hiroshima?**

Do I recall news?

**Hearing the news in Brunei?**

Oh yes, yes we received the news,

16:30 which was great celebration of course. We were disposed in our... the enemy was still there, didn't know anything about it, which was a bit difficult, wasn't it? I mean but we celebrated as best we could with what we had in Seria. The other companies were out in the hinterland within the jungle with enemy about them,

17:00 still chasing them or getting rid of them. It was wherever they heard of course, the natives helped them a lot as to the whereabouts of the enemy but they still had operations there. Everything was scaled down of course, we didn't want the chase, the enemy unnecessarily once the, particularly when the war was over.

**Were you making plans for your future life at that point? When you heard war was over**

17:30 **did you start thinking about what you wanted to do upon returning to Australia?**

Well, I had a job to go to, they were waiting for me to go back there and as a matter of fact after a certain time I stayed on. When I say I stayed on, I finished off the cadre unit with the battalion before I went back to Australia, the CO and myself. I was cadre adjutant and there was a couple of other officers

18:00 and about a dozen troops if there were that many. A cadre to go back to Australia and wind up the battalion's affairs before it was disbanded, but the battalion was demobilised in Labuan actually, we were never in Labuan but we, before but they and of course they were hosts for the Japanese

18:30 prisoners coming in to be cared for and guarded, not that any of them wanted to get away as far as I know, but still that's the process. There were quite a lot of them that came off, came down from Kuching. I went down to Kuching for the surrender actually. I was the staff officer at the surrender at Kuching.

**Can you describe that event for me?**

Yeah, we went down in a gun boat,

19:00 it was with small headquarters staff. "Kuching Force" it was called. There was a brigadier who was the CRA [Commander, Royal Artillery] of 9th Div [Division] Commander (UNCLEAR) that is, he had his BM [Brigade Major] actually for the regiment and three staff officers. A staff officer, administration, a staff officer, quartermaster and I was staff

- 19:30 infantry, so we got, as there was a rendezvous made in the river, in the Kuching river there. It was actually a branch junction of a small branch river there to that was the rendezvous. Obviously all these things were arranged unbeknown
- 20:00 to we underlings but which was the case and we arrived there at the rendezvous and we could see the red blob, you know the Japanese red circle flag, which was the indication they were there and the whole thing was timed because it was high tidal situation. The gunboat could get up to Kuching only at high tide.
- 20:30 The boat came across to the gun boat from the area where the Japanese were, Japanese general with a message from the general that he was sick and just that he was sick. I didn't see the message that was sent back
- 21:00 by our brigadier but no doubt it was something along the lines 'Come along, come or else.' I imagine so. There was a delay but this did happen and the surrender took place on board the gun boat but it was too late for the gun boat to go up river, so we went up in a company, well a good, best part of a company
- 21:30 of the battalion of the Pioneer battalion you know went up in PT [Patrol Torpedo] boats. I went up myself and also the staff captain Q [Quartermaster], the two of us went up more or less in charge of these troops that went up. There must have been about half a dozen of these PT boats I suppose
- 22:00 and the brigadier he took off and went by land with the BM and one section of soldiers. There were thousands of Japanese, you know, in the Kuching area. I don't know what was there. Could have been at least a division, it could have been a corps of Japanese. They'd never fought a, fired a shot against the enemy for that matter they were (UNCLEAR)
- 22:30 and so he took off to go to the prisoner of war compound there out of Kuching you see, so we went up river and I don't know how it was known, you'd wonder how, but the natives people had lined a bank when we got closer to Kuching,
- 23:00 all their, they got out their sarongs and coloured things, dresses and everything which they had hidden it seems. They buried them when the Japanese came. They buried this, their best clothes and of course their white clothing too you see, so along the river bank and we were tearing up the river there. They go a good speed these things
- 23:30 and we got to the wharf at Kuching and a Japanese guard was there lined up. John Saul and I, John was my counterpart, we had the job of accommodating... it was getting late too you see, there was the question of darkness coming although it hadn't arrived
- 24:00 to the accommodation, the soldiers. We had a map, a proper plan which must have been arranged with the Japanese I suppose cause all the buildings in Kuching... and so we were the first ashore and here was the Japanese guard sort of lined up and we both had Owen guns, so he and I just
- 24:30 marched, we didn't look to the right or the left, we marched past them left, right, left, right straight past them into the main street and behind us the soldiers disembarked and took over from the guard you see. I didn't see though, we didn't see just how that was, how that was done, but we knew when it was done there was a great cheer from the locals
- 25:00 who were watching you see from a some distance away, the Japanese kept them away. As a matter of fact in the street, which is on the right running along the river on the banks more or less off the river, we could see above people, and they were all lined along the street there, thousands there would have been, the Japanese flag on
- 25:30 on the top of their jeep type vehicle, you could just see that and it was tearing up and down the streets keeping them off the street you see, so we reached the street there and turned right. We knew we had to go to the building. It happened to be the Kuching Bank where we have these troops there for the night and
- 26:00 straight down the street we went, left right, left right sort of thing and not a sound. It was extraordinary. Just faces you know on both sides of the street, just faces. All was as quiet as anything. It reminded me of Henry Lawson's poem, the faces in the street
- 26:30 and of course the, after a time we reached Kuching Bank and the soldiers were marched up, those that didn't take over the guard from the Japanese. The Japanese marched off first of course and they tore off in vehicles out of the way but it was quite an experience
- 27:00 and it was dark very soon after we, they got there and the night I remember, oh some of the... obviously the prisoners of war they'd opened the gates and some of them were not very far out of town, some of them came during the night, came down to see us. We didn't go up there but they came, some of them came down. Those
- 27:30 that could walk were you know, a lot of the emaciated ones in there had in the compound and I was kept awake all night by the clod, the Chinese clods outside in the street. 'Clod clod clod clod' you know, the wooden clogs that they wear.

**You mentioned that you had a surrendering party on board.**

Yeah.

**Did you make eye**

28:00 **contact with any of the Japanese?**

Personally I didn't no, but, well there's only a... I can't remember how many were there, would probably only one or two or three Japanese. That'd be the commander and then it'd be his aid. I don't remember how many there were. There were only a very few.

**How would you describe their manner?**

I didn't take particular notice really. I mean they were very, they did as they were told sort of thing.

28:30 They, in all cases they did as they're told, they sort of laid their sword down in front on the table sort of thing. It was quite a ritual, you probably might have seen them in the films.

**Were there any security concerns given the Japanese and the way that they had proven their lack of willingness to surrender, the fact that surrender was not an option to their culture?**

That they

29:00 were, their discipline was very strict. I mean they obviously told commanders what to do and they obeyed commands. Japanese, a Japanese would obey commands. Very, very disciplined and if they were told "Not to do, not to shoot someone," they wouldn't do it. We didn't have any. We didn't have any particular security that night anyway. We were just in a building. We

29:30 didn't have our weapons at the doors stopping people to come in and there was no thought of any worry of from that point of view. There were plenty of civilians outside in the street and as I say they opened the gates for the prisoners of war. One of my jobs was to collect all the dumps and supervise the various dumps of things, which included the arms,

30:00 Japanese arms. Of course, they had to dump all their arms in various places. I remember one trip I was out on this duty and there was a group of Japanese along the side of the road, sort of thing, whatever they were doing, and an officer with them. He was certainly an officer, not a warrant officer cause he had a sword

30:30 and I sort of drove past. We didn't look at one another or well, we were conscious, they were there for the side of you know peripheral vision sort of thing and as we got past I was able to sort of look back a bit and when we'd gone past, he went like this and pulled out his sword to demonstrate to the soldiers that you know, they were better than we

31:00 we were.

**Was there a sense of satisfaction being present at this surrender?**

Oh yes of course, yes. The war was over.

**What about a closure or a catharsis to the war experience by being present there at their surrender?**

A closure, how do you mean, I am sorry?

**A sense of closure or catharsis on the overall experience by being present at that,**

31:30 **at the surrender? Did it help you to kind of put to rest that experience?**

It's all part of it I suppose. I can't say really, Simon. I can't say that there was any particular source, I mean it was an interesting experience. It's all part of the war, which is only a more pleasant part than others.

**Did you personally maintain any bitterness or resentment**

32:00 **towards the Japanese?**

No, I don't think so, no not really. I didn't like 'em, like the hell of them but at that stage I, well we sort of looked upon them as you know I mean what could you do? They were disarmed and so on and they were for that matter, they were carrying a bit I think. They, I mean they still. They did,

32:30 these soldiers in the Kuching thought they hadn't been defeated. See they hadn't fired against the enemy, so there was that about it. They were solemn to that extent. I didn't have any very close contact with the prisoners. Of course our soldiers did. I was involved in the headquarters and at Kuching and

33:00 and we didn't, they used to arrive there by, from up river they were arriving there also from further north, ah further south rather along the coast of Kuching of Sarawak but I saw them at a distance come and go but other people, the soldiers were taking care of them you know.

**It's extraordinary to me. We've**

33:30 **spoken to a few Australian POWs [Prisoner of War] and the justification for the atrocities and the way that they were treated keeps coming back, that the Japanese just didn't, their culture, certainly their military culture just did not understand or comprehend surrender. It was offensive to them and yet to be there present at this mass surrender is, it seems extraordinary to me. Did you have any sense of that having known what had occurred to our Australian POWs?**

34:00 Oh yes, of course, yes. I had no obviously, I mean the extent of what they did to us, our soldiers I hated them for that extent. I mean the more we knew of that but the Japanese today is a different matter, isn't it really? I mean you can't, those that have gone since or been

34:30 born since or had nothing to do with the war, what can you do? You can't hate them, can you?

**This section of transcript is embargoed until 1 January 2034.**

36:45 **How fatalistic, were you in your attitude towards what went on in the war?**

Well, there's no bullet for yourself you know, they're only for other people. Shouldn't laugh, should I?

37:00 **Sometimes you have to I think, don't you?**

You can't be too serious about these things can you and there's one of our B company soldiers wrote a little story of his own, war sort of thing, "As the bells of hell go, ring a ding a ling for you but not for me." That was his

37:30 opening to his booklet. No you don't, you can't do that, you can't, you never, if you worry too much about whether you're going to get shot. You don't worry about that, you can't. I mean you put, you pull your head down, you don't, if you have to, we, I mean there's no point in putting it up there for target practise, is there?

**Was religious faith at all important?**

Beg your pardon?

**Was religious faith at all important**

38:00 **to you at the time?**

Not really, not. No it I did pray once but that was when it's strangely it was it was our own fire. This was in Jivenaneng and there was a bit of a problem of where people were and because of the jungle and so on and our own

38:30 Pioneer battalion I think it was were there, where the road was blocked you see and so we're up on the hill and they were down the bottom sort of thing and they were shooting at the enemy with their mortars and they were landing right on top of the beaten zone was my company headquarters for the whole company you see and so

39:00 they were coming in cause a mortar is a bit disconcerting. A mortar's, they come straight down from as you know, they're perpendicular, they're not like a shell from an artillery piece where they, a shell gets forward and you know comes from an angle and the shrapnel is inclined to go forward but a mortar is landing right on top of you sort of thing

39:30 and you see the things coming down for that matter and so they were firing them off in lots of seven, we could hear them down the bottom there you know some distance off 'pop pop pop', you know up to seven and then right on top of us there come the headquarters and another platoon too of the company in

40:00 location and there were seven lots of these and they had about half a minute gap between each, so the communication wasn't very good either because our communication there were cut off. Our direct communication, it had to go round through brigade headquarters away, across to another feature and by line and eventually it got through. Course I was on the phone

40:30 quick smart to battalion commander, "We're being mortared by the troops down below there," and he obviously did what was necessary, so eventually it was stopped, but there were seven lots of seven before it was stopped and I you know, I had a

## Tape 8

00:31 **Could you just pick us up on the story we were talking about you being flanked on three sides by the by the Japanese and you had your own friendly mortars coming in. You just had seven lots of seven mortars coming in.**

Yes, well I was sort of lying down in my full length in my slit trench such as it was and one, the ground, there had been a lot of rain

01:00 actually and the ground was where we were, was quite deep and sodden sort of thing, so these mortar rounds weren't exploding when they first hit ground. They were penetrating into the, well down into the ground before they were exploding sort of thing but one of these mortars bombs was

01:30 as close as six inches to the side of my hole and went down right down into the ground and before it exploded and I had left my hat on the top and it had many holes in it. It was blown off with holes in it, well it had a few holes. As I say most of the explosion went well down into the ground but I but nevertheless, I

02:00 was quite deaf for quite a long while after that of the explosion but this. All soldiers have these stories, how close it was that they, you know that it happened that they, lucky they escaped.

**What was your most fearful moment in World War II?**

What was my most what?

**Your most fearful moment?**

Oh, I don't know

02:30 that I had any most fearful moment. That might have been one for example. I don't think it was the only time I prayed or time I could see these things coming down, so put your head down and pray.

**Did you have a proudest moment?**

Oh, I can't think of that, no I can't think.

**What was the**

03:00 **best of times during the war?**

The best of times? Oh I suppose when you go on leave it's a relaxation, isn't it? Particularly if, after a long period of time you're serving, if you're not in tents you're in operation somewhere, yes leave was pleasant. Was never long enough of course, it, surprising you know

03:30 as you get old of course, the time goes so quickly I mean, but when we look back on, we were only if you go to for example leave to Tel Aviv, you, you'd have three days and you'd think that was a long time or to Cairo, it'd be seven days and that that was you know, seemed a long time.

**How long after the war ended?**

Never long enough, never long enough, yeah.

**How long after the war ended was it that you returned to Australia?**

04:00 I came back in, I was discharged in March. It was, oh I have to think now. I was, it was before that. I was as I say, I was on the cadre for the battalion and I last, as a matter of fact the commanding officer and myself were and another officer were the last. Oh no, the commanding

04:30 officer and myself were original officers. We were in, he was in the first five I think, officers in the, as a platoon commander in the battalion. I was in among the first hundred of the battalion at Ingleburn and he and I were the last two of the cadre strength of the battalion

05:00 as it was, yes.

**And how long after that discharge in March did it take you to return to a sense of normalcy?**

Oh, it took a long while I think. I think it did going, I went back to the bank. The bank might have, by the way was sending me letters that 'I was due back there by that time' and

**How did you cope with normal work conditions after being?**

Well, it needs some

05:30 settling down. It did definitely need settling down very, no question about that. You, a different sort of thing you're doing and to some extent, I don't think one spent all ones deferred pay by you know by drink or anything like that. I think the, I was posted

- 06:00 about oh 50 miles away from my home where my parents were and I brought myself a little Ford roadster car, only second hand car with my deferred pay or a good deal of it, and I, at the place, the bank where I was you know, where
- 06:30 I was serving, I lived at a hotel which was just across the street more or less and there were a group of us there. There were a couple of others bank johnnies, young fellows and I don't say we misbehaved. There was three of us in a row and they called "The rotten row." We weren't drunks, drunkards or anything like that for that matter.
- 07:00 It, well was pleasant though getting back into civilian life because there were golf clubs to go to, you go and play golf and things like that and cricket, tennis all these things, you got caught up in, which helped going back into the civilian life.

**Were you able to discuss your war time experiences with your friends or your family?**

With the family? No, I haven't

- 07:30 discussed them, no.

**Would you have liked to have?**

Oh no, I don't particularly want to do that. I've said about a family history which I'm doing and you've seen just a little bit of it. I felt, I feel that one should do that because you know it's people,

- 08:00 sort of later in life, they wonder about these things, about their family life and

**Yes, we were just talking about settling back in, some of the difficulties you had settling, oh no, we were talking about talking to your family about communicating and you were telling me about your family history stuff that you'd been doing.**

Yes, well I feel that

- 08:30 sooner or later young people like to know something about their roots, don't they and it can reach the stage where a lot of a, lot of the history is lost and it's too late to ask people when they're dead, so for that reason I'm doing a bit of a family history and I've shown you little bits that I've written about my father and uncles
- 09:00 in the First War. Some of it of course is only available to me since records have been available in Canberra and now it's much easier for young people because they've only got to use their internet to find out pretty well everything about their fathers or their uncles or their grandparents or whatever who were in the war, all except perhaps their personal experiences
- 09:30 but there's a lot of detail as to where they were and so on.

**Can you tell me how important your wartime mates were in re-integrating and re-settling back into life?**

Oh well, they were tremendous really. We've had our battalion association, a very, very strong association which apart from being so few, by reason of we're dying very at a rapid rate,

- 10:00 it's still, just is just as strong and we've brought in associate members which are widows and off spring children or any relative who would like to be a member and in fact that has kept in recent years, that has kept our reunion numbers
- 10:30 constant to about 120 for our annual reunion.

**Can I ask you on your return to Australia and resettlement back into civilian life, what were the major changes you noticed in Australian society?**

One's inclined after all this time to forget what this sort of thing. I don't know that there was anything outstanding really. It's hard to sort

- 11:00 of think back on what one thought in those times really. I don't think I can help you really, Simon. Obviously I would have had some thoughts about it but not really of any great concern.

**Were you aware at the time of any significant changes that had happened within you? Did the war change you personally?**

Oh it must have changed me. I mean I was close on six,

- 11:30 six years older since I joined the AIF. You, I can tell you that arriving in Tobruk in the middle of the war, there you grow up very quickly.

**What were the major lessons you learnt in the war time?**

Oh human nature I suppose was,

- 12:00 you're dealing with men, all types you know, all you know coming, when I say all types, I mean coming from all different backgrounds and so on from different places, different areas and different

personalities.

- 12:30 I think you learn to sort of appreciate people more. You have better understanding of human nature. I think that's the main thing.
- 13:00 **Seems to be a common theme, a common lesson people learnt. Can I ask you how you came to be involved with the UN [United Nations] monitoring force in India and Pakistan?**
- I just wanted to in 1952, I think it was...
- Yes.
- ...you became involved with the UN military**
- 13:30 **observer group in India and Pakistan. Can you tell me how you came to be involved with that?**
- At that time I was serving with the 17/18th Battalion, the North Shore regiment which is, was in, obviously in the North Shore, but I was in the CMF. See I continued in 1948, I continued in the CMF. Firstly, I'm getting off the track a bit but firstly
- 14:00 as a squadron commander of the 7/21st OTS [Officer Training School] course, which was out at Wagga and after my father was killed, my mother came to Sydney and I transferred to the 17/18th battalion and in 1952 they were looking for volunteers to serve in India and India and Pakistan in
- 14:30 UNMOGIP, United Nations Military Observer Group India and Pakistan and so I was single, I sort of jumped at the chance to serve. It was, I wore the Australian uniform. We were seconded to the Department of External Affairs on loan to the United Nations, a very complicated situation and I
- 15:00 was fortunate to be selected. There were six Australians in India and Pakistan. The first lot that before, I was amongst the second lot but the first lot were mostly regular soldiers, retired regular soldiers. Several of them, three of them were full colonels and they in that situation also were reluctant to retire from that particular
- 15:30 job.
- Yes, we were just describing your time in Kashmir and I think you were saying there were six Australians over there, that's three other colonels or three full colonels?**
- Yes of the original six and of the number of the original six, there were two full colonels, I think. Of
- 16:00 the relief lot that I went with, there was another full colonel, who was a previous regular but there were two from the CMF. I was one of those, yes.
- And what were your principal duties as part of the Military Observer Group?**
- In the Military Observers we, there was the cease fire agreement,
- 16:30 which when we arrived there of course that we had to not know by heart but nevertheless that was the whole basis of the, our being there and to see observance of the cease fire agreement between India and Pakistan. That was the main purpose and which included attending to any violations
- 17:00 of the agreement either side and also this entailed visiting the positions to see that they don't become any stronger in their positions or that they don't introduce more troops in number and capacity than there were at a certain time when the agreement was established.
- 17:30 **So it was an essentially an administrative position that you were holding?**
- No, not much in the way of administration although there was an administration element there which, who were regular UN [United Nations] who weren't soldiers, they were regular UN people including signallers. The whole signaller situation was, they were regular UN employees.
- 18:00 **Can you tell me about your faith or belief in the UN system, the UN charter that was developed post World War II?**
- Well, it's the only thing that exists to maintain the peace, isn't it really? It's only four of them with any success, likely success. I suppose you're going to ask me about the present situation as to political situation and no, I
- 18:30 feel
- Let me ask at that time, let me ask first when you went in 1952, how did you feel about what you were a part of with the United Nations?**
- I felt very strongly in what we were doing, very strongly. We kept them apart, kept the opposing forces apart. I know there have been several wars. They still have flare ups on about three occasions I think
- 19:00 in over the period of time, but they were always controlled and in the long run they were brought back

to a peaceful situation and... Oh no, I was very well at the time there was the possibility of the threat to the nuclear war and it was inevitable that that the UN should take part in or an organisation as such

19:30 much better formulated than the League of Nations who, which failed than, no that's that previous situation.

**Did it give you faith that a recurrence of a war of the scale of World War II of what you'd been through could be avoided through an agency like the United Nations?**

20:00 Well, we weren't looking past that were we? I mean we had the job in hand and if we were successful then other situations could be successful.

**Let me ask you then about the time you spent in Korea as part of the Military Armistice Commission?**

Yes, well that was a different situation there, as you know it was, we were partisan there, in India and Pakistan we were

20:30 non partisan, we were, we didn't favour one or the other and neither should we. We had to be very careful particularly no loose talk or anything in that respect, the politic side of it was taboo, but in Korea, the UN was at war virtually with North Korea and the Chinese. It was a different situation entirely

21:00 so obviously... we, I was a part of the advisory group. I was representing the British Commonwealth with the exception of Canada on the advisory group which involved joint observer teams of the agreement, so likewise we investigated any violations of the

21:30 Armistice Agreement you see. In this case it was an Armistice Agreement. In India and Pakistan it was a cease fire, they had a cease fire line in Korea, they had the Armistice and so I was attending the Panmunjom every time they had a violation or complaint, one side to the other, of course they met in

22:00 Panmunjom. They still do after all this time and any time there was a flare up on in, on the Armistice line, then of course we went out and had a talk about that but largely it was a propaganda exercise by both sides. They used to decide what they were going to say, "So and so said if the oppose side said this and we say that,

22:30 then if they say something else, then we say something else," and so they planned it along those lines as to what would be said in response to what was said on the other side you see. It was entirely propaganda and there was a lot of this business talking about all the peace keeping or the peace keeping people of the world and this sort of thing in conversation across the table

**How did**

23:00 **you feel then about being involved in something that was so innately political as opposed to militaristic which had been your background?**

Well I was apart from, I was given top secret clearance before I left but when I arrived there was some problem because that, it hadn't arrived with the Americans you see,

23:30 so they had to get back to Australia to see what happened to their, to my security clearance which in time eventually turned up but all the time I was there, I was there a year, I didn't see anything that was confidential, let alone secret so and my Canadian counterpart

24:00 used to get more information from his Embassy in Tokyo as if there was any flare up of something in regard to the Armistice Agreement there. It was funny in a way because we'd know there was something on when some of the officers weren't at mess in the morning when you go in the morning. In other words, they were, they'd had their early cups of

24:30 coffee or something and they're busy working out their strategy for what was going to happen at, in the conversations with the enemy across the table at Panmunjom, so my job really there was as far as I was concerned, was to keep

25:00 the diplomatic representative in Seoul informed of the real situation.

**Did it give you, did your work and time with UN give you a more rounded full understanding of what war was about?**

Oh, I learnt more about it when fighting the war than talking peace of course

25:30 but

**Had you understood when you were fighting the war just how much politicking and show was on in the background?**

Oh no, what the generals were talking about or what the, what MacArthur was talking to Curtin?

**Well I guess just the amount of politicking and show ponying and diplomacy that was sort of**

**going on behind the scenes, were you?**

No, no we were too much too busy with our own little war. We called it a little war but I suppose it was the hardest,

26:00 more important. No, we didn't, there was much even in our own divisions you know one so far as the politicking was concerned, one has read about it after the war and as the books are still coming out, aren't they?

**So would you rather have been a soldier or a diplomat? Did you prefer the role of soldier or diplomat?**

Oh, I

26:30 was, well I suppose I was to extent, you're suggesting that I was a diplomat. I was to extent a diplomat I suppose with the Americans, so I lived with them for a year and one had to think about what one said all the time. I remember one of the things we used to do in the mess, after the mess the general, he would

27:00 have a picture show. When I say a picture show they'd show a film. This was not for everyone, it was just selected in the general's quarters you know. I was invited and it was one film there that had to do with John Wayne and it amused me, the end of the picture where John Wayne was sort of, after

27:30 he'd done all his wonderful things, sort of rode off into the sunset you see and I passed some remark about that and it didn't go over well at all but that's the only time that I think that I said the wrong thing, which after all there could have been a better sense of humour by some people.

**Did you wish to make a comment about**

28:00 **recent goings on in terms of the UN's power and its effectiveness?**

I was very disappointed in, terribly disappointed in America and Australia and Poland going, abandoning the UN, desperately disappointed.

**Does it have a future, the UN United Nations?**

Of course it has, there's nothing else, it might be changed in some way

28:30 but you can't have one all powerful nation deciding what's going to happen to the world, can you? Hitler set out to do it. It was fortunate that he, other nations had the power to stop him and only through very strong resolution and combined wealth and no,

29:00 mainly resolution of course, wasn't it really? The will to see the end, see it through. Course the present situation is very, very difficult I know but one finds it difficult to see the end in this present situation taking on the (UNCLEAR) the world that's what's happened. There has to be some other way of dealing with it and I don't want to be.

29:30 I'm not being you know gracious about these things. I think the way things developed I think was unnecessary, they should have taken it further and I think that the Iraq war and terrorism are two separate things.

**You, also while you were**

30:00 **in, over in the UN is that where you met your wife as well?**

Yes, Dawn was the private secretary to the High Commissioner in India and evidently we had leave in, we had three or is it three days' leave or six days' leave? It, we could take, we could get three days a month or six days two months if I remember rightly and

30:30 Delhi, the UN plane, they had a UN plane under the CMO [Chief Military Observer] there. It was stationed either in Srinagar or Delhi and it had used to fly to Delhi, go on leave with the UN plane and I met Dawn and fell in love with her and that was that

31:00 and we didn't get married until after my tour in Korea.

**How long did, were you in Korea?**

One year, yeah.

**And then you returned to Australia?**

Yes and I rejoined the bank. That's all I knew really. I was very, very happy that really the chief,

31:30 the chief inspector, we're talking about now in the bank, he took me back on his staff.

**We've got about 10 minutes left on this tape. I just wanted to go back to Tobruk and ask you a block of questions regarding your time in Tobruk because yesterday we were interrupted a few times, we didn't get to address it in the depth I would like to have. I'd like to ask you,**

- 32:00 **I know you arrived a short while after the rest of your battalion. You'd been first of all, could you tell me about the officer training that you were doing in Cairo?**
- Yes, well it was three months' training and it was all sorts of things that an officer should know, you know deal with I suppose. We even had a month's learning about the internal combustion engine, so that we
- 32:30 could maintain the vehicles or if necessary. After all that's not the job for an officer but if you're on your own in the desert somewhere with a broken down vehicle then you want to know how to fix it and if there's no-one there to otherwise to do it, so that that's the sort of thing. Then of course such things as map reading in the desert particularly and tactics,
- 33:00 all those sorts of things.
- Was it run by the British?**
- Yes, it was run by the British.
- So were there other nationalities other than Australian and British officers training there?**
- There were New Zealanders, Australians and British.
- When you arrived in Tobruk what evidence did you see of**
- 33:30 **Italian occupation?**
- Italian?
- Yes.**
- I didn't, well I knew their locations of their positions you know. They had these fortified, when I say concrete posts very well established, concrete posts which would hold about 30 or 40 people I suppose if they wanted to, I and they probably did have that many. They didn't have that many
- 34:00 places to shoot from, fire from their, as a matter of fact our soldiers sort of developed that aspect of soldiers on top to fight the enemy that's likely to attack and they also found that they were a bit too far apart. They had, we had developed intervening posts that developed on the lines of, we knew soldiers,
- 34:30 the methods we had of digging our defences.
- Morshead made the statement that there'd be no Dunkirk here and that there'd be no surrender and no retreat?**
- That's right, yeah.
- Yes, I was just saying that Morshead made his statement that in regards to Tobruk that "We'll have no Dunkirk here and..."**
- Yes.
- ...there'd be no surrender and no retreat."**
- That's right.
- Was that,**
- 35:00 **did that scare you or did it uplift you that statement?**
- We didn't think of surrendering for goodness sake. Why would we think of surrendering?
- I know you wouldn't think of it but was it fearful knowing that you weren't going to, that you may die there or did it uplift and inspire you?**
- You don't as a soldier, you don't think of dying, you think of living. The enemy are the ones that die.
- 35:30 **Was there any sense of disappointment in not leaving Tobruk via the road that Morshead had discussed, that you, that he said, "If we leave, we're going to leave by the road that we clear ourselves." Was there a disappointment in leaving by the back door so to speak?**
- Well I left before then you see. I left because I was sick. I had hepatitis, jaundice as we called it then. I left at a month or so before that, the battalion did, so I'm not the right person really to ask that.
- 36:00 I think the 2/13th Battalion that went out by road. You, if you've interviewed anyone from the 2/13th, well they make a big issue of that. They were you know the first to strike the Germans up at Ismailiya and then the last to fight them in Tobruk.
- As an officer, what were your biggest challenges in terms of the,**
- 36:30 **your men's morale for men under siege. What do you, what sort of?**
- You keep them occupied, that's what you do. You have to keep them busy.

**How important were those, were the patrols and the control of no man's land in terms of keeping them busy and that, the keeping the psychological advantage over the enemy?**

Oh well, obviously their being, you're dealing with the enemy and it was a nice challenge to command no man's land,

37:00 say 'It's our land and come out if you dare.' I mean we went out. They were inclined to lie in wait you know more so the Italians too rather than the Germans but they liked to be behind the wire, we liked to be in front of it.

**Can I ask you how you felt about the Afrika**

37:30 **Corps, Rommel and the Afrika Corps?**

Yes, well we respected them. They respected the Geneva Convention and in that case we respected them as soldiers that fighting for their country and just the same as we were doing as we were told - was as simple as that. We didn't have any particular hatred for them.

**Did you respect them as fighting soldiers?**

Yes, yes

38:00 they were well respected. They had big problems just as we had and they probably in the latter stages of course, they had much bigger problems than we did by reason of their length of supply and so on. They were a long way from Tobruk sort of thing, which their, you know, their and then of course their supply went right back as far as Tripoli originally.

38:30 **Were you at any point required to take POWs in Tobruk?**

Not, not personally no, I didn't have. I have a photograph over there of German prisoners, actually that you might like to like to have.

**Was enemy equipment a valued price?**

Valued? Oh yes, they were, this is another thing you see, this is a matter of interest as far as the soldier is concerned

39:00 as to these Breda and Schmeisser and other machine guns which had been captured from the Italians and the Germans, you see. They were something to tinker with and also to use against the enemy to supplement their own section firepower. That was one of the, as I say one of the

39:30 things that kept them occupied. Also mines too, different mines that they come have been found you know, although you had to be very careful with those, you imagine that the Pioneer platoon was more inclined to be doing that tinkering with those.

**Were you**

40:00 **able to have any psychological escape while you were in Tobruk, were there activities that you could do that took your mind elsewhere and?**

Not really. There was a place where you could swim and so you know small batches were, sort of went down and had a swim, that was the only real recreation and it was very pleasant in the ocean. It was a

40:30 nice spot down at Wadi Auda, out of the way. Not very often you could go there of course. It had to be very much controlled particularly, you got very dirty, dust, a lot of dust and it got into everything. It got into your eyes, into your hair, you only had a limited amount of water to wash. You had originally, you had two water bottles full.

41:00 One was, these water bottles, you've probably seen the army water bottle, the regular Australian Army water bottle. They're not very large. One, they wouldn't want to be because you've got to carry them anyway, aren't they full of water? Water's very heavy but one of these water bottles would go to the cook house and the cook commandeered that for his cooking, if you had a cookhouse. It depends what your

41:30 arrangements for cooking is. Of course, if you were just a section then you would keep it but if it was a platoon cooking then there would be, you'd have a platoon cook probably, well or you know. I can remember I was as a lieutenant in charge of the carriers I was usually established near battalion headquarters. Well they had a sergeant cook there. Well, he'd get all the water, the water bottles

42:00 you see. The other water bottle you'd use for drink.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**