

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Edward Roberts (Eddie) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 19th April 2004

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1847>

### Tape 1

00:36 **So whereabouts in Perth did you grow up?**

Highgate Hill. It's just north of the Perth Oval, runs off Borwell Street, and I was born there in 1912, and then Dad bought this block of land where we are now in 1914,

01:00 so in 1914, like two years after I was born, I moved out here and Dad built the house, it was completely all bush around here, no electricity, no water, not anything at all. To get to Perth we had to walk down to Nedlands to get the tram while we were walking across the Karrakatta and catch the train, and my brothers did that for some years when they were going to work.

01:30 I started school in Nedlands and I never had any problems with transport because we used to walk everywhere, and even when I started, I shifted a couple of schools, Mum was a Catholic, but she turned to Protestant to marry Dad, who came from Sweden in 1882, so -

**Sweden?**

I was of Swedish-

02:00 Irish parentage, and Mum decided that perhaps St Patrick's School might drill something in to me. Wasn't too bad, a little bit of bullying there, a bit of skylarking around because Mum was a great seamstress and she used to send me out all dressed up in a cardigan and a straw boater with the thing on to stop it from flying off, and I never got on too good with the kids there for a while, around East Perth it

02:30 was a bit rough. And they used to bully me a bit till I just flew out and flattened two of them, so that all fixed that up. But then after that I left there and went to Claremont High School, and finished my education there. I was never an academic; I could do better with my hands than I could with my brain, type of thing, so the teacher said,

03:00 "Eddie, I think you'd be better off if you went and got a job."

**How old were you when she said that?**

About 14 I think.

**What sort of things did you like doing with your hands?**

Everything.

**Like what?**

I was never afraid of work, but Dad was one of the chiefs of the Metropolitan Water Supply of Sewerage and Drainage, he was one of the engineers, so he said, "I can get you a job in the Water Supply." I said, "Righto."

03:30 But Dad's idea of a job was to go to night school and study and become an accountant and that, and I didn't like it. But I got a job in the stationary store delivering stationary around to the offices, and the Premier was there, and those - it was up at the old barracks, do you know the old barracks at the top of St George's Terrace?

**Oh yes, yes.**

They were the original old police barracks, and the Public Works Department took them over, and the Water Supply.

04:00 So then I - 10 shillings a week and I got in touch with some friends and they said, "Well we can get you a job at 30 shillings a week, down in West Perth shovelling sand for a sandblaster for German people who've started a business called Metal Spraying." Now they sprayed the original doors on the old Embassy ballroom

04:30 in William Street, and I got working with them shovelling all this, and then they went broke and left me out on a limb with no job. So I didn't go begging back to Dad again, so I went farming and all over the place.

**Before we talk about that, what sort of things did you do when you were a younger chap going to school, what did you do on the weekends?**

05:00 Well, we used to make our own toys, and then we got Mum to make us some sandwiches and we'd walk to Cottesloe and play around, play around in the bush here, of a night time you get the - if it was a moon light night, you'd go out possum hunting, you'd look up in the tree and get the moon behind the possums and you could see them running along the branches.

05:30 There was a fungi that grew on the trees that was sort of fluorescent of a night time, and there were some children over the road here in Boronia Avenue, they were about the same age, and we used to go round playing all the time, night time, moon light, any night, because Friday nights we were allowed to go to the pictures down at Nedlands which was open air, down

06:00 in Broadway, and then that only cost sixpence anyway. But we were never out of a night time. Mum used to be a beautiful pianist and a singer, as a matter of fact she sang with - the name escapes me now, but one of the great sopranos in Sydney, Melba, Madam Melba.

**Nellie?**

Nellie Melba, that's the one. And we had the piano

06:30 over in the corner there, and my brother when he came back from the First World War, he used to sing a great song called Nirvana, and of a Sunday the people would come visiting, with their horses and sulkies tied up to the front fence, and the old WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK would get knocked over and the rooster - and they'd have a concert here with Mum, we used to see

07:00 the concert.

**Is it actually the same house?**

The same house.

**That we're in now?**

Exactly.

**That's wonderful to be in the same house for such a long period of time.**

It is, yes. I'm the only one left.

**How many people were in your family Eddie?**

I had four brothers, there was Stan, Gus, Jack, Charlie, and a sister Mena,

07:30 and myself. I was the last of the brood.

**You're the youngest?**

The youngest, yes.

**You mentioned that you had some brothers who went to the First World War.**

One brother.

**One brother?**

My brother Stan. He enlisted in 1914, and he went to Gallipoli with the 10th Light Horse, and then through mortar he got wounded, recuperated in Malta, then went to France,

08:00 where he was put in the artillery. He was badly gassed, but he came home, well you know, as whole as you could be, but he wasn't the same man of course. I remember him sleeping here, he used to grind his teeth all night, so that was part of the war.

**Was it that left over sort of stress that he experienced?**

That's right, yes.

**How about with the gassing, what sort of symptoms did he have from being gassed?**

From

08:30 what?

**What sort of symptoms did he have from being gassed?**

Well, see I was only a youngster, but I remember that was the main part, but he was sort of a nervous

man all the time, I think he was probably shell-shocked, you know, and he got on, he married a lass, she was a nurse, she used to

09:00 be a nurse in Subiaco in the big hospital there, and they had three children, a son and two daughters, and he finished up on the transline as a steward, but he used to work for the Water Supply. Every member of our family bar my sister worked for the Water Supply, so we had somebody from 1908 till my youngest son

09:30 pulled out about three or four years ago, and went to Tasmania. So we've got a pretty good family record with the Water Supply. But getting back to my brother, he took to the drink a little bit, and his wife passed away, and I don't know, he sort of got all nervous and that, and he went looking for accommodation all over the place,

10:00 and he finished up in - down south of the river there, at some - I think it was the Masonic Homes there. But he couldn't look after himself so I went down there one day and I said, "Listen Stan, I'm going to take you into Hollywood." So he said, "Righto, I think that's the best." So I got him into Hollywood and they said,

10:30 "You can't have a wireless, you can't smoke," and he said, "Well belt me over the head, if I can't do any of that in here." So that's where he passed away, I just forget the year now, but a fair while ago.

**What sort of chores did you have when you were a young lad?**

Chores?

**Yes, around the house.**

The main thing was to feed the fowls, dig up the garden and get the morning's wood in, for my brothers to light the fire.

11:00 I had to go out - it wasn't any big deal because there were trees all around the place, but that was my main job, and we used to have an old Colcast mower, I used to mow the lawns, odd jobs around, you know, I was never frightened to work. But I had nobody to play with when I was young, and my brothers used to sort of bait me and scare me. See, Stirling

11:30 Highway was built out of logs, cut like that in a circle, and just over not far away, they had these big saw pits - used to be - they're still there, or they were, not now of course, and my brothers used to tell that if I went there Old Nick'd get me.

**Who's Old Nick?**

The devil.

**Oh.**

Yeah, the Old Nick. And that used to scare the daylight out

12:00 of me.

**What's the devil doing in a saw pit?**

See they used to stand there, pardon me, and saw the logs into round things to make the Stirling Highway out of.

**Where these immigrants that were doing the sawing?**

Pardon?

**Were they immigrants who were doing the sawing?**

No, they were convicts.

**They were convicts?**

Yes.

**So it sounds like pretty hard work?**

12:30 Well, it's all hard work, in those days it was hard work, but I'm sure it was convicts that built the highway, right through. They had a convict camp down in Claremont, where Meals On Wheels have got their delivery - and they have Meals On Wheels there, I delivered meals down there for over 25 years, and there was an old camp there, and then the university got onto it, archaeologists,

13:00 whatever you like to call them, and they had a dig there, digging for artefacts from the convicts and so forth, there.

**Gee. Did they find anything?**

I don't know, but they were all busy there with sieves, you know? A shovel, and sieving away. But they put a plaque there anyway, that they were digging. But the early days here were very

13:30 interesting, as I say, I never had toys bought for me because money was very short, I only had one bike in my life, and I paid five shillings for that, and I loaned it to a friend of mine to go home on, and what did he do? He left it outside the Swan Brewery with a flat tyre and somebody pinched it. So that was the end of the bike. But you learned very fast when you were young, because you did everything yourself, it didn't take long to learn

14:00 how to use spanners or tools, or you know, change the oil in your car, or fix up your motorbike. I was a great motorbike man, as I grew older, just before the war, and you know, you learned - Dad was a very good carpenter, and he showed me how to - we used to get little blocks of wood and make toys out of them, and pinch Mum's cotton reels, cut them in half, and they were

14:30 wheels, put a screw in. So the cotton reels were scarce, and pram wheels, they were in big demand for hill trolleys. And we used to go down the Cat and Stirling Hill there, past the pub, when I was about 10, on the hill trolley, you wouldn't believe it. Wouldn't dare put your foot on the place now.

**Absolutely. What sort of sport did you play?**

I was never a sporty

15:00 person. We played tennis down at Dalkeith Road, there was a couple of courts there, but see, unfortunately my father passed away in 1933, and there was a big Depression on in those days, money was tight, and my friends, a lot of them were never out of work,

15:30 and their fathers worked. See my best friend, his father ran the Karrakatta Cemetery, and (BREAK IN TRANSMISSION)

15:46 around in the cemetery, and - but he just couldn't give me a job, money was too tight. So I said, "All right." So anyway...

**How did you see the**

16:00 **Depression affecting people?**

Well it all depends on what you could do. See as I say, I was never afraid of doing work, I used to go round cleaning windows for two shillings, cleaning windows. Do anything, go and catch crabs and cook them and sell them, cobblers down the river. In 19 - just before Dad passed away I went down to Bridgetown picking apples,

16:30 no pay, just food, clothing and food. But then when Dad passed away, Mum asked me to come home, and I got a job on the, probably sustenance you might call it, and that was five weeks on and six weeks off, because I had a dependent, like Mum see? And all my brothers had gone to Kalgoorlie and all over the place, and my sister

17:00 was a barmaid, and she didn't live at home, so it was only just Mum and I here for quite a few years, until I went away. But it's no big deal to make your own fun, you didn't come in watching TV, TV wasn't there in those - and my sister learned to play the piano, and I would have dearly loved to play the piano

17:30 but Mum never had the money to send me to school, to teach, so I bought a beautiful organ and tried to teach myself. It was a bit of a disaster, so it's still there.

**Did you have a wireless?**

We had a beautiful wireless, see that one there, that one right there?

**Yeah. Righto, that's a great old wireless.**

Yes. And Mum swapped the piano for it, for a wireless like that.

**Why was it important to have a wireless?**

18:00 Well Mum got - she never used to play the piano as much as she did, you know, nobody played it, it was just sitting there full of moths I suppose, and she said, "I think I'll sell the piano," and she went into Nicholson's and got a - it was a lovely Beale piano, and she swapped that for a radio. It used to stand in the corner over there. And we used to put the records on, one of those long

18:30 players, and go around down the lounge there, having tea, or in the kitchen, and run out and come back and put another one on. And I've got a tea chest full of them out there.

**How was it that your father actually died when I'm assuming he was quite young?**

Dad was 74.

**Oh, OK.**

How he came to die, he was - as I told you he was - he ran

19:00 all the works from the Water Supply, and in 1929 they started - they sewered all this place, this area here, and he was in charge of the whole works, they were building down on the foreshore where they go

surfing now, and sailing, you'll see a little pumping station there. Now the way they built that pumping station was to lay

19:30 bricks and dig the mud out from underneath, and the bricks would weigh it down and make the walls. See there's always two walls in a pumping station, the effluent would go in, and it's pumped away. So Dad asked one of the chaps to shift a five by five wailing, what we call a wailing, that's a long piece about 20 foot long, to keep the lards apart, and he said, "No, I'm not going to shift that." So Dad grabbed

20:00 it, and he shifted it and burst a duodenal ulcer, which was cancerous and we didn't know that.

**Gee.**

So poor old Dad. We used to go up and see him up in the Perth Hospital, and Perth Hospital in those days was great lines of beds, with a head sister up the end, and as you deteriorated you shifted one bed at a time, till you got up the top, and then

20:30 it's ring up Donald Chipper.

**So the care was pretty basic, is what you're saying?**

Yes. It's just one of those unfortunate things. Yes, Dad was a good man, liked to have a bet on the trots and the races, never drank, he smoked a pipe, but he was a good man.

**How old were you when he died?**

Me?

**Yes.**

Well, about 22 or 23.

**So you were still quite**

21:00 **young when your father passed away?**

Yes.

**Was it difficult supporting your mum?**

Well, it was really. You see, I used to - as I say, I had these friends that were never out of work, they had fathers who ran things, like one of my best friends, he worked at Drabbles, the big iron monger firm, Bunnings have got the place now.

21:30 And he was never short of money, and we'd go to the pictures and I'd say, "Listen Dick, I haven't got the money to go buying packets of Fantails and that." And he said, "No, righto, she'll be right". But when he'd get there, there'd be - if we went in the middle of the week, he'd say, "I've only got three pound to last me till Friday," and I never had two bob. And everything went ploughed into the house. So

22:00 that's how it happened, but it didn't bother me really. But then I got tangled up with signals.

**Well how did that happen? Did you actually join the militia at some point?**

Yes.

**Well ...**

I'll tell you how it happened. My brother got onto it, somehow or other, my brother Jack. And there was a Captain Beazley and Sergeant Coleman,

22:30 a First World War signallist, and if my memory's right they worked for the Water Supply, and they had a section, a signal section called 13th the mixed brigade sigs. And Jack said, "Well I'm going to join, do you want to be in it? We go camping, you know?" So I always liked uniforms, I was

23:00 crazy about them, and glamour and all the other - so I joined, and I went out to the drill hall in Beaufort Street, the next Sunday was the parade out at a place called Bushmead, which is just out of Guildford, and we got issued with a uniform. Leggings, riding boots, spurs, boots, slouch hat, bandoleer, the whole works. So I took that

23:30 home, and next Sunday there was another parade, so I went up, all dressed up, oh, my boots and my feet were hurting, the leggings were tight, and I came home with my boots around my neck, and carrying the rest in a bag. But I got used to that. But I used to like going out, we used to go into Perth and signal underneath the street lights, a little heliograph which works on

24:00 sun, and it worked quite well, you know, under a street light. And lamps. And I'd just get down to Claremont when the pictures came out, and I'd be there in my uniform, all poised up, and the blokes would come out, and the girls were out - talking to the girls.

**So it was a bit of a girl magnet, the uniform?**

Well, it did me a lot of good. See a lot of chaps I found, they didn't like discipline, they

24:30 didn't like to be told what to do. No big deal to me, I was learning, I was a great learner, I was never frightened to ask anybody, no matter what it was, even how to use the humble shovel, I asked an old chap mixing concrete, I said, "What is the best way to use this thing"? And he said, "I'll show you, because you're going the way you are now, you'll be dead in about two hours". Because I used to lift the concrete up, and you'd just push

25:00 the shovel in and turn it over. When I was about 17, old-time dancing came into my life, and I used to go down to the Rosebud Hall in Claremont, and I'd polish the floor and I'd get in for nothing. It was only one and threepence, but I got in for nothing. And all the old grandmothers there taught me how to dance, and I've never forgotten.

**Well done.**

Yes. So

25:30 that was one of the things that the Depression taught you, that you can't get everything off a plate. Some were lucky, some got it through, but I was never fortunate like that, I was the only one here, my brothers were all away doing what they were doing in the Depression. But I was never frightened to ask anybody.

**What sort**

26:00 **of things did they teach you in the militia?**

Signalling.

**Was that the one thing that they were teaching?**

Well, they had three methods, those with a vehicle would go up to Kalamunda or round - not to Kalamunda, up in the hills, and we would go to Kings Park, and we used the heliograph to signal, then one man would operate the heliograph, another one would call out,

26:30 "A, B, C, D, E" or whatever, and the other one would write it down on a signal pad. And that's the way they transmitted. And then you'd signal back. Of a night time they had a lamp, very powerful. Now we used to get up on top of the roof, my brother and I, and we'd signal down to Mosman's Bay, Buckland Hill of a night time, and you could see it quite easily, because there were no street lamps or anything like that, or there

27:00 were, but very dull. But you could pick them up easily. And they had one flag that was just a flag on a pole, and you'd go like that for a dot, and down further for a dash, so dot dash A, dot dash A. But they ran out of fashion because the snipers would - you know, you'd stand up. In the navy they use two flags,

27:30 they were like that.

**You were a sitting duck I suppose with this flag?**

Oh yes, you would be a sitting duck, yes.

**When you looked out, you know, over Perth at night, could you see lots of people signalling each other?**

No, no, it never went on, only us, only in the signals.

**How hard was it to learn?**

Not very bad, it'd make the Morse

28:00 Code stick in your head, you know, it's a long time since I used it, but I think I could go out there now and I could send it quite easily. But to receive it I might have a bit of bother for a while. You see, with Morse Code, when you're reading it, especially in the job I did in New Guinea, you get a block of five figures, and as you're writing this one down, the other one's coming in your ear, so that's how it goes.

28:30 You've got one coming in and one going out, through your fingers. So I thought it'd be quite easy to learn music like that, but it didn't work that way. So that was the interesting part of signals, I liked it, I liked the uniform all right, but going out on the camps around the suburbs, doing training and you know, we had a blue and white arm band around here, to show that we were signals,

29:00 and we went everywhere.

**How often would you do the training?**

It'd be about once a fortnight I think, or every Friday night, I just forget now. I know it was pretty often. We'd catch the tram down to Claremont and get on the train and get out at Perth, and then vice versa when we came back.

**And when you went away on a camp, whereabouts would you go?**

Well we

29:30 used to go up in the hills, and I know there that we used to – I had the job of looking after the commanding officer’s horse, because there was a lot of poison there.

**Poison?**

Yes, horse – you know, weeds. Like Patterson’s Curse or something like that. It wasn’t Patterson’s Curse I don’t think, but it was a similar type of thing, and if the horse got a bellyful of it, he’s history. So he said, “Don’t let him browse, don’t let him get

30:00 around.” So that was my job there, and also on the cable cart, the cable cart – two horses pulled it, and you sat on the back winding in the cable, and others are on the side, or on the horses with crook sticks, a long handle with a crook on it, and they’d pick this wire up, hang it on a tree, or go over the road and hang it on a pole, and

30:30 then we had to go and retrieve it and take it down and wind it up on the cable cart.

**So this was a telephone line?**

Yes. And that was made out of solid copper coil, and steel, and then insulation. So it was pretty tough stuff.

**Do you want a glass of water?**

31:00 Yeah, I wouldn’t mind.

**OK. We’ll just pause there for a moment... that you did go for.**

Virtually weekend work, weekend bivouacs or holidays or anything like that, we were always on holidays because nobody was working. But it was good fun.

**Would you have to learn anything about navigation?**

Yes, we used to have our prismatic compass.

**What does that look like?**

It’s a round –

31:30 about that round, I suppose, and it pointed north and then you could point it at and work the degrees around the top, and so north-north east, or north-west or south-west, or whatever, but before I’d find out that, I’d turn that around and that’s so many degrees north or west, and it’s so many degrees south. And then if you go out – during the war

32:00 we used to go out in the bush, and then you’d have to navigate backwards, go out and then come back, which is a little bit tricky, but we didn’t have to do that very often.

**When you were training, did you have to sort out where you were navigating from? Was that part of the training that you got in the militia?**

Yes, it was, it was quite easy

32:30 there, doing that, because if we come down this way, I knew all the roads and that, but...

**Cheating.**

It was good exercise, and we all got – we learned a lot – I think of all the chaps that went, when we went away to the war, we were very well healed up in knowledge more or less, for a start of a war experience.

**Were there a lot of**

33:00 **horses to take care of?**

Yes. This is what they used to call the remount depot, at Bushmead, and that’s where they had the horses, I believe, from the First World War, where they used to train them. It was First World War stuff we were using.

**Well what sort of stuff?**

Well, all this cable and carts and they had a little box where the wires would come in, and it’d buzz and you’d put your thumb over the hole to find out which one’s buzzing.

33:30 **And what would happen when you put your thumb over the hole?**

Well, you’d just put the little plug in, connect them up like a telephone.

**I see. And what sort of weaponry were you using?**

What sort of what?

**Guns?**

Guns? Never had any guns.

**Really?**

We had 303 rifles, we used to do a rifle shoot, but other than that we had no - not in the militia with the signals, it's not a gun-happy crowd. But we were taught how to use them,

34:00 machine guns and guns, should the occasion come up.

**What did you think of the 303?**

The 303? Good rifle, very accurate, give you a kick like a mule, but very good, very good for the job it was designed for. Especially for bayonet work, which I didn't do, but ...

**How come you didn't do the bayonet work?**

Well, I was a signaller.

34:30 **And that wasn't part of the training for signals?**

No, no, no. See they left that to the infantry.

**So you weren't trained as part of the infantry and then taken separately?**

No, no, no. We were trained to communicate with the artillery, that was our job, and we learned that in the mixed brigade sigs [signals] before we joined the war, you know?

**How did you actually get selected to do the signalling in the first place?**

What, join the military?

**Yes.**

35:00 **Did they just say, "You look good for being a signaller"?**

No, I'll tell you how it happened. I was working for the Water Supply at the time, and I was cleaning out pipes out at Belmont, because the pipes weren't lined with any anti-rust stuff, so they had to be rotted out, cleaned out, they were two inch pipes and that. And there were all sorts of pipes had to be clean, get the rust out of them.

35:30 So it was a red hot day and I don't know whether it was John Roberts or Bill Beazley the captain, came up and he said, "We're getting a section ready to join the 2/3rd Field Regiment in the war, of course war had broken out then, and I was doing this job.

36:00 So I said, "I'll be in that, couldn't be any worse than this."

**How long had you actually been in the militia before war broke out?**

I reckon a couple of years.

**So you pretty much knew what you were doing by then?**

Yes, I did indeed. One trip I went down to Bridgetown for a while, and I taught the kids down there how to signal, and the scouts, took over the scouts, taught them.

**And how old were you by this time?**

36:30 I'd be 22 or 23, I suppose, something like that.

**Some of the other blokes in the militia, would they have been younger than you, or the same age?**

No, John Roberts, he's now - he took us into action against the Italians, he's 88, and

37:00 he's very ill with Parkinson's disease, Bert Zackland, he was a Jewish chap, he's 85 I think now, and another one named Bruce Porter who just died in Melbourne, he died at 85.

**So you're one of the older ...?**

I'm one of the oldest ones, yes. Well I am the oldest. And I'm the only one left of the -

37:30 that I know of, there's three of us left.

**Well you're doing well. So when war broke out, did it come as a surprise to you, or were you following what was going on in Europe?**

Well I remember when war broke out we were working down in Fremantle on the bridge, and I didn't - everything was - pardon me -

**That's fine.**

- 38:00 **of course everything was Hitler, the whole news and everything was Hitler, so you sort of got used to it. In September, October/November, when I joined, it was, I**
- 38:30 **don't know, it was just - all you could hear about was the war in Europe, there was no war in the south-west of the Pacific or anywhere. So we - that's all the news we got, and of course news was pretty slow too, not like today, you do it now and it's all over the place in a couple of minutes.**
- How were you hearing**
- 39:00 **about Hitler mostly? Was it the radio or was it ...?**
- Papers, or the radio.
- How often would you read a paper?**
- We used to get the West Australian, I don't know, I think we used to get it every day sometimes, it was only a penny or tuppence, two pennies.
- Did a lot of your friends think that there was going to be a war breaking out?**
- 39:30 No, they didn't give it much thought, I don't think.
- How about you? Did you give it any thought?**
- About joining?
- Well, about the war breaking out. Did you think that it was going to happen?**
- Well I thought about my brother and what it did to him, but I don't know, I just wanted to adventure and go further - I was in the signals and I just wanted to go on from there. There was really nothing here, you couldn't
- 40:00 get any money or job, if you were very lucky - well they said, "You'll get five shillings a day if you join." Big deal.
- So how did you go about joining up?**
- Well we went down to the Cen [Centenary] Park Drill Hall, and then we went before the doctors. They took blood out of your
- 40:30 ear ...
- Out of your ear?**
- Yes, like that, prick, you put your feet in a bucket of water, and walk across the floor, so I said to the doctor, I said, "What's the key to this?" He said, "I want to see if you've got flat feet." But I was a big boy, I was well built, strong, because I'd worked hard all my life. See digging was no big deal to me. So I passed with flying colours, everywhere.
- 41:00 So then we went up to Northam, and we got issued with a giggle suit, it was a khaki thing with a white hat, and I think we called them Menzies' Daisies, or Blamey's Daisies.
- Blamey's Daisies?**
- Blamey's Daisies. But then they said, "Well we can't send you over to the East, dressed like that. So back to Guildford we went..."
- So hang on a second. You're doing some training in Northam, is that right?**
- Very little. No, we were one of the first there and we were digging latrines and getting the camp ready.
- Oh, so you were setting up the camp in Northam?**
- Setting up the camp. We were there for very little time.
- So you were just**
- 41:30 **digging and building?**
- Yes, just there

## Tape 2

- 00:33 **You were about to tell us the story about Northam?**
- Yes, well we went up to Northam and of course digging was no big deal to me, I could - I worked hard,

but some of the chaps had come straight out of an office, it was only ten minutes and they had blisters. But besides that we were given palliasses and a great big heap of straw, a palliasse is a big

01:00 long bag, you use it as a mattress, you stuff it full of straw. And these poor blokes had never done any hard living at all, they felt it badly. But they got used to it as time went on. But one chap came and said, "I think I'll go and catch a rabbit". So I said, "Catch a rabbit, how the dickens is he going to catch a rabbit"? And he came back, and the thing is that if you can get a

01:30 rabbit and run him down in 50 yards, you keep him away from the burrow, you're right. So Northam was our first experience of real army life. Then we came down to Perth, and they couldn't send us away in these giggle

02:00 suits, so we went out to Midland and got dressed with militia uniforms, and then we went to the eastern states with those on. We went to a camp called Ingleburn Camp, which is out of Liverpool, and there we received our proper AIF [Australian Imperial Force] uniforms and badges and we started training then, we had nothing to train

02:30 with, we had no gear for our route marches.

**How did you get there Ed?**

Pardon?

**How did you get there?**

By train.

**What was that journey like?**

Pardon?

**What was that journey like?**

Oh, it was good, the first one. Yes, we were just like passengers. We had passenger meals right across. See, you had to change trains

03:00 at Kalgoorlie, Adelaide, Albury, about there or four changes you had to make till you got to New South Wales, and they dropped us off at this station at Liverpool, and we were picked up by trucks and taken to the Ingleburn Camp. And we were there to - this is about '39, 1940,

03:30 January 1940, and we came back on the Manunda, back to West Australia where the convoy came in and took us away. But while we were at Ingleburn, it was a proper army camp, millions of mosquitoes, terrible place. But we were lucky, we got to - got out to see

04:00 Sydney and some of the Sydney people were very good to us, especially West Australians, and the one that said that I could go and stay with her, or two of us, was Eileen Boyd, she was a great singer and teacher of singing, I think she worked for Nicholson's over there in Sydney, and she took us around, she was well-known everywhere, and

04:30 we got out on the harbour and the boats, all the VIPs [Very Important Persons] and things you'd never go in an army uniform, you'd never get there unless you knew somebody. And we had a great time there. And of course we started out, what training we could do at Ingleburn was mostly squad drill and learning Morse. I went to a school in

05:00 Sydney, a mechanical school put on by the Ford Company, so all the girls in the factory used to yell out to us, "Stupid mugs going to the war", and all this. "You'll be sorry", was the great catch cry then.

**Why were you at the mechanics' school?**

Well I was a driver, a driver

05:30 wireless operator, and the part of the teaching I suppose was to go through this school and they'd teach you all about engines, well I knew anyway. And they had in the camp a little battery charger with a Douglas engine on it. My brother had a Douglas so I knew all about them.

06:00 So the corporal who was lecturing me, he said, "You know more about this than I do," and I said, "Well I'm no stranger to it, so you know," but I said, "But keep going, you're doing all right."

**You said that to your ...?**

Yes, he was a corporal, teaching us. But that's the way it went, there's always - when you got to become an NCO [Non-Commissioned Officer] yourself, there's always some smart Alec, you know,

06:30 probably knows more than you do, and you've got to watch yourself what you do, what you talk about.

**How long were you at Ingleburn?**

I think we came back in - when did we leave, April? So it must have been around about November, February, might have been March we came back here, and

07:00 then we went to a camp in South Street, East Fremantle, they had a camp ready there for us, and we all camped there, they were doing the convoy to go to the Middle East in 1940, so we used to route march around the place while we were in camp there, and there was no training, because we never had any equipment or anything.

**Was that Melville?**

Melville, yes, that's right.

07:30 **What was Melville Camp like?**

What was it like?

**Yes.**

Just tents. They had a hut there built by the Red Cross, I think the Salvos had a hut there too, but it was very basic, you know. The buses used to go past and we'd get leave to go to Fremantle, I used to come home some nights.

08:00 But that was just a gathering of all the troops that were going to go on this boat, the 11th battalion, and the second third field regiment, he was supposed to go on the boat and he wouldn't go because he didn't like the look of it, he said his troop's not going to go on that. So anyhow, I went on it, so we sailed away on that.

**How did you board her?**

Pardon?

**How did you board the ship?**

08:30 We went down the wharf, on Metro buses, and just walked up the gangplank onto the wharf, and I've got two photos there with 'Via Karrakatta' signs over the door, and we pinched these and took them to the Middle East with us.

**So what were conditions like on board?**

09:00 This boat, the Nevassa was a troop ship, used to use it in the First World War to transport troops from England to India, she was built for that purpose. The sleeping was all hammocks, just all together, and had a mess hall and the cooks had their

09:30 kitchens and that. The food was just food, and that was about all it was, nothing flash about it, in fact the CO [Commanding Officer] Louch, he complained about it, he was the CO of the 2/11th Battalion.

**Was it cramped on board?**

10:00 Cramped? Yes, very cramped. We did the signals on her, it was an old boat, it only travelled at 12 knots, which is not a great speed, you know, we were convoyed by the Ramillies and three destroyers, and there was about three other troopships, three or four, I forget, and the Ramillies was - we used to take the

10:30 signal and they'd say, "MT [Motor Transport] Nevassa, you're going too slow, you're holding up the convoy." So next minute it's smoking like blazes and they'd pick up a couple of knots, and then back would come, "Nevassa, you're making too much smoke, you're going to draw crabs on us with the squad," you know, the enemy could see the smoke.

11:00 And somebody got a porthole light, "If you don't put it out, we'll blow it out," this is the Ramillies. So I said to the English sailor, I said, "They're not dinkum are they?" He said, "Yeah, too right they are, they're not going to... this old tub". So no big deal. So that's how we - we

11:30 did a bit of training on board, like Morse Code, and got books on procedures for signalling and all that, walked around and around, we pulled in at Colombo and had a couple of days in there while they dolled the old girl up, and then we called in at Aden again.

**What happened at Colombo?**

I got full I think. No,

12:00 Colombo, we went ashore - the funny thing I noticed about Ceylon, that when you were about a mile offshore, you could smell the spices, you know they talk about the Spice Isles? And you could smell it on the breeze, the different spices coming off the country, and when you get there they're all spitting beetle nut all over the place, red beetle nut, and these rickshaws they had,

12:30 we'd go riding around in those and all buying souvenirs and just relaxed all the time, but we were very hot and we never any tropical uniforms. I just read in the Battalion book that they'd ordered tons of fruit for us on board, but it never arrived so we didn't get any of it, they were very short of rations

13:00 there.

**What were the rations?**

The bakers made bread, and meat stews mainly with veggies, I don't remember if we got sweets or not, can't remember that, but one chap came up and he said, "They've just made a discovery, they've found an Indian stew that had been in the

13:30 freezer since the First World War. But the eggs were cooked, we ate a lot of eggs, and the yolk was black. God knows how long they'd been in there, I don't know. Seasickness took over a bit, didn't bother me so much, I don't know why, I get very seasick, but well, it was all a new experience for us

14:00 so we thought it was just part of army life so we just put up with it. Some couldn't hack it and they didn't like it at all. But it didn't bother me, I could eat anything, I'm used to it.

**Any gambling on board?**

Pardon?

**Any gambling on board?**

Any what?

**Gambling? Two-up?**

I think there was a little bit, no two-up, they used to call it Crown and

14:30 Anchor, that was a game like a draughtboard, and it had crowns and anchors. And some chaps made a lot of money on it, stuffed shirts full. My brother Jack was with me, he was a great gambler, yes, he used to gamble, a lot of gambling went on in the army. I never gambled, I couldn't stand it, too hard to get without gambling it away, but old Snow,

15:00 he used to gamble, then get rid of it.

**So you never relied on the odds?**

No, what, the toss of the coins? Nope. Well, when I became an NCO in Palestine I had to go and close the game down, they all went - they'd say, "There's your brother, coming down to..." I'd say, "It's not me, don't look at me, it's the

15:30 CO's rules, no gambling in the camp." I don't know why they did that, because it was part of the pastime, you know, two-up? Wasn't hurting anybody. But some of the top brass didn't like it, for some reason or other.

**So your brother was notorious, was he?**

Notorious? Yeah, a gambler, yeah. Very hard drinker too, old Snow, poor old

16:00 bloke. Yeah, we all liked a beer, no two ways about that, that was part of army life, you'd go on leave, you'd look for a pub and have some beer and that. But mainly we trained.

**Well where did you go from Colombo?**

Colombo, next stop was Aden, they pulled in there,

16:30 they put a ramp up, and these coolies, baskets of coal, and they're like ants, crawling up and tipping it in, in no time they'd have it full of coal, and away we'd go off to Tewfik and up the Suez Canal to the Bitter Lakes, and that's when Italy came into the war, if I remember right. And they unloaded us into a station called El

17:00 Kantara and we were taken then by train about 400 kilometres I think, to Kilo 89 [Camp 89 km from Jerusalem], which was our campsite in Palestine. That was our first experience of Palestine.

**How long were you at El Kantara?**

I think they took us off - it might have been a few days I suppose, we got fed there.

17:30 **What did they feed you on there?**

Pardon?

**What did they feed you on at El Kantara?**

Well camel sausages I think. They were big in Palestine, camel sausages. But food was pretty good, it might have been bland and tasteless, but it was good for you. I used to like army biscuits, they were like rocks, like pavement slabs, but they were very

18:00 nutritious, especially on convoy work, I used to have a bag of these biscuits and I'd sit there and nibble at these. But the food was worked out I suppose in calories or whatever, although it didn't suit everybody, it was good. But when you went on leave of course you'd change your diet to go into a café, my main one was Wiener

18:30 Schnitzels in Tel Aviv, used to go for them every time we could get into Tel Aviv. But you couldn't go gallivanting around all over the country because you never had the money.

**So you used to get a craving for those Wiener Schnitzels?**

Pardon?

**You got a craving for those Wiener Schnitzels?**

Yes.

**What was that Kilo 89?**

That was an English camp originally, it was built by the English, and they had huts there, but we lived in

19:00 tents, and our first job was to put up these white tents called EPIP [English Pattern, Indian Police] tents, they were big white cotton ones. And then we'd have to dig the inside out, down about three feet, in case they were bomb blasted. If you were hit direct of course you were history, but if it hit the side, the bomb blast would scatter over the top, and you'd be safe. The same as digging a slit trench in the desert, you'd dig a trench big enough to

19:30 hold yourself, and then when the bombs came, the shrapnel would go over your head, and you were safe. A direct hit of course, goodbye Charlie.

**How long were you at Kilo 89?**

I think we were there, must have been there, when did we get there, 1940,

20:00 six to eight months, I should think.

**Did you do much training there?**

Yes, we went out in the desert, we got some equipment there and some vehicles, and we went out into the desert, and I got into trouble out there because you should never - in wartime - send a message in plain language, like I couldn't tell you, especially on the wireless, because it's gone,

20:30 so I did that, I made the blue, we were at Beersheba, which was a great - you heard of Beersheba, the great battle for the Australians in the First World War? So I sent a message, we were only training, that the Australians were advancing on Beersheba, and it was picked up by the Warsprite, the big English dreadnought off Gibraltar, and sent back,

21:00 and I got into big trouble over that, big trouble. Everything had to be in code.

**What kind of trouble?**

Pardon?

**What kind of trouble?**

Reprimanded badly, yes, a dressing down. And when you got a dressing down you got it, and you took heed. You didn't do the same thing again.

**So were you doing a training exercise at Beersheba?**

21:30 Yes. We went all around - we went to the Dead Sea, Nazareth, Bethlehem, they were only - I remember them as only sort of mud villages in those days, now they're big towns. Gaza, we used to down to Gaza, we had surf races there in Gaza, and you'd take your clothes down there, and these - what do they call them? Dhobi -

22:00 dhobi wallahs or something, and they'd take your pants and shirts and wash them all, and bring them back, and get your same clothes back again. But I ran a dance at a place called Rehovet near Tel Aviv, and I put on a dance and invited a lot of the Jewish people to come, and we got on very well with those, they used to sing to us,

22:30 and of course they'd say, "Well you sing now," and of course all we knew was "Waltzing Matilda" or something like that. But we got on very well with them.

**How did you organise the dance?**

I don't know, I suppose being a dancing man I always had a pair of dancing shoes with me, till I wore a hole in the sole, and during the war you couldn't get anything fixed, of course. And I couldn't dance - well I

23:00 danced in my army boots, but it was a pretty shocking thing to do. But the shoes gradually wore out, and what they were - they were given to us and I got them for drivers, they were the softest shoe for driving, and they were very good, well made leather shoes. But I

23:30 asked the unit, you know, what do you reckon we run a dance, we got some Jewish chap to play the piano, some old time music.

**Whereabouts did you hold the dance?**

In a place called Rehovet.

**What kind of building?**

It was open air, if I remember right, open air, a dance floor there.

**Was the dance floor already there, or did you have to assemble it?**

Did I what?

24:00 **Did you have to build the dance floor?**

No, it was there, it was there. But the Jews came, they liked it, they were doing some of their own dances, and we did ours. Quite good, yes. I've got an old program there somewhere.

**And did you dance with the Jewish girls?**

Yes. Yes, they didn't mind, we were there to have fun and you know, we were there to help

24:30 them, fight the Germans, and of course when the Italians came we had to fight them too, and then we got all our equipment, got all our trucks and vans and we headed off to Egypt then.

**I'll just ask you, what did the Jews think of the Australians?**

The what?

**What did they think of the Australians?**

25:00 Various. Drunken louts, no hopers, and well, to be quite frank some of them were too, they were you know, the larrikin element, you know, all out on the side, I come from way back of Widgimills or somewhere, and I can do all this on

25:30 my own, which they couldn't, but a lot of larrikinism. They reckon we weren't disciplined enough, the English reckoned we could do with more discipline than we had. But when it came to the nitty-gritty, they were good soldiers.

**But there was no trouble at the dances?**

No. Everybody was there to have a good time. There wasn't many - not a great lot came,

26:00 but a lot of them seemed to go into the pubs in Tel Aviv somewhere there, a lot of them couldn't dance, didn't have a clue.

**Any romance with the young Jewish girls?**

Pardon?

**Any romances with the young Jewish girls?**

I don't think, no, they're very choosy, Jewish girls. There was a rumour going around that

26:30 Jewish parents with plenty of money wanted their daughters to marry an Australian soldier so that she could become an Australian citizen, and after the war they'd get on a troop ship and go home, you know? Whether there was any truth in that, I don't know, nobody fancied me, so I didn't get married. So I wouldn't have got married anyway.

27:00 But that was the rumour going around, but it might have been all malarky, I don't know. But we used to enjoy - I used to enjoy going round to the - I'm not a religious man by any means, but I like going around to the holy places, you know, where you've read so much, like the Garden of Eden, and the Garden of Gethsemane and the holy sepulchre and

27:30 all these - the steps of Christ when he carried his cross up through the rocks, through the town, they've got the - stations they call them, stations of the cross, and you'd walk up to where he was crucified, at a big building thing. I don't know how they dug holes in the rock, but in the Garden of Gethsemane you could buy a little

28:00 olive leaf as a souvenir for so many mills, and mills was the coins in those days. They're great ones for making a dollar, the Jewish people. But I enjoyed it there.

**When you got to Kilo 89 you said you received some more equipment and some vehicles.**

Yes, we got wireless sets, and

28:30 then we had to put them on the vehicles, the vehicle I had was called C2, now its job was to follow the commanding officer around, wherever he went, you'd be there. "Send a message back to headquarters." Now wireless is a funny thing, you could send it, and it goes

- 29:00 up in the ionosphere, then comes down, like that. See, you could send the message, receive nothing here, but go down the other side of the fence out there and you'd receive it, or a bit further. And he always used to go crook, he'd say, "I could run faster than you blokes, sending messages." But we got through all right. We laid a lot of cable
- 29:30 around from our sig headquarters, see we were attached to the artillery, to the headquarters and out to the guns, and we had to keep them in good condition, and when we started action and Bardia Bill opened up, used to blow our lines up, and I was told to go out and fix them. I thought,
- 30:00 "God, this is First World War stuff, this is not me." But we did it.

**Just while you were at Kilo 89, can you describe the training that you were doing in the desert, the kind of exercises? You mentioned some places earlier.**

Yes, well that's right, we did mainly communications, they'd go out and you'd signal to one another,

- 30:30 and train, getting used to all the procedures, the codes, so that you'd be spot on, should the occasion arise that you've got to do it. Even at night time you'd go out in the desert, and a lot of blokes got lost, out in the Sinai Desert, they didn't know where they were. And they fitted our trucks with sand tyres, and of course they were civilian trucks and the clutches wouldn't stand up to the big
- 31:00 tyres. But we did most of our training there around Kilo 89 and around the Dead Sea and up in the hills and all over the place.

**How about the dry conditions?**

Dry?

**Yes.**

Yes, it was a pretty dry country there, but they used to - must have had bores there because a place

- 31:30 called Jaffa, that was just out of Tel Aviv, I think everybody's heard of Jaffa oranges, they're beautiful great big oranges, and the green pastures and that, and they had these little villages called kibbutz, the Jews had these little kibbutz, and they're like a little tribe or whatever, you know, and they'd live in those places instead of living in the towns like Tel Aviv and Jerusalem
- 32:00 and Nazareth and all those places. A lot of Jews there, but they made these little kibbutz.

**Did you visit the kibbutz?**

Did I think it was a good thing?

**Did you visit them?**

Yes, I did. Yes, I bought a guitar in Tel Aviv and I got one of them to make a case for it. I used to - my friend Charlie Avery used to play the guitar, and

- 32:30 he said I always started off with "Beautiful Dreamer", and I used to go, "Beautiful plunk plunk dreamer plunk plunk," and they'd always yell out to me to shut up. So somebody pinched it in the finish anyhow, got rid of that.

**They had to shut you up.**

Yes.

**When did you leave Kilo 89?**

I think it must have been '40 -

- 33:00 round about March I think, March 1940 I think it was, somewhere around that.

**Where were you on the move to?**

We were on the move to a place called Helwan out of Cairo, that was our first staging camp. And the first incident I had, my friend or my partner in the van, we were told

- 33:30 to fill up our tanks full of petrol in Kilo 89, and he filled - he grabbed a can, it was full of water, and of course we didn't get two yards down the road and of course - but that was just one little thing by the by. But this place was Helwan out of Cairo. So there we started our training, real training there, round the Pyramids of Giza and all over the place.
- 34:00 That was where we started to get really into it. Then we had to camouflage our vehicles, and they weren't spotted like these ones are today, they were stripes, like that.

- 34:30 **Got a frog in your throat?**

The reason being for this camouflage, that if you're on a tarmac road, you pull off, you don't alter the camouflage, you don't alter it,

35:00 see it's straight strips, the camouflage is straight black and white and silver.

**You mentioned that it was here that you started to really get into it. Did training increase or...?**

The what?

**You mentioned that when you got here you started to really get into things. Is there where training increased, or you were just getting closer to ...?**

35:30 Well we thought things were getting a bit close to warfare when we started doing this, and also I think we got tin hats, and

36:00 then we were tearing around all over the desert, laying cables and fixing it up and training and learning all the procedures, all the codes and everything like that, and trying to find out the best way - we had earthing problems, you had to have an earth return on the - you'd peg it out to a little telephone, it had to be earthed. So we had one wire, and then you had to put an earth pin down, and drive it into the

36:30 ground so it'd make contact, and make good reception. So we found out that the best way to do it was to drive the pin and then urinate on the pin, which would dampen the ground, and make it better, better contact for earthing. That solved the problem.

**How did you discover that?**

That's just a little ...

**By accident?**

37:00 Pardon?

**Was that by accident you made that discovery?**

No, that was - we found that out, probably by accident - tried water and that, tried anything to get proper communications because it was very vital.

**Water was too precious, I suppose.**

Water yes, you only got a little - in the big camps like Helwan and that, we had showers and we used to go into Cairo on leave and that, and have showers and

37:30 get all our clothes washed and that, because in the desert that all stopped. No, we had good food there, we were all happy lucky.

**How much water were you rationed each day in the desert?**

In the desert, we had about a couple of pints, I think. A little water truck used to come around, full of chlorine, terrible, we used to

38:00 scrounge water from anywhere, but even the officers weren't treated any different, they only got their so much. And I used to get a water bottle, take the cover off it and I'd - for Brigadier Cremor, I'd fill it up full of water and lay it on top of the engine, and heat it up for him, for when he had his

38:30 shave, he used to enjoy that.

**How did you lay the cables, Ed?**

How did I what?

**How did you actually lay the cables?**

On reels, you put a rod through it, and two of you would run down and lay it out.

**One each side of the reel?**

One each side. And then reverse, on the way back you could roll it back up again, or on a reel like that, moving.

**And you were laying what,**

39:00 **practice lines or ...?**

The cable?

**Yes.**

Yes, well it wasn't - it was all steel wires with the copper centre, and insulation on the outside, so when you had to fix them, when they got blown up, you'd have to cut so much copper, do that first and then wind the steel back, and then put insulation around it so that it wouldn't

39:30 short.

**Did you have a little mending kit?**

Mending kits? Yes. A pair of pliers and things. My wife would get me - I think there was some insulation tape and that. You had to have a good pair of pliers because the steel is very tough stuff.

**What make of pliers did you use?**

I don't know. Just ordinary pliers, used to have the little thing at the back and you'd cut them off,

40:00 and I think they were some real cheapos, weren't worth much I don't think, but maybe, they were pretty good. But you learned very quickly how to do things, well I did anyway, because early in my life I learned how to do things, and you just couldn't say, "Well I don't know how to fix that," you had to fix it up. Our first generator we got to go into action with,

40:30 was an old engine, and on the bottom of the big end was a little scoop to scoop the oil up and splash it on the cylinder. That fell off, so just useless, so we had to get another one. But that's the sort of burnt out stuff we had.

**So equipment was pretty limited and primitive?**

Primitive, yes. At the start, yes, very. Our early training stuff

41:00 was primitive, but it got better as time went on, but in war time you get stuff and it's lost, it's blown up, or discarded, yes.

**We're just getting the wind up there Ed, so I think we'll have to change another tape.**

Righto.

## Tape 3

00:43 **How reliable was the equipment out there?**

Reliable?

**Yes.**

Pretty basic, it all depends on conditions. Wireless and all that, cable was OK, wirelesses,

01:00 atmosphere, very dickie, you know, you never know when you're going to get it, when you're not. I think it's improved a lot now, wireless communications, but virtually a lot of times we just couldn't get through.

**Because that's got to make things hard when you can't rely on your equipment.**

That's right, yes it would.

**Did that cause a lot of frustration?**

Well yes it did a great

01:30 deal I suppose, and more so to the commanding officer, because he wanted to get some messages through and you jut couldn't get them through, you know? But I think he understood the conditions as much as we did, although he used to stamp around and roar a little bit. He soon learned.

**How about the weather conditions out there?**

The weather conditions in the desert,

02:00 hot in the day and bitterly cold at night.

**So what sort of equipment did you have to tackle the cold and the heat?**

Against the heat?

**Yes.**

Well we had no - we had one uniform and that was it. We'd go on leave, sleep in it, fight in it, and do whatever. But - and we had a great coat and the people in Australia

02:30 used to knit balaclavas, you know, they put them on now and they're robbing banks and things. But they were good. In the night time you'd put everything on that you could find, because of the cold. But in the day time you'd take them off. But I was saying that we used to have to dig a slit trench to lie in of a night time, and you'd lie there with everything on, and it was pitch

03:00 black, never seen such blackness in all my life. And we used to have a wire we'd run from the sig office

truck along till you came to the slit trench, and then if you had to come on duty in the middle of the night, you'd pick it up and run your hand along and find it. You could get down, sometimes you'd see a silhouette, it was very hard, very dark. But I seemed to

03:30 be - I don't remember any moon light nights, there might have been.

**Did you have enough blankets to keep you warm at night?**

Yes, I think we had enough. I was a great scrounger, I was a home comfort man, and I woke up smartly what would come in handy, such as a primus stove.

04:00 **Where'd you scrounge that from?**

I bought it in Jerusalem or somewhere, no it wouldn't have been in Jerusalem, in would have been in Cairo I think, and we had - supplies of kerosene for it ran out very quickly, so I tried it on dieseline which didn't work. But we never had thermos

04:30 flasks or anything, but we used to eat in the day time, the cooks had a kerosene, I think it was a kerosene stove, like a big - and it used to shoot the flame into an oven and it'd cook all the meals there. Well it was open tins and M&V, that's meat and vegetables, or fish, herrings, goldfish we used to call it, we used to eat that until it

05:00 ran out of our ear, and then chop up army biscuits and make porridge out of them. So we could scrounge potatoes or veggies and hand them over, that all came in later on during the war, but that was all right then.

**Did you have any dust storms out there?**

Yes.

**What was that like?**

Terrible, absolutely. A dust storm, I couldn't see you, and that's

05:30 when all your thoughts would come on fighting where you were going. I think they called it the camp sin, it was a dust storm, you could see it coming, and once it hit you, just get in your tent and sit and wait.

**What would you do when you saw a dust storm coming?**

I used to - don't know

06:00 really, sometimes it just whacked you, if you were out repairing things, but other than that you just sit and wait, wait for it to come, sit in your truck, or go to wherever you were. See there's nothing much you could do, just do your job signalling and keeping in touch, and keeping the lines open for messages, and

06:30 that was our main feature, to do.

**How often would the signalling line need repairing?**

Well as I say, the first experience we had, was a gun called Bardia Bill, that blew up our lines quite a bit.

**Where was that?**

That was in Bardia, and we were at - we'd started getting into the battle area then, past Alamein,

07:00 and Mersa Matruh, we passed another one. The real battle started with Bardia which was up on the plateau, it was on the coast but we had to go up a thing called Hellfire Pass [Halfaya Pass], and that was where Bardia Bill started opening up.

**How big was this Bardia Bill?**

I think it was a naval gun, about a six-inch naval gun.

07:30 But that was our first experience of war.

**And when did you actually go to Bardia?**

Pardon?

**When did you go to Bardia?**

That was in 1940, yes.

**So was it straight from training in the desert, and that was your first ...?**

Yes, we started from Kilo 89 to Helwan, then down through to Alexandria in -

08:00 what's the name of the place, Burg Al Arab, and Amiriya, and then through to where the big battle came

later on - oh, it's gone.

**It's all right. When you were in places like Alexandria, was there a battle going on there, or were you just on your way to ...?**

No, we were on our way to it. See, they wanted to take Alexandria

08:30 and Cairo, and shut off the Suez Canal, and then their idea was to go up through Palestine, or through Alexandria at least, and across to Greece, and that would shut the British right off, and they'd have supplies right around. That was the idea. Because our first contact was with the Italians.

**And that was in Bardia?**

09:00 No, that was before Bardia.

**Where was that, that you had the first contact?**

Mersa Matruh, just after Mersa Matruh I think it was, but Bardia was when they really - the battles really started with us.

**Well maybe first you could tell me what happened at Mersa Matruh?**

Mersa Matruh was a little village, they reckon Cleopatra and Mark Antony used to go over there for weekends, but it's only a little village. But there were no hostilities then,

09:30 they had an air force strip there and a hospital, and all the stuff for war at Mersa Matruh, and a sort of stockpile there and they'd take it up to us through Fort Capuzzo and down to Bardia.

**So you were**

10:00 **getting a lot of your supplies from Mersa Matruh?**

Pardon?

**Were you getting a lot of your supplies from Mersa Matruh?**

I'd say we would have been, yes.

**Did you have any leave there?**

No, nothing to go to.

**Did you have any leave in Alexandria?**

Yes.

**Well tell me about what you thought of Alexandria.**

Well I thought it was very pleasant actually, because in Sydney, through this lady Eileen Boyd, she had a friend whose brother was a doctor

10:30 in Alexandria, and she said, "Well, we don't know where you're going, you don't know where you're going, but should you get to Alexandria," what was his name, Bedford, I think, doctor, his address was 11 Rue Na Cradis, I'll never forget that, his name will pop up, in Alexandria. So a friend and I, Charlie

11:00 Avery, we used to go - we met him, and he showed us around Alexandria, he had a big yacht on the harbour, and he used to take us out crabbing, and I thought, "I wonder what sort of crabs they catch over here?" The same as ours, blue mannis. He wasn't allowed out, because you could see outside the harbour the destroyers patrolling up and down outside, but he could sail around in the

11:30 harbour. And he used to take us home, and he had all native servants, and everything was all polished silver and the whole bit, you know? And they used to give us dates, beautiful big dates. So anyway, Charlie saw a glass of water, and he drank it, and the doctor's wife said, "Charlie, that's to rinse your fingers in when you're eating dates."

12:00 So that was that.

**How were you to know?**

Well we didn't know, first time, we said, "We've never eaten these things like this." Dates are dates, you know? All the starched napkins, not the ordinary paper serviettes like you get today.

**Sounds like Alexandria was very exotic.**

It was, but the doctor's wife was very good

12:30 to us. We used to go in by bus and around, and she'd sort of steer us through the place. And if they to chisel you on a bus, she spoke Arabic of course, and she'd tell them off. But she told us not to go into these back alley places in Cairo, because they said, "They'll cut your throat and chuck you in the river, no big deal."

13:00 **Is this, sorry, in Alexandria or Cairo?**

In Alexandria, out of Alexandria.

**So it was pretty rough in Alexandria?**

Well it all depends where you went. You could make it rough for yourself if - you know, if you got full and went blurting around all over the place, it could be very nasty.

**Was any of that going on? Blokes getting too full and getting themselves into strife?**

Oh yes, fighting.

**There was a**

13:30 **bit of fighting going on?**

Anything, just fight.

**What would they fight about?**

I don't know, might be over girls or whatever.

**So were there any girls in Alexandria?**

They were lovely girls in the cafes, belly dancers. And belly dance, they'd belly dance, they're like a big heap of blancmange, like a big jelly, and they shook, really.

**I believe**

14:00 **you.**

Yes. And the chap was behind the bar, he said, "Soldier, no monkey business, my girl, she belly dancer. My girl. No monkey business." But I used to like watching them, having a beer and watching the belly dancers. And they were good at their art, there's no doubt about that.

**Would the belly dancers be in bars?**

I don't know, I suppose they were all over the place, but that's the only place we struck them.

14:30 **Would you be doing a lot of drinking when you were on leave in Alexandria?**

Yes.

**How many mates were you hanging around with at the time?**

There was Charlie Hay and I were mainly cobblers, we got on well together. All of them, you know, whether you'd see them and that. We had an experience in one of them, there was a convoy of English tramp

15:00 steamers came in doing convoy work, and this officer was full as a boot and he fell off, and we thought he was a navy man, so we said to the English mate, "Why don't you look after your mate here?" "No, he's not a mate, he's a private, he's not a navy man." So they said, "Oh well." Charlie said, "We'll look after him." So we took him down to the wharf, "Where's your boat?" "What colour is it?"

15:30 "Grey." Everything is grey. He said, "It's that oil tanker." And we found it tied up at the wharf, the coal wharf, and the chap said, "Why'd you bring him? He does this every night, goes down with a fistful of money and gets full, and expects somebody to come and take him home." But anyway, that was part of it.

**But still that's nice to be caring for somebody that you don't know.**

Yes. Strangers are great stick together,

16:00 you know, if you were in trouble, especially after the war and coming home here with the Yanks here, no trouble at all, stick by you. Oh yes, and mateship was great in the Australian army. There was probably a few that couldn't care less, but mainly if you were in trouble, you had, you know - quite easy to get into trouble, too.

16:30 You had to keep your wits about you, look after yourself.

**Were you told anything about VD [Venereal Disease], you know, about that sort of trouble?**

Yes.

**What were you told?**

Oh, the experiences of VD, and they give you a thing called a blue light.

**What's that?**

That's an ointment that you used, if you want to go to a brothel, you could use this stuff and you'd be

17:00 safe.

**Really?**

Yes.

**What was it, like a ...?**

Like a jelly, and you'd just put it all over yourself.

**And this was given out by ...?**

Yes, they had them around - I forget what they called them now, blue stuff? But that was - a tube of this stuff, and if

17:30 you wanted to go and get rid of some of your frustrations, you'd use this stuff.

**What were the brothels like out there?**

Rough as bags.

**Yes?**

Yes.

**Were there a lot of blokes using it?**

Oh yes. An experience.

**No, because the thing is you probably wouldn't have had a lot of experience.**

The natives there, I call them natives,

18:00 the brothers were their pimps, and they'd say, "Come on, my sister very good, good doctor, very clean, you look." And that's what you do, it was no trouble to them. Dirty pictures.

**Were there plenty of those?**

Plenty of those, stupid things.

**Were they really explicit, or were they very tame?**

Oh, very explicit, yes.

**Yes? So even in reference to today, were they**

18:30 **still explicit?**

No, I don't think so. No, no, I don't think - things have changed.

**So would they be expensive to buy, the pictures?**

I forget what the coinage was now, ackers? I know in Tel Aviv it was mills,

19:00 I just forget what the coinage was now, we used to call them ackers, anyway.

**Would everybody buy a stack of these pictures?**

Some of them bought them.

**Was it more as a bit of a laugh then?**

It was only for a laugh. You'd look at them and give them back, say "No good, get lost."

**So how many men were actually using brothels at the time? Was it really everybody, or ...?**

Well, you can take your pick, there was the

19:30 7th Australian, 6th Australian division, the 7th, the 9th, three divisions of Australians, a division of New Zealanders, the eighth army, and the air force. So it was a pretty busy pastime.

**So it sounds like there was a bit of a queue? If you've got like one big - was there one big brothel there at all?**

Yes.

20:00 **And so how many blokes would show up to that?**

I think Alexandria was called Sister Street. I was talking to a young Pommy bloke down at Claremont, and he said his father was in the war and went through the Middle East. I said, "When you get home ask Dad did he ever go to Sister Street." So the next day I said, "Did you ask Dad?" He said, "Yes, you're a dirty old man." They had

20:30 to have them, because it was part of life, male life.

**Sure. Was there anyone in particular that you were recommended to go to from the army?**

Yes.

**And how would they tell you about that?**

Oh, they'd tell you, but probably if you got full you'd forget anyway. But no, they examined them, yes.

**So it was actually controlled a little bit by the army?**

21:00 Yes, of course, yes. It's part of army life.

**Was it expensive to use the brothel?**

I forget, don't know, I really forget. I'm trying to think of the currency.

**Just wondering if it's a high price exercise or a low price exercise?**

Well I think

21:30 the low price was for soldiers, the high price was for officers. See they used to have their - what did they call them - special places, I know out of Cairo I used to take an officer down to Heliopolis, and there was high class stuff there. In Alexandria

22:00 I don't know, but even the girls operated on the dhows, on the Nile River, so the blokes - I'd say, "What have you been doing?" He'd say, "I've been diddling on the dhows." Yes.

**What's the high class place like in Heliopolis, you know, what makes ...?**

Oh, big - yes, very expensive I should imagine, I never went in there. I used to drive the officers there and pick them up when they were full,

22:30 take them back to camp. I was a good night driver, it was completely black out there, and one night I had to pick up - I forget what this major's name was, and he said, "Stop Eddie." I said, "What are you going to do?" And they had shields over your headlights, with just a little glow, but no lights, because of aircraft. And he kicked them

23:00 off, he said, "Now I can see where I'm going." I said, "I think sir, you're going to get a snarler out of this." Snarler meant back to Australia. I said, "Now I've got to drive all the way through Cairo," yes, Cairo that's right, "Out to Helwan, with no shields on the lights," I said, "I'll look like a searchlight coming."

23:30 I said, "You're in big trouble. I'm not taking the rap, I didn't kick them off, you did." So what happened to him I don't know, whether he got reprimanded.

**Sounds like a bit of a tool.**

Stupid thing to do, absolutely stupid.

**So what happened?**

Don't know what happened to him.

**Because you had to drive still.**

I had to drive, I got him home, and myself. Didn't worry me. But I

24:00 turned my lights off a lot, because I used to have some lights, like glowing lights you can feel your way around the pitch black night, but he made a complete mess of them.

**Sounds like a pretty difficult thing to do, driving completely in the dark.**

Well we had a lot of practice in convoy work.

**But how would you know where you're going?**

You follow the bloke in front, and at the back of the vehicle in

24:30 front was a little light underneath, on the differential, and you'd keep your eye on that. Very strained ...

**Yes, concentration-wise?**

Yes, concentrate. You'd have to keep it - say 50 yards or 25 yards into them, in the - see convoys, when you're driving in a convoy it could be a mile long,

25:00 and then expand to two mile, then it'd be close up, and that's how it goes. It doesn't keep - you say 25 yards ahead of you, that doesn't work, doesn't keep going all the time, because the chap might hurry up

- to have a look at the light, and the other one comes in and gets together. But I learned driving at
- 25:30 night - I do it now - at night time I look at the kerb, because it changes colour, on a black road on the kerb, even on a clay road, the churned up will have a different colour to the other, so when you're going along there and you keep in a bit, you know you're on the road. See they used to make us - we had civilian vans, we used to have to
- 26:00 put grease on them, and chuck dust on them, the windscreens, because the aircraft, it wouldn't shine, and you'd make a little hole like that, and you'd look through where you're going. That's in the day time. Well night time didn't matter. See, another thing about aircraft, we didn't
- 26:30 know this, that you must never look at an aircraft because your face shines. We didn't know that.
- How did you find out?**
- They told us, the experienced people, they said, "Don't look up, lie flat. If you get hit, you won't feel it."
- If you get hit you won't feel it?**
- No.
- Why? Because you're dead?**
- You're dead.
- 27:00 See when we first got over at Capuzzo, we had to dig the slit trenches. Now you can imagine with a little pick trying to pick a hole in that road out there, which would be easy compared to this stuff, it was like a marble, very tough stuff, you couldn't dig it. We only had a little shovel. So I said, "Well I'm going to sleep in the truck,
- 27:30 may as well sleep in the truck as to lie down there."
- Is it dangerous to sleep in the truck?**
- No more than lying down there, unless you had a slit trench, you're on the surface, the blast would wipe you off anyway.
- So it was more dangerous to sleep in the truck than in the trench?**
- Well I couldn't see any difference, because if you're just lying on top of the ground, you're at the mercy of the bomb blast as much as you are in the
- 28:00 truck, and you might have a little bit of protection in the truck. Dust was the biggest worry, they could follow your dust trail, the vehicles.
- Is that the thing that you were worried most about?**
- Well it did occur. Well I say, I didn't think about it because they got very quick at spotting you. See they'd put a direction finder on you, and make a cross reference,
- 28:30 put it together and that's where he is, sending, see? That operator's there sending. Boom.
- Did you feel like you were a target because you were signalling?**
- Yes, all the time, all the time.
- Was there any incidences of signallers getting knocked off?**
- There was one chap, I think he got a Military Medal, he got all the wheels blown off his van. Oh yes, there were
- 29:00 several vans blown up.
- So they were definitely looking out for you guys out in the desert?**
- Yes. Well they had their spotting aeroplanes I suppose, but they had high towers up - built up about 20 or 30 feet, and they got up there and you could see for miles, from these towers. But we stopped digging trenches because the
- 29:30 Italians had them already dug, and they nicked off, so we just took over.
- Going back to Bardia, so this was your first action ...?**
- That was the first action.
- So can you describe to me what happened to you as you arrived in Bardia?**
- Well, we were - the artillery got their positions,
- 30:00 and we got ours, in a - they called them a wadi, it's like a little valley, and we were camped there up

against this wall, because if anything did happen, it'd go over your head, and that's what happened, a lot of them went over our heads, but a lot of them landed pretty close. And that's what happened with the wires. See when I was told to go out and repair this wire, I thought,

30:30 "This is First World War stuff." But that was serious stuff, and the shell would land on it and break it, and you'd have to go and fix it, you'd just run up, if it was in the night time, you'd run up with the wire in your hand till you found it, and you'd fix it. Then you'd run back again. In the night time you couldn't find it otherwise, terrible place.

**And how much gun action was going off in Bardia when you had to do**

31:00 **that as part of being in the signal section?**

Well it opened up a fair bit, and then of course the aeroplanes were bombing too. But it didn't last any great length of time because they moved quick, well we ran over the top of them. See the next stop was Tobruk, and we got to Tobruk and ...

**How long was it taking you getting between Bardia and Tobruk?**

31:30 And Tobruk?

**Yes.**

I don't know, about a week, I suppose, after Bardia fell. It's pretty quick, the desert, because the Italians gave themselves up in truck loads, and our next stop was Tobruk which they'd just left, they'd just left everything, so we had a field

32:00 day there, but what we wanted was clothes, we never had any clothes, our clothes were worn out, even the officer had a big hole in the behind of his pants, and he couldn't find any either. So we went scrounging in Tobruk for Italian clothes, but they were only little blokes, they had nothing to fit me.

**Why was it so difficult to get hold of clothes?**

The ships apparently that had come from Australia were

32:30 torpedoed, or lost, or didn't bother to send them. Bob Menzies came over there and gave us a talk.

**Yes? What did he say?**

How proud the Australians were of us, and doing a good job. We said, "What about some clothes? Never mind about that."

**Is that what the general consensus was?**

Yes.

**Go back to Australia and give us some clothes.**

Yes, that's what we wanted. Clothes wore out very quick.

33:00 Well you lived in them.

**You didn't have any spares, or did you go to ...?**

No. Oh, you might have had a spare - we got shorts and that for the summer time. The night time was the worst part, it was that cold. And you'll see pictures of - war pictures of - all in

33:30 overcoats and that, and the next minute they're running round in shorts. So clothes were a big thing. Food we survived on, because it was nutritious. Whatever you could scrounge around, which was nothing.

**How many meals a day would you have?**

Meals?

34:00 I think it was three.

**So you weren't hungry?**

Not really. Only hungry for home-cooked meals, you know? The old meat and veggies, you know? The cauliflower and the carrots and roast potatoes, you were hungry for those.

**Is that what you missed the most?**

Yes, that's right, we were hungry for those. But

34:30 the food was - it kept you going. There was no booze or drugs or anything like that.

**So going from Bardia to Tobruk, can you describe the journey?**

The journey?

**Yes.**

Well it was a sort of hit and run thing, you'd go out and put all the artillery and the infantry would go, and they'd stop, and the artillery

35:00 would put the barrage over, and then we'd put the lines out and then we'd have to go and reel them in again, then they'd move and the same - you know, jumping all the time. It was sort of pick up and run, I suppose, pick up and dash or whatever.

**Were you getting fired at between Bardia and Tobruk?**

The

35:30 shells were coming over, yes, a bit of a barrage. Not a great deal, but enough to keep you on your toes. And the Italian air force used to come over, give us a pounding.

**What were they like?**

They had a different sound to - I think the Germans sent some planes over too. But the Italians would go woooong, woooong, woooong, as

36:00 if their motors weren't synchronised. But you hear the planes today, the propeller type, they've got the one sound, but the Italians, woooong, woooong, something like that.

**So you'd know if they were Italian or German?**

Pardon?

**So you'd know if they were ...?**

Yes, you'd know by the sound.

**What would you do when you knew that there were some planes coming over?**

36:30 Get in your slit trench.

**It sounds like you were doing a lot of digging?**

Yes, well we did until we found the holes that were left by the Italians, that saved a lot of trench digging.

**Was there any trouble with insects?**

Yes, fleas, not a lot, we had more in

37:00 Queensland than we did there, but flies, flies were our biggest, not so much fleas, flies.

**How did the flies make your job hard?**

Well, you couldn't eat, you'd open your mouth and they'd all - "You're not having this, I'm having this," and you'd try and put something over your head.

**Makes it hard.**

Yes, it does, yes, very hard. No, flies were the worst, and shortage of

37:30 water I think were the main - other than that we could smoke ...

**Plenty of cigarettes?**

I never went short. See my van had two bunks in it. Underneath I had scrounged tins of stuff and that, and kept it there, and I had the primus stove, which didn't work too well at the finish, on dieseline.

38:00 But you're getting to - like later on we did a lot of bartering with the Italian population, but mostly it's just army stuff that you could get, you know, scrounge off - tea, you'd get plenty of tea. We used to

38:30 stain our camouflage nets with tea to make them brown. I said the people in Australia would go crook if they see us doing this.

**But you know, if it works ...**

Yes, it worked.

**It sounds like you were in a bit of comfort, you know, having a couple of bunks in the van.**

Well that was it. See the wireless set was up against the front - see you had to be mobile, you couldn't carry everything with you,

39:00 so we had the little tray with the set there, and the aerial was on the back, and the sleeping - you didn't always sleep in them, you had to go to the sig office and work of a night time there, so it wasn't all that

comfortable, although it's better than the poor old infantry, I suppose.

**How big was the aerial that you had on your truck?**

About six foot, used to wave around like this, with a big spring on the

39:30 bottom, would wave around.

**Is that to pick up the signal more effectively, that waving around?**

No, no it's only because of the motion of the truck. Shouldn't make any difference, but it did. Reception - the wireless was very bad to keep going.

**Could you pick up any propaganda on the wireless?**

No, no, they weren't built for that.

40:00 That came later in New Guinea.

**Right. OK.**

No, you only had your crystals, they put a crystal in the set, and that was the same as the other sets, so they only operated with the one frequency.

**Was the enemy operating on a different frequency?**

I don't remember so, we may have, I don't

40:30 know, I forget now. We could have done.

**How often would the codes change when you were ...?**

Well I don't know that either. Pretty often I think, they had codes - the chap in the office said they had somebody that's pretty smart at decoding, or coding, and he'd do all that type of thing. It was pretty hush-hush.

41:00 See we didn't know a lot of what was going on, because they were saying, "The enemy has ears," you know, that's plastered everywhere. But we didn't know, we couldn't have told the enemy anything, because we didn't know. Wondered, rumours, plenty of rumours, doing this and doing that, but we didn't know. Even the kids in the street would tell you what you were doing, but we didn't

41:30 know, didn't want to know. Would liked to have known, probably, but we didn't.

**So what happened as you arrived in Tobruk?**

Pardon?

**What happened when you arrived in Tobruk?**

It had been taken by the sixth division, and everybody had fled, a bit of bomb damage,

42:00 not a great deal

## Tape 4

00:34 **So can you describe your role in Tobruk?**

Pardon?

**Can you describe your role in Tobruk, Ed?**

Driver. My role?

**Yes.**

Operator driver, yes. As I said, we followed the commanding officer around, C2 was the truck. And when he said, "Send a message," if possible we sent it. But one night I went out

01:00 and they bombing the blazes out of Tobruk, so I said, "Are you going back in there?" And he said, "I'm silly, but not that stupid. No, we'll wait till it quietens down."

**Can you describe the defences at Tobruk?**

The defences?

**Yes.**

Mostly tank traps, big ditches, and ack ack - anti-aircraft pits, and gun pits, they're all dug down and

01:30 I think the Australian artillery, like Eric Watts' crowd, they might have dug a lot, but they were all dug there by the Italians I think. Tank traps, so you couldn't drive a tank, you'd have to fill it in or if tank went over, he'd never get out again.

**How were the defensive lines organised?**

How?

02:00 Well mostly for the condition of the terrain, and what hostilities were going on, it all depends on that, like you had bombarding from the air, you'd have to have special dug-outs built for that, dig your guns in so they wouldn't get blow up. A direct hit of course, you're history. But a bomb

02:30 blast would go over the top, and these guns are poked in there with the muzzles sticking out. Ack ack guns, straight up in the air.

**What were the main defensive positions?**

Defence?

**Yes, the main defensive positions in the ...?**

What were they? Well they were dotted right around the perimeter, right around. And I think they went out into the desert, but

03:00 mostly round just the perimeter of the town, the perimeter could be over three or four miles, kilometres and that. But they were right through the desert, you could see them, they used to do a desert patrol, they'd go out say 100 kilometres, and come around, back in again, looking for enemy and that. And a lot of these - I take it the traps were built there then.

**03:30 Where were you positioned inside the perimeter?**

Wherever we could get a spot. Somewhere in the town I suppose, if I remember - no, it wouldn't be in the town, it'd be out of the town, because the township would attract bombers, and we didn't want to be there when that happened,

04:00 so we'd be out. And good communications were necessary and we'd try and keep them up. So we didn't scatter around too far away from our headquarters. But we had to at times.

**Can you describe your headquarters?**

The what?

**Your headquarters, can you describe it?**

Oh, it was just a truck, a truck, and they'd take

04:30 everything out and put in a pile, make a sig office out of it, then you never know when you've got to move, so you've got to move everything very quickly, because if they found out where you were, they'd put the shells over and blow you out of there. So movement was very quick in the desert, you had to be very smart, roll up all your stuff and get going

05:00 again. And then you'd stop, unroll it, communications, and on you'd go again.

**Can you describe your headquarters when you had the sig office and everything set up?**

Yes, it was just a table, with a wireless set, also the latest thing like the old telephone things with the plugs in, they were going out to the troops, or the guns, and you'd operate that like

05:30 that, not the early ones, you've got the First World War, you used to put your finger over to find out what hole was buzzing, but that was manned 24 hours, you had to be in contact all the time.

**What shifts did you do to man the wireless?**

Probably about four or five hours, four hours. All depends

06:00 how many.

**What would you do between shifts?**

Just lie there, go out and lie in the slit trench or sit in your truck if it was safe, or make tea and drink tea if you had it, learn different things. I used to look after the truck and if you were near the sea you'd

06:30 go down go down and chuck yourself into the sea for a while, but that very rarely happened.

**What was the main threat? Air attack or artillery attack?**

Combined. See the British had an aeroplane called a Lysander, it was a fixed wing top, the wing was on top of the fuselage

07:00 and that used to stooge around spotting for us, and he'd spot whatever he wanted, and he'd fly away, and the artillery would put a barrage there. And I think they had the same thing, the Germans had a little thing called a Storch, Rommel used to fly around in that, and do the same thing, just slow moving, better than

07:30 a fast plane, these slow ones they just stooge around, like that, and they could spot, and they'd send a message to wherever it was, like a map reference, to the artillery, and they'd come over.

**Were they out of range of the anti-aircraft guns?**

Oh no, no, if there was any about there were sitting ducks.

08:00 No, they were just up, not very far, might be 1000 feet, I don't know.

**They would have been an obvious target?**

Oh yes, absolutely. I think a lot of them got shot down. But another hazard we had was in ack ack guns in Amiriya and

08:30 Burg Al Arab, Alexandria, and they'd fire them up and they'd burst. And the nose cone that they set the fuse for altitude to fire, that used to come and go swish, back down to our camps. But we didn't strike that in the desert.

**Were there any casualties amongst the signallers?**

No, not many, not many,

09:00 no, no, no. I can't think of - there may have been, I don't know, I can't think of any. Not in the desert.

**Did you have any close shaves in Tobruk?**

Any what?

**Close shaves?**

Close shaves? We had them all the time, because the Italian bombers were coming over, they were dropping their bombs. Our first experience was we all stood up,

09:30 looking. The thought of getting killed never occurred to us, that we could get killed. We wanted to see what was going on. Silly. We were told so too, in no uncertain manner. Standing up there looking at bombs hitting, and shells. Stupid. That's the way it was, but we soon learned. You're a quick learner in the war, believe me.

10:00 **Did you watch the barrages?**

Sometimes. The prettiest sight you'll ever see in your life is a barrage and rifle fire with tracer bullets of a night time, these tracer bullets. Fireworks, leave fireworks for dead. And these shells would go up and burst into flame and show all the ground up,

10:30 very pretty. Dangerous, but pretty. Very dangerous. So you've got to be this end of them, not the other end.

**How long were you at Tobruk for, Ed?**

We were probably there about a week, then we moved on to Derna.

**Why were you given instructions to move on?**

Well the war moved, we had to follow them,

11:00 and we had to go. See they were running over the Italians and they were coming back in truck loads, so we were taken their places, heading for Tripoli which didn't occur, but we went through there, like that. Very quick moving it was.

**Did you get much time for rest?**

Rest? Well, as I say, when you do your shift on the wireless, you're

11:30 spine-bashing all the time. In the army during the war you did a lot of waiting, a lot of waiting. Dangerous waiting, good waiting, but waiting. Spent a lot of time waiting for troop movements, waiting for trains, waiting for boats. Wait, wait, waiting for this, waiting for that. But of course when you're hectic you're not

12:00 waiting, unless you're waiting for something to hit you, which is not very pleasant.

**How did you develop enough patience for all the waiting?**

How did I develop patience? Well, it's a part of your training, you've got to be patient. It's the same now, I'm a patient driver on the road. So you're allowed to be

- 12:30 patient, you never know what's going to happen to you in war time, you never know that something's going to come and you're history. So probably you worry, but you get a little bit patient too, and wait. Probably it's just waiting for the inevitable, you don't know. So that's when you get to town, you play up, you know? Having a
- 13:00 drop of beer, watching the belly dancers, because there's none of that out where the shells are. So you've got to - see one of our trucks, he was taking some supplies out, and he was told there's a sign on the road, don't go past it. He said,
- 13:30 "I've driven all over Australia, I know what I'm doing." I said, "You don't know what you're doing, you know," and I said, "If there's a sign there don't go past it, don't go past it." He did. History, gone. The Salvation Army did the same. Had an uptake, the Salvation Army always had coffee for you, had a tent. "Have you written to your mother today?" It was a tent, the whole
- 14:00 bit. Marvellous people, yes. And you know, it's do as you're told. I went out looking for a crowd that had come from England, and I said to Charlie, "What's that sign say?" "It says mine field, keep out." I was in the middle of it, didn't see it. But as luck had it, I got out.

**How often would you come across the Salvation Army?**

All the time,

- 14:30 they were with you. If you went out when you're training, out on a route march, they were there when you got back with a hot coffee or tea. I don't say all the time, but most of the time, with their tent, "Have you written to your mother?" Not the other churches, they didn't care whether you'd written to your mother or not.

**What, the other churches were out there too?**

No, didn't see

- 15:00 them. I think the padres were there, but I wasn't a religious man, although my friend, a great friend, a childhood friend, gave me a bible, he became a Born Again Christian, he gave me this little bible, I've still got it, and I thought, somebody was looking after me. Was it the bible,
- 15:30 or was it Mum praying for me? Don't know, but I'm not a religious man. So all these things come into your mind as you're going through wars, you never know when it's around the corner. When I put in for a disability pension, I had a little Chinese doctor, and he said, "What would make you like you are?" I said,
- 16:00 "Well doctor, there's things like that, they're bullets, and there's things like that, and they're shells, and there's things like that, they're bombs. And if you get hit by one, you're history." I said, "That makes me internally what I am." Anyway, we're the other side of Tobruk.

**So I was just going to say, I guess waiting would have been a luxury in comparison with fighting?**

Well, it all depends where you are,

- 16:30 you've got to sit alongside the road in the desert, or out in the desert somewhere, where you've gone out to put your truck to send a message, and you've got to wait for the message to come back, sitting there was - you don't know what to do, you know, you just read or just listen, you've got to keep your ear on the thing for when the message comes through, what you're going to do.
- 17:00 **We're on the other side of Tobruk heading down through Derna, what was it like overrunning those Italian positions?**
- It was - to me it was history making because I liked to scrounge around and see how the other half lived. Had a lot of gruesome things, one Italian aeroplane came
- 17:30 down and all the crew were incinerated and they were sitting in their seats, about six of them. Terrible. You know, when you see dead bodies lying around, that's the worst part of war, that gets to you, it's not a happy situation. So you never know when it might be yours somebody's looking at. Who knows?

**How did you**

- 18:00 **overcome those feelings?**

How did I?

**Yes.**

I've never overcome them. Nope. Very hard.

**But you did manage to continue throughout the rest of the war?**

Pardon?

**You managed to continue throughout the rest of the war despite ...?**

Yes, I went on with it, had to. You just can't

18:30 come home. Yes, we went to Derna, and Barce was the next stop, that's when we got in with the Italian community, we did a lot of bartering. They said, "We don't want war, you get on with your war and let us get on with our farming." So we used to trade eggs and milk.

19:00 **How and where did you trade with them?**

Stay with them?

**Trade.**

Trade? Oh, walk over, there were plenty of farms everywhere, go and milk a cow or - but they were nice people, we used to like their tinned tomatoes, they're great ones for tinned tomatoes,

19:30 and we used to get these tinned tomatoes and the odd bottle of vino we used to get there too. But we got a lot of Italian currency, lire, and we were using it for toilet paper, and we found out it was currency, and the smart blokes had picked it all up and put it in their pay books, and it got covered.

20:00 Never thought of it, being any good. One big mistake.

**You wouldn't make that mistake twice?**

No.

**What did you have to trade with the Italians for their goods? Or how did you buy their goods?**

M & V, meat and veggies, or tins of herrings or something like that. Not a great deal.

**So you could trade your rations for their fresh**

20:30 **produce?**

For fresh, yes, you could.

**Seems like a pretty good deal to me.**

Wasn't bad while it lasted. What we missed mostly, or I did, was bread, and it wasn't until we got to Barce and we got on leave into Benghazi, that we got these little bread rolls, and they make a good bread roll, and I

21:00 stuffed myself sick with these little bread rolls. Yes, they were good.

**It seems to me like an unusual scenario, you were trading with the Italian community, after defeating Italian soldiers in the area.**

No, the Italians, they were rounded up or they nicked off, they fled to

21:30 Tripoli or Benghazi. I think Benghazi, we did get to Benghazi but I think we were only on leave, I think we stopped at Barce, because I've got a train ticket there and a leave pass to go to Benghazi, and that was just about the end of the western desert for us, when we got to those places.

**How were the Italian**

22:00 **POWs [Prisoners of War] rounded up?**

How did they feel?

**How were they rounded up?**

Just gave themselves up. A lot of Australians in there. They used to yell out of a night time, "Aqua, aqua, water, water," and one bloke yelled out, "When are you mugs going to give us a drink?" And I said, "He's Australian." I said, "What are you doing here?" He said, "I came over on leave to see my relations in Italy, Italy came into

22:30 the war and Muzzo [Mussolini] grabbed me, put me in the army." Several of them, they marched off with the - I said, "Well you'll probably wind up back in Australia now." "Goodo, suits us."

**So did they put up much of a fight?**

No. But I wasn't a shooting bayonet man, I was signals. We had quite a few casualties in the infantry. A

23:00 lady two doors from me, Helen, her father got - she never met her father, her father got killed at Derna, he was one of the first casualties, and her father married her mother, and Mum was pregnant, and he sailed away with us, and she never met her father, she didn't know him. So that's one of the casualties of war, and it probably happened to others.

23:30 I've seen plenty of casualties, but I never personally bayoneted anybody or anything like that.

**How were the POWs actually rounded up and removed? You must have seen a lot of movement around you?**

I'm not sure. No, they just gave themselves up, hopped on trucks and said, "Here I am."

**Were they marched out?**

No, drove their own trucks.

24:00 **Where were they moved to?**

Oh, a lot of them marched, a lot of them - I think they were herded into Tobruk, which was a port, and they probably went from there into holding camps around Alexandria or Cairo, those places, somewhere like that.

**I'm just wondering how many Italians you saw surrender or taken POW on the road down to Benghazi?**

Oh, about 23,000, I think,

24:30 yes.

**There must have been, well thousands of them, marching along the road.**

Yes. We used to chuck them a couple of tins of bully beef. But no, they were different to the Germans, but I didn't fight against the Germans.

**Were their guns removed from them once they were ...?**

25:00 Their what?

**Were their guns removed from them once they surrendered?**

Removed?

**Yes.**

Oh yes, only take what you can carry, to get put in the bag. And that was it. I don't know, I never had that experience so I wouldn't know, can't comment on that. But what I've read and the soldiers I've met who were POWs, it's only what you could carry.

25:30 **How long did it take you to reach Benghazi?**

Couple of months, I suppose.

**That's a long time on the road.**

Yes.

**In that time, what did you see?**

Everything, the horrors, and the highs.

**The Italians had surrendered, were you under much threat from the**

26:00 **Germans?**

Were we?

**On the way to Benghazi?**

Yes, a fair bit, yes it was war all the way, but were too - see they thought we had bullet-proof vests on, but they were sheepskin, turned inside out, leather, and they thought they were bullet-proof, so what's the good of shooting at them, it won't kill them? So that helped a fair bit. And they were

26:30 very warm.

**Who was shooting at you, and from where?**

Pardon?

**How were you shot at?**

How was I? Machine guns, rifle fire, bombs, shells, you name it, the whole bit.

**Where there many German planes attacking you on that**

27:00 **journey?**

No, not me, no. See we were pulled out, we pulled out of the western desert and the 6th Division went to Greece.

**This is once you'd reached Benghazi?**

Once we got to Greece. Stupid things army do, there was Charlie Avery and myself, and an officer, were taken out of the section at

27:30 Alexandria, and all the rest went to Greece. We went to school. Our officer said, "I can get you to Greece, we'll rejoin the unit". So I said to Charlie, I said, "Well he's going AWL [Absent Without Leave]", which is - it's a no-no as far as I was concerned, I would never do it, never did do it. He went,

28:00 and he got on a boat called the Slomak [?], which was blown sky high. And it was only when we got back to Fremantle the Red Cross saw my colour patch and asked me what happened to him? So that's the stupid mistakes you can make.

**What happened to you when you got back to Alex?**

Me? I went to school.

**What school?**

You wouldn't believe it, it was digging trenches,

28:30 how to make the abutments and that.

**Can you describe the abutments that you learned to make?**

Pardon?

**Can you describe the abutments?**

Well, it's just a trench, and it's timber put up where you jump over into no-man's land, if you're lucky, you'd get over. You see a lot of it in Gallipoli, and France, mainly France. They had these

29:00 trenches, and they thought that perhaps trench warfare might develop, but it didn't because it came into the blitzkrieg and the tanks, the tank warfare, and artillery. They never had time to dig trenches. If it developed they wanted to have somebody who'd know how to dig them, and I was the bunny.

29:30 But it was no big deal to me, I'd dug sand for years, no trouble at all.

**You must have had a reputation for being good with a shovel.**

Yes, that's right.

**Can you describe how the training was organised at the school.**

How it was organised?

**Yes.**

Well you go in as a - you report to the lieutenant or captain,

30:00 he said, "Yes, you're WX1293, Eddie Roberts?" And I said, "That's me." "Righto, we'll go out and we'll show you what to do, how to dig." And this so-called trench digger expert, and I could have showed him myself how to dig the sand. And you go through all that.

30:30 It wasn't the only school I went to, I went to another one when I came back to Australia.

**Sure. How long were you doing the trench digging training?**

Trench digging?

**That trench digging training, how long were you doing it? How long were you at the school?**

What, digging these trenches?

**Yes.**

I think it was about three weeks.

**Were the trenches put to use, or were they purely training ...?**

31:00 No, they'd tell us what they wanted done, and then we had to do it that way. It was the army way, you don't do it any other way, the army tell you to do it that way, that's what you do, be it dangerous or whatever.

**But I might have thought you'd get enough practice digging trenches that you'd eventually use, rather than just digging ones for the sake of learning how.**

That's right, exactly, see they didn't know what the war, what it was going to develop

31:30 into. So you've got to be prepared for anything. Maybe say just to dig out a signal office, I had to do. But it was all training.

**So during that three weeks, did you hear what was happening in Crete?**

No, no. The only thing we

32:00 knew was something wrong, that the trucks weren't going over. You see, the trucks, they used to pull the top down over the - load the trucks up and pull the top down, it was made so that the top could come down, it was all steel tubing made like that, and a tarpaulin, and then it'd fit over into lugs on the side of the truck, or you could

32:30 pull them out and slide it down. So I said to Charlie, I said, "There's something wrong here, these trucks are not moving." And we're down by the wharf. So then things started to happen, they started to come back. So I knew a chap in the 7th Field Ambulance, he got back, but there was only seven of his crowd, the

33:00 7th Field Ambulance, out of about 30 or 40 blokes. The 11th Battalion, they lost three parts of their crowd, left in Crete. So a lot of reinforcements came, so we regrouped and we were sent to Syria.

**Did you find out what happened to your unit?**

What happened to it? Yes, they came back, what was left

33:30 of them.

**Where did you rejoin them?**

I rejoined them in Gaza, then we came back to Egypt and went to Syria.

**So you've moved around quite a bit in that time. Can you tell me what happened during those movements? You moved to Gaza?**

Yes, well they had a big holding camp in Gaza,

34:00 and if you were in the hospital or anything like that, and you had to come back, you entered this holding camp, because there was no guarantee that you'd always go back to your own unit. But I was sent - I caught Dengue Fever, and I was - this is - it was after - and then, I was put

34:30 in hospital and they stuff you full of sulphanilamide tablets, which kicks hell out of all the germs, but cures you. So then an officer was walking through and he said, "You're a 6th Div sig," and I said, "Yes, that's me." He said, "Do you want to join your own unit?" I said, "I sure do." And they were bringing in reinforcements, so I got

35:00 sent, and he said, "Will you go as a batman?" I said, "I'll go as anything." So I went back and I was a batman to John Roberts, the commanding officer. That's how I rejoined them.

**This was after Gaza?**

Yes. That was a sorting out place, Gaza.

**How long were you at Gaza?**

About a fortnight, I think.

**Can you describe the camp at Gaza?**

It was like

35:30 any army camp, all EPIP tents, an orderly room, like a wooden hall, with officers in it, and that's where if you're court-martialled or reprimanded, you had to go up and face the commanding officer, the CO or OC, officer commanding, whichever, he'd give you a dressing down, 28 days' leave if you were a bad one,

36:00 he'd send you to Jerusalem. Now Jerusalem was a prison, I had to take a bloke into Jerusalem, and they'd break you, break your spirit. And he said, "They'll never break my spirit, Eddie." We got to the gate, and the big red - Pommy Red Cap [Military Police] says, "What are you doing carrying that gear?" I said, "I'm helping the prisoner." "Drop it,"

36:30 he said, "Prisoner, pick it up." "What did you say?" The prisoner said, "Nothing." He said, "That's what you're getting for dinner. Pick it up, double over there, double back, everything at the double." So when I went and picked him up, he said, "I'm going to soldier on, I'm not going back in there again." But they break you. You get a pack with eight house bricks, and you take two steps left

37:00 turn, two steps right turn, and about three sergeants barking at you, you'll give it up. And the Pommies were good at it. And this bloke said, "Aah." There were two chaps, they picked them up in Beirut, they were running hashish across the border in stolen officers' uniforms,

37:30 I was on charge of the guard to look after them, and they said, "If they run, shoot them." He gave me a tommy gun, a machine gun, I'd never handled one in my life. I said, "Oh come on, they're Australians." "That's an order," he said, "They're bad, they're villains." See there were bad larrikins in the army, in

there to make the big quid, see? Too right.

38:00 **The dark side of the army.**

Pardon?

**The dark side of the army.**

Yes.

**Can you describe what troops were coming into the holding camp at Gaza while you were there?**

Well I think there were mainly reinforcements, and those that had been in hospital, like I had been.

**Were there troops being evacuated from Crete?**

Probably. See, they're like wounded from the desert,

38:30 you'd go into a hospital and you'd - I don't know why, but they seemed to all wind up in Gaza, and that's where they sort you out. See the funny thing with the army, if you got promotion, sometimes you weren't going back to your own unit with your own men, they'd send you to somewhere else. See one of the chaps, his widow now comes to the dance,

39:00 he was a signal with us, he got promotion to a lieutenant, but they sent him to a machine gun battalion, knew nothing about it, he was a signal, but that's what they do. And it happened to me.

**Before I ask you about becoming a batman, how did you contract dengue fever?**

Well Dengue Fever is like a treble dose of flu or malaria, I'd say

39:30 it's akin to malaria, because it repeats on you, every March for a few years this dengue used to come back at me, right on time. You run a terrific temperature, and when I went into the hospital, the silly looking orderly put me under a shower to get my temperature down and nearly killed me. Worst thing you could do. So

40:00 that's how I finished up in Gaza. But they pump you full of drugs and - it's like - see we never had the tablets like in New Guinea we had things to fight those things with, things to rub all over you, and Atebrin to take. We never had those, so - I don't know whether it was because we were

40:30 Australians or not, but we fell down with a lot of those funny diseases, you know, like dengue fever and all those things.

**So you can't say much about the treatment that you received?**

No, just like a hospital with nurses, very good, lovely ladies, looked after you, pat you on the head, and wipe your

41:00 forehead, give you a needle if you can't sleep, they'd give you a needle that would make you sleep, it was full of saline solution, there's no drugs in it.

**Which field hospital were you in?**

Which one?

**Yes.**

In Gaza?

**Were you just in a - yes, where were you being treated?**

In Palestine, I don't know, Beit Jirja or Kilo 89,

41:30 a hospital there.

**It wasn't one of the Australian general hospitals?**

Pardon?

**Was it one of the Australian general hospitals?**

Yes, Australian. I don't know, they called them AGH [Australian General Hospital], the 24th AGH, the 28th AGH. And once you're cured, you were discharged out and sent to the Gaza holding camp, where you'd wait till somebody wants you. So as luck happened I got

42:00 picked and I got back to my own unit.

## Tape 5

- 00:35 When we took Tobruk, my friend Charlie Avery, we went looking through the town, and we entered a church, a big Catholic church, so there was a casket there with a lovely crucifix on it. So Charlie said, "I'd like to get that and take it home for Cath." I
- 01:00 said, "Well you know, this is sacred ground, turn it up." And a priest came out, and he said, "My sons, what do you want? Don't steal anything, you can have it." And I said, "Well we don't want to steal anything Father," I said, "But my friend would like the crucifix." So anyway, he disappeared then, the priest, and I said to Charlie, "Well put it up on the trestle and I'll get a screwdriver."
- 01:30 And when we went to lift it up there was somebody in there. So the priest came back, and I said, "No, we've decided not to take it Father, we've left it." That was one incident, I'll never forget that. The second one was scrounging around, I got a little Baretta revolver, and Charlie was having a snore off
- 02:00 alongside me here, and I was playing with this thing. And he got up to go to the loo, and I went like that and it fired a bullet straight into the pillow where his head was. Yes, you wouldn't believe it. So I went out and I threw it in the Mediterranean, and it's still there as far as I know. That was the second incident, it always sticks in my mind. But the third one was a machine gunner from the
- 02:30 Northumberland Fusiliers, somebody had shot his mate, and he was going up the front line with this Bren gun. I said, "Tommy, where are you going?" He said, "I'm going to sort them out with this," he said, "They just shot my mate." I said, "You can't fight the army on your own, you're the one that's going to get sort out." "I don't care," he says. And he was way off the planet. And those three incidents, I'll never forget.

**It's**

- 03:00 **interesting how that shock of you know, losing someone, can make you do something that's completely illogical.**

Yes, that's right.

**Would you see a bit of that going on?**

Pardon?

**Would you see a bit of that going on? You know, with the shock of an experience, and people doing ...?**

No, I think chaps discuss it, but not much - I've never - I don't think I ever told Charlie about it, himself. But they're things that affect your life, and you think about

- 03:30 them a lot. Half a minute before, and I would have killed him.

**It wasn't his day to die.**

No, it wasn't his day, no way. Anyway, where were we?

**We were talking about ...**

School.

**Before lunch, we were talking about you were a batman.**

A batman.

**Yes, a batman.**

Do you know what a batman is?

**I don't, actually.**

Well a

- 04:00 batman is a chap that looks after an officer, looks after his clothes, washes his dishes or cleans up after him, and he goes everywhere for him, runs messages, and looks after him. If he wants to take him into his confidence and talk about things, like family matters, or he wants somebody to talk to that he can't talk to anybody else,
- 04:30 a batman falls for it. And I used to talk to John Roberts, I still talk to him, he's over in Cargill there. But that's how I got back to the unit. Now the unit was out of non-commissioned officers, that's NCOs. So after a while, all the reinforcements were coming in, so John said,
- 05:00 "I'm going to give you one stripe and make you a lance corporal." I said, "Well that'll wag some tongues, won't it? Your batman to a lance corporal?" So anyway, that's what happened. And then after that I got two. And that's the job of a batman. I'll tell you another story about a batman. This Jewish chap I go and visit, he was sent to Rottnest as a batman for the captain there, and he didn't like this bloke. And the

05:30 captain didn't like him. They couldn't get on. So he said, "Oh well, I'll have to do something." So he took the job on, and he starched all his underwear. Yes, he said, "I didn't last long as a batman."

**Is that a pretty good job to get?**

Pardon?

**Is it a pretty good job to get? A batman?**

Well it is, you know, it's - it's probably if blokes don't like it, to say I'm

06:00 looking after somebody else, I've got enough on my own plate. But you can - it's somebody to talk to, you know, and his name was Roberts, came from West Australia, and we used to talk about everything, and he had one passion, when I was driving him around, he wanted to knock off ashtrays for souvenirs, even in Damascus.

06:30 I said, "I'm not over-rapt in this," I said, "All these beady-eyed Arabs there."

**So you ended up with a lot of ashtrays? Obviously you got on really well with this guy, because you seemed to. Is that really important, if you're a good batsman?**

It is, you can make it uncomfortable

07:00 and you know, don't do anything, but I sometimes get a little bit untidy, but in the army I found out that you can carry more if you're tidy and do things, like carrying around your haversack, I learned how to fold a blanket around it. Some blokes were carrying it in their hands, and all that. And you get very good at packing

07:30 things in a small space. When I went to hospital with dengue, I had all my underwear was spotless, I was always a great one for cleanliness, always, but when I undid my pack in hospital, it was all dirty stinking clothes, and somebody had pinched mine and swapped it over. Yes, I was very hurt about that.

**I bet. So what were you doing around the time**

08:00 **that Crete fell?**

I went to the school.

**Right, so this is ...?**

See we waited - well I said to Charlie, I told you, the officer went AWL, that's absent without leave to get back to Greece to the unit, and he wanted us to go, and I said no. I said to Charlie, I said, "You don't know what could happen, and things don't look too good over there, because the trucks are not going,

08:30 a couple of boatloads of blokes came back." And I said, "Well we've got a few bob in the pay books, let's have a good time. We don't know where we're going to finish up." So he went away, he got blown up on the Slomak and we stayed in Alex, and went to the Rue Na Cradis, had a meal.

**What's at the Rue Na Cradis?**

An English doctor.

**Oh, the English doctor friend that you met.**

I'll get back to him, too.

**OK.**

But when we

09:00 were going through, we overran an Italian hospital, I forget just where it was, around the Tobruk area somewhere. And there was stacks and stacks of hypodermic syringes and drugs, didn't understand them, so didn't touch them. So I said to Charlie, "We ought to take a box of these back to Alex and give them to the doctor there, they might come in useful." And he said, "What's the good of that? They're Italian, they won't fit English ones, the needles."

09:30 "Oh," I said, "All right." So we left them. When we got back to Alex, we told the doctor, he said, "I would have given you two and six each for them, I can't get them." And there were thousands of them, thousands.

**Bad decision.**

All these drugs.

**Bad decision. Were you doing some leave around about that time in Alexandria?**

Leave?

**Yes.**

Well, while we were at school we sort of - we were sort of, I just forget, we were just out of Alex, I forget the name of the place

10:00 now, but we were in Alex every day, when we finished our studies and that.

**And what exactly were you studying?**

Digging trenches.

**There doesn't seem to be a lot of studying going on if you're just digging trenches.**

Well, I suppose there was other things going on, nothing to do with signals, I know that. But just army things, I think. I know it was

10:30 explosives, the officer there nearly blew himself up, and I warned him about it, had a special gun cotton that you put around a train line and fire, and it'll cut a piece out of it, used for demolition from partisans and you know, fifth column people. And he went over, it didn't go off, and I said, "I wouldn't do that if I were you sir, don't go near it." I

11:00 said, "Give it another quarter of an hour." And he went, and he just got a couple of feet and it went off. He said, "You were right Eddie." and I said, "I told you," I said, "It's very tricky stuff, that fuse," because a fuse might be continuous, but then it might be a little piece with no powder in it, and then it smoulders then grabs again, and it's hot, see, you think it's all right, bang, got you.

11:30 **When did you learn about fuses?**

The other side of Kalgoorlie, in a place called Kurnalpi.

**And what were you doing there?**

Working on a mine.

**Oh, you missed that bit in your early life.**

Yes, I'm sorry, yes I did miss that bit, that was before I was 21.

**Was that a hard life, being a miner?**

Well it sure was, didn't - it was only 10 shillings and keep,

12:00 but I did everything in the mining business. See some ground up there you could use an auger, what they call an auger, and you could grind a hole to fit the charge in, the other ones you've got to do it with a hammer and tap, like a little drill, like they have at Gympie.

**Did your mining background really help you out when you were over there?**

It did, yes, a lot of things helped me.

**Is that mainly because you knew a bit more about explosives than**

12:30 **some of the other blokes?**

Well they're funny things, you know, that's the only time I had anything to do with explosives, was blowing out, except you've got to be very careful when they light them, that you count them, like one's gone, two, three, four, miss, then it's a miss. Now, you've got to remember where it is, and try and dig

13:00 a hole alongside it, and put another charge in there and blow that out, otherwise you'll forget and you might hit the pick and ...

**Were there a lot of explosives being used out there in North Africa?**

Explosives?

**Yes.**

Oh yes. We had a thing called a Bangalore torpedo, that was a piece of pipe about, two inch pipe I suppose, now what they do with this thing, they'd

13:30 load it full of explosives and they'd push it under barbed wire, and put a charge in it, and blow it up, and the shrapnel from the pipe would cut a piece out of the barbed wire, leave a gap there. Bangalore torpedo.

**Sounds pretty volatile.**

Yes.

**At what point did you end up going to Syria?**

14:00 What year?

**Yes. Was it around about this time after you finished the course?**

Yes, it was about '41 I should think.

**Was it after you finished the course that you went to Syria?**

No, it was when - Greece fell, we lost everything in Greece, my truck with all my souvenirs and everything, and then we went back to Palestine and reformed, so there was a bit of a shemozzle up in Syria, we went up there as a garrison

14:30 army, to look after it. But while this was going on, Churchill and Curtin, the Prime Minister of Australia, wanted us back in a hurry because the Japs were in the war. And he wanted us back, and Churchill wanted us to go to Europe, because he had that D-Day in mind. And we had the good name, the Australians were good soldiers. So this is what's going back and forth, we didn't know that of course,

15:00 but we learned afterwards. And while we were up in Syria, all this was going on. So ...

**How did you find out that the Japanese had come into the war?**

I couldn't tell you, straight off the top of my head.

**That's OK.**

No, I don't know, I really - I can tell you how it finished, but I ...

**We're not there yet.**

No, not there yet. But

15:30 no, I don't know, must have come from somewhere, because when we finished at Syria, we were taken to Tewfik, and put on a boat and taken back to Ceylon. See our ...

**Sorry, what were you actually doing in Syria?**

Garrison.

**Which on a daily basis means ...?**

Well,

16:00 looking after things. We were still doing signal work, but there was no war there, it had finished. I think the Vichy French were taken over by the Free French or something. And then there was talk of us going up into Turkey, but we didn't go to Turkey. This hullabaloo about coming back to Australia was still on. So we looked after all that in Beirut, and we were in a place

16:30 called Baalbek, which is a very old ancient town, beautiful ruins there, out of Beirut. And then down to Damascus, the 2/11th Battalion was down at Damascus, it was just keeping things in order in case anything flared up, you know, we were there on the spot.

**What would be an average day when you were there?**

My average

17:00 day?

**Yes, what would you do?**

Mostly man the sig office, or sightsee and go into Beirut.

**So it was a fairly relaxing sort of ...?**

Yes, take my officer down to Damascus and have a look around.

**What was in Damascus?**

Nothing.

**Nothing?**

A lot of Ay-rabs. That's what the Yanks used to call them.

**Well what did you think of the Arabs?**

Didn't have much to do with them. They were

17:30 very good at pinching things, thieves. We found that out in Palestine, they'd come up and lift your head off your pack and take it away, and you wouldn't know it's gone. They put chains around a tent pole and put the rifles chained to it, they'd lift that up and pull the chain underneath.

**Bit of an art,**

18:00 **really.**

Well they'd sit there for days and you wouldn't know they're getting closer and closer all the time, they're sitting there in the grapevines, you know, think they're picking grapes but they're - as the Yanks would say, they're casing the place, yes. They're very - I never had any trouble with them, but the funny thing in the desert that the Bedouins would come across the battle

18:30 field looking for the - on the end of a shell is what they call a driving band, that's made of copper, and that fits into the rifling in a barrel, in the gun barrel, and these were very well sought after by the Arabs because they made jewellery out of them, and different things, yes.

**So they're just going on a bit of an emu hunt for copper?**

Yes, they

19:00 didn't seem to worry about the war, they're just with the camels and walk across picking this stuff up.

**So how long were you actually in Syria before you started moving on to Balabac and Tewfik?**

A few months, I don't know the exact time.

**That's all right. So from Tewfik what did you do? Did you get on board a ship?**

In Syria?

**Yes.**

No, no, no.

**No? What happened?**

No, we went back to

19:30 Palestine, no, yes we did, I'm sorry, yes we did.

**And how long were you in Palestine, is it just a bit of leave?**

We were back and forth all the time.

**Did you do any ...?**

We reformed in Palestine after Greece, because all the units were depleted, and the reinforcements were coming over,

20:00 and then we went up to Syria. So after that we went to Port Tewfik and got on the boat.

**Right. So what was the boat like that you got on?**

It was a pretty modern one, fast, no escort, because they reckon it was fast enough to outrun a submarine. I said, "What about if a submarine's waiting for us?" Never happened, it

20:30 didn't happen.

**Can you remember the name of the ship?**

No I can't, I've tried and tried.

**So you're on your way to Ceylon, are you going directly from Tewfik to Ceylon?**

Yes.

**What was that journey like? Can you remember that?**

Very good, very good. The food was good, the sea was calm, it suited me. And ...

**Are you still being a**

21:00 **batman?**

No, no, no.

**So you're back in signals?**

No, I'm a corporal by then.

**Oh, OK.**

No, I was in charge, giving orders, not taking them.

**Well what sort of orders were you giving?**

I was running parades, in - it was Beit Jirja or Kilo 89, I

21:30 think it was Beit Jirja, we had a camp there for signals, and I was the only NCO so I had to run the big

parade and read out the routine orders for the day. And they brought in some other blokes and they got promotions. There were sergeants in another group and they brought them in.

**Worse sergeants?**

Yes, they came in and joined the signals.

22:00 **What was so bad about them?**

Nothing, they were all right.

**OK. On board the boat, where were you sleeping?**

In cabins on this one. Yes, we didn't sleep in hammocks. Right down the bowels of the earth, but you know ...

**How long approximately did it take you to get to Ceylon?**

22:30 Oh, I don't know, two or three days I suppose.

**So not a long journey?**

I don't think it is, no.

**Did you get off on Ceylon?**

Yes, we were there for about six or seven months.

**Well tell me a bit about what you did when you were on Ceylon.**

Well we were taken to Ceylon, there was about four brigades in a division, and these are two brigades, the 17th and the 19th, or the

23:00 18th and the 19th, were left in Ceylon as a garrison, because the Japs were coming, after Singapore had gone, they were coming, but they were beaten in the Coral Sea by the American fleet and Australian fleet, British fleet. So Ceylon was safe, but there was still plenty of fighting going on in Malaya and all those places, Borneo

23:30 and New Guinea and Rabaul. So we were left there as more or less the garrison, I said we were there but we never had enough money to commit suicide with, or ammunition at least.

**Was it a bad time for you?**

No, it was a good time, I liked Ceylon. We got friendly with the tea plantation, a place called Akuressa, which is down near Galle, they call it Galley,

24:00 it's an old Portuguese fortified - old fort, a Portuguese fort, Galle I call it. Well inland from there was this Akuressa, and they sent a bunch of natives in and in about no time they cut the trees down and palm leaves and weaved them, and they had a roof on it and everything, in about an hour. So we were stuck in there. We

24:30 used to go to Galle I think for the pictures, and sometimes if we were lucky we'd get on a bus and go to Colombo. But I got friendly with the manager of the tea plantation, and I went up to a place north of Colombo, that's where he lived. So I stayed there for a week, I got a week's leave, and learned how to make tea and all that.

**And what do you**

25:00 **do for a week on a tea plantation?**

A week? No, we still had our signal duties to do, but we used to spend our time watching the girls picking tea, you know, like this, and the more you looked at them the whiter they got. They used to get five cents a day for picking the stalks out of the tea.

**Gee.**

And when we got to this camp

25:30 site, Theo said to the owner, he said, "All those coconuts have got to come down," he said, "Fall on your head." "No, no, no. Sorry, can't cut them down." He said, "I'm telling you, Get a monkey or somebody up there and pull them down." The bloke wouldn't be in it. So he said, "Orderly sergeant?" "Yes sir."

26:00 "Four men with axes." So those blokes went and got axes, brought them over. Now, are you going to pull them coconuts down or are we going to chop the trees down?" Put it on him, plain. "Yes, all right." So he got the blokes to - they're dangerous, coconuts, get them on the head and you're history. So I was just trying to think of the name of the things they

26:30 made for the roof. But they were very good, they were rain-proof, but all the timber started to grow very quick. Everything went mouldy, we had our desert stuff, all from the desert, and after looking at a

distance in the desert, when you get into a jungle, you know, right up close, your eyes ache.

**Really?**

And the Sikhs were there, the big Indians, you know, the beady

27:00 eyes and black beards? They reckoned we were cannibals and we'd eat them, eat the natives.

**Who told them that?**

We got the rumour, because everybody - as soon as you'd go anywhere they'd all run like blazes, take to their scrapers through the scrub.

**Who do you think put about those sorts of rumours about ...?**

The Sikhs did.

**Just as a bit of fun?**

I don't know why they did it. But we were soldiers, and gentle people, wouldn't hurt a fly.

**Absolutely. So**

27:30 **what sort of signal work were you doing while you were on this plantation?**

Well just communication between ourselves, like you know, as far as I know we didn't link into the Ceylon system, but we did most of the signals. And they sent one chap we got there as a reinforcement named Kelly, and he told them in Australia, "If you send me to the jungle I'll die, I don't like it". And they said, "You're going

28:00 there." So they sent him and he did die. I've got a photo of his grave. But it was - what did the Yanks call it? Resuscitation or whatever? It was a good spell after the desert. The meals were good, we used to buy curry and beautiful tea, they made lovely tea, and they used to have a little urn

28:30 with little coconut fires, the husks, and they'd just put the water through the sieve with the tea in. Beautiful, absolutely.

**Is this the first time you've discovered curries?**

Pardon?

**Is this the first time you've discovered curries?**

First time - no, I never made it.

**No, not made it, eaten it?**

No, no, we used to have it at home, Keens curry powder. Mum used to make lovely curries. But they made it out of

29:00 coconut milk and all that, with all beautiful herbs and spices, really lovely, make your mouth water.

**And when you were at the tea plantation, what were you sleeping on?**

We had little huts built.

**But as a floor ...?**

Floor? The floor was things in the ground and a pole across. What the dickens did we use then? Boards, I think, yes, on the boards. It was too hot, you didn't need blankets or anything.

29:30 **Were you given any extra equipment for dealing with the jungle?**

Have extra fitness?

**Extra equipment?**

Not there, no.

**Because it's a big difference you know, going from the desert ...**

That's right, we had hardly anything, because everything went to Greece, the whole division, their equipment was lost.

**So how were you getting supplies?**

Pardon?

**How were you getting supplies to where you were in Ceylon?**

Well

30:00 I don't know, there were some ships coming from Australia to Ceylon, communications were pretty good because they had the Catalinas flying from Crawley to Ceylon. And mail came through, I got new clothes, got special clothes, and I got a tailor in

30:30 Calder to alter them for me, and put my stripes on, and when I got home they thought I was a doctor, they'd never seen this tropical stuff - uniforms, before, nobody had them. Nobody had tropical gear till New Guinea opened up.

**You mentioned mail. When you were out in the desert, were you getting any mail?**

Yes.

**How often would you get mail?**

31:00 I think it was pretty regular, perhaps once a week, all depends how often you get letters from home. I used to get a couple from my sister and that, Mum never used to write, my sister used to write to me and that. Never had any girlfriends either write to me.

31:30 **Who did you write to?**

My sister and friends, yes. Gibson's family, they were very close to me and I was to them, they looked after me, when Dad died I became the - they sort of adopted me to be a friend of their son's, they had a little shack down at Rockenham and I used to go down there with them. And

32:00 they were very nice. And before I left to go overseas they put a party on for me, and gave me a watch.

**That's lovely.**

First thing I did was have a salt water shower on the blessed boat, and forgot to take it off, that was the end of that, it was full of salt water. No fresh water on the boat for showers, but you could buy salt water soap.

32:30 **Did you get any Red Cross parcels?**

Yes.

**What sort of things would be in the parcels?**

Toothpaste, toothbrush, razorblades, nice cake. There was only one thing with the cakes, that they didn't have any preservatives in them, and they'd go off, and they'd taste like ants. You know what an ant smell is? A real acidic smell, and that's how they went.

33:00 But we used to whack them up between us. I think the POWs got all the Red Cross parcels, and fairly good enough too.

**How important was it to get mail?**

Oh, very important.

**Why is that?**

Well, you like to know what's going on at home, we never had any wirelesses to listen to the news, we didn't know what was going on there, mostly rumour. A lot of

33:30 rumours in the war. Furphies, they used to call them. A furphy called about by the water tanks in the First World War on wheels, called a furphy, a water tank, and it was never used much, in this war, because they called it a furphy, because they didn't want it.

**Fair enough. So when you were in Ceylon,**

34:00 **can you think of any other things that you got up to while you were there?**

No, I mostly - really just lounging about and I was a great reader, I like reading books when you get hold of them, and go sightseeing, you know, around the place.

**What sort of things did you like to go and have a look at?**

I used to watch

34:30 these temple dancers, with the gongs and bells, clanging all the time, used to be a lot of them. And they used to have parades with these huge elephants. They were big, those Indian elephants, they're colossal things, and they'd be walking down all painted up and a thing on their trunk and eyes painted, and a big thing on, they're all sitting up in there, a

35:00 howdah I think they call them, I'm not sure.

**It sounds like a pretty impressive sight.**

Yeah, they were, yeah. It was all new to us, you see?

**Was there anything new that you had to learn as part of signalling?**

As part of what?

**As part of signalling, was there any new things that you had to learn?**

Well you had to handle the new stuff that came in, we didn't get -

**There was new stuff?**

- -we didn't get any

35:30 modern ones, I think they were still the same ones we used in the desert. But I don't think we - wait a minute, yes we did use wirelesses in Ceylon, because I remember having to scale up a tree, and it was full of ants, coconut ants, and I struck the same things in New Guinea, same type of ants, and rats. Used to have things to put on your leg

36:00 here, and you'd dig them into the trunk and climb up.

**So there were rats up the top of the coconut ...?**

Oh yeah, coconut rats. In New Guinea they were bad.

**So why did you have to climb the coconut tree to ...?**

Put up a wireless aerial.

**And so this aerial had to be pretty big then?**

Yes, we'd sling it between two trees, two palm trees.

36:30 **How effectively did the wireless work?**

Pretty good, yes.

**Where could you broadcast to?**

Oh well, I mean only amongst ourselves, we didn't broadcast overseas, that wouldn't be allowed.

**I'm just wondering how big the range of the wireless is?**

Well the ones we had in the desert weren't very long, very long range things. Although, as I say, that blunder I made at Beersheba when the

37:00 Warsprite picked me up, because they had to have a powerful receiver, and they're monitoring the air all the time, and decoding everything if it was in code. The English were very good at breaking codes, and I suppose they thought, "What the dickens is going on here, what's this, Australians in Beersheba?" Because it was right, we were there, but I shouldn't have said it,

37:30 not in plain language.

**What sort of communications were you talking about when you were in Ceylon? Is it - what information is being passed?**

Just troop movements I think, about our own personnel or troop movements, there wasn't much to report on, because there was nothing much going on,

38:00 really.

**So how did you pass the time?**

Exploring, looking, reading, practicing, reading our army books on things, you know, studying wireless procedures. There was plenty to do to keep you occupied, but it was - you'd always find something to do.

**What is a wireless**

38:30 **procedure?**

What is it?

**Yes.**

Oh, gee whiz. Well the opening one in the desert was Vic Eddie Z, Vic Eddie Z, Yank Yank P, Vic Eddie Z, that's V as in - you remember the victory song? Da da da da,

39:00 Da da da da, Churchill used to sing it, Da da da da, that's a Vee, and E was just a dot, and a Z is two dashes, a dot and a dash. So that was your opening thing, and you get a reply back, and you'd carry on. I think, was it - who wrote that score,

39:30 Mozart or somebody, Vic Eddie Da da da da.

**Gotcha. So at what point did you actually get out of Ceylon?**

Well we were down on the beach at Galle watching them catching fish, and a crowd of – or a flight of bombers came over, and we all

40:00 clapped, we shouldn't have clapped, they were Japs, and they'd just bombed Colombo. Now Colombo was full of warships, and Cunningham, who was the chief admiral of the fleet, he got wind of this, and he told them to get out to sea quick, "Quick, get out," because they're all lined up, sitting ducks, and they got out and the Japs came but they were a bit late. I think they made a bit of a mess of the harbour, but they missed

40:30 the big cruisers and that. Yes, see he was lucky, didn't he blow the tripe out of them. Tell you what, we were all waving to them, we thought they were ours.

**At what point did you realise that they belonged to the Japs?**

Oh, when you see the red spots on them.

**That would have been a bit of a shock.**

Yeah, it was, it was a shock. So then we talked amongst ourselves, you know, "Well if the

41:00 Japs land, what are we going to do? Just get shot or try to fight them, kill as many as we can, if possible, or just get captured?" It wasn't much of an option.

**Certainly right with that. So what did you do?**

Well, we didn't do anything, we just stood and waited and as I said before, you spent a lot of time waiting, and then the message came that we were to pull down our gear, pack it up, and

41:30 go to Colombo, because, pardon me, we're being moved. We didn't know where. And see everywhere they were saying, "Don't tell the enemy anything", we didn't have anything to tell the enemy. We didn't know where we were going, nobody told us. But the rumours were there that we were going to Australia, you know?

**Was that the big rumour, that you'd be going back to Australia?**

Yes, we used to call them a ryebuck.

**A ryebuck?**

Yes, a ryebuck.

**Does that mean a**

42:00 **good rumour?**

No.

## Tape 6

00:31 **What was the voyage like back to Australia, Eddie?**

The journey?

**Yes.**

Terrible. We were on a – I don't think it was a very old boat, it wasn't a new one, but I got seasick. Everywhere you looked, you'd look forward, look up, look down, I never had a good meal from Colombo to Fremantle. The

01:00 weather was atrocious, you'd see a boat go up and the propeller's spinning around, on top of the wave, and it'd go down. And that's how it was nearly all – we went way down south, because it was starting to get cold, to dodge the Jap submarines. We didn't know that of course, but that's what it felt like, so all the way, I think it took us about a fortnight to get here.

01:30 **How many ships were in the convoy?**

How many?

**Yes.**

I think there was about 20, because they were shifting the whole Middle East, and then us, out of Ceylon.

**Were you in a hurry to get back and defend Australia?**

No, we didn't know where we were going, see?

**You must have known the Japs had entered the war?**

We did know, at that time, but they'd just say it was a

02:00 rumour, we didn't know. And we thought, well afterwards we could have been heading for Singapore, but Singapore fell see, so we came straight to Fremantle.

**What was morale like on board the ship?**

Dodgy. See, I had the - the reason I'll tell you this is that the CO said,

02:30 "I've heard - it's come to my ears that there's pilfering on the boat. Now, I've got no time for pilferers, if you find him, chuck him over the side, but if you don't want to do that, bring him to me and I'll throw the book at him, which means he'll get everything I can give him." So I'd never heard of any pilfering going on, but they reckon it was pretty rife. In the staging camps,

03:00 yes, but when we got to Fremantle, I had the job of dishing out kitchen duties for the troops that weren't getting off, there was only West Australians getting off, and all the eastern staters were staying on, and going around past Albany, you know, to the east. I'll never forget this bloke, and I said to

03:30 him, I said, "Fred, you're on kitchen duty while the chef's in port." "Oh, no way," he says, "I'm going to get leave." I said, "You won't get any leave." He said, "I'm not doing any duty." I said, "Well that's an order, you've got to do it. I'm told to give the orders, I'm just passing them on, it's not my fault." And he king hit me. You know what a king hit is, don't you? Hey?

**Yes.**

Well he hit me. So for the next 20 minutes we fought in that office.

04:00 I finished up with all my hands smashed, broken nose.

**Sounds like a dinkum blue.**

Oh, it was a real blue. And when we pulled in alongside the wharf, I said, "There's an ambulance there," so I said, "Oh, somebody's going to get picked up." It was me, down to Hollywood straight away.

**So who came off second best?**

I did, no he did.

04:30 **Are you sure about that?**

Oh yes, he got - I belted hell out of him, and he also got court-martialled and put in the brig. You can't belt an NCO, it's a no-no. When you get - anybody - the recruits are pretty tough, you've just got to eyeball them, because you know you've got the army behind

05:00 you if he whacks you, so he whacks you, he's gone for all money, he'll finish up in the jail.

**Sounds like you were a mess, if you ended up in hospital.**

Yeah, I had to go down and get all this hand all plastered, the ambulance came past here, I got him to stop here and I threw the kit bag over the fence. And my sister was there, I said, "Tell Mum I'll be back in a minute." And when I got down to the hospital and got my

05:30 hand done, the doctor said, "I've got to keep you in here for three days." I said, "Oh, come on, I just came from the Middle East, I don't want to be stuck in here." And I said, "Do you smoke?" He said, "Yeah," so I gave him a carton of Craven A cigarettes, so they got me on three days' leave. So I came home here, and that was my introduction back into Australia.

06:00 **I'll just ask you a few questions Eddie. Why do you think this bloke was so determined not to accept the duty you were ordering him to do?**

There were people like that, they didn't want to do anything, they weren't soldiers. I know chaps grizzled about the uniform, grizzled about the army, grizzled about everything, they weren't worth two bob. And he was a trouble maker this bloke, I know him, because

06:30 he was in the unit with me. So then came - I didn't - carry on with your story and I'll tell you as I go along.

**Sorry, I was just going to say, if you were in the same unit together, how did you come to having such a big blue?**

Well he didn't want to do anything, he didn't like taking orders. See, I had to detail all these jobs to be done,

07:00 there was a lot of jobs to be done, even on a boat with a crew, there's the mess orderlies, and potato

peelers, and the whole box and dice. And you'd just dish it out, I had my share of it, before I was an NCO, I did it, no worries, part of growing up and learning. But some of them didn't want to learn. So they had to take it the hard way. And I learned a trick or two too, in the meantime.

**Was this**

07:30 **the first time you'd disagreed on a ...?**

First time? No, no, no, I had trouble with a bloke in Ceylon. I had to put him on a charge too. He didn't want to do anything, he started swearing at me, he called me for everything. So I thought the only way to shut you up mate, is to put you before the CO, which I marched him in. But you finish up mates after all.

**What did you do during your leave?**

08:00 Leave?

**Yes, here in ...?**

Well unfortunately when I left the hospital and come home, Mum wasn't too bad but she was very ill, because there were no doctors here, the doctors were all gone in the forces. So I went down to the Gibsons, my friends, hopped on the tram - no, the first thing I did was to go down, I

08:30 took a case down to Captain Stirling and I said, "Give us half a dozen bottles of beer," and the barman said, "Where have you been?" I said, "I've just come back from the Middle East." He said, "I thought so, we're not allowed to sell it to you." Anybody in an Australian uniform is not allowed to buy it, bottled beer. And I thought, "Oh, all right." So I thought, "What sort of a country I've been fighting for?" But anyway, I went down to the Gibsons, and they -

09:00 Ida and Ella Gibson and Mrs Webster and some friends, they - I'm trying to think of the word, adopted a destroyer, an Australian, and when it came into port they'd put a party on for it. And Mrs Webster's husband, he got caught, and he was a POW in Germany, he got caught in Libya somewhere.

09:30 So I had all my arm in plaster and I said, "Oh, great carrying on, you're all having a party here, drinking up and your husband's a POW," and they said, "Well don't go crook at us," you know? I said, "Well I can't understand it, what are you celebrating?" And then I got - later on I got to know, that these sailors, they went out and never came back, they got

10:00 torpedoed or blown up, and while there were in shore they really played up, they had a good time. And that didn't click onto me at the moment, but it did after, because when I came back on a couple of pieces of leave, I enjoyed myself too, because I didn't know what the future held.

**How was your mother's health?**

Pardon?

**What happened to your mother's health?**

My mother?

**Yes.**

Mother died of an

10:30 ovarian cancer, cyst, a fortnight after I came home. She said that she only wanted to live long enough to see her boys come home, and we all came back.

**Sad, but fortunately you were at home, Eddie.**

Yeah. They gave her a medal, with four little plaques on it,

11:00 and somebody pinched it. My sister let this house to some barmaids at the Captain Sterling, during the war when Mum passed away, and they pinched my Dad's - the surveyor's theodolite, and everything was cleaned right out. And I think Mum's medal went then too.

**When was the house broken into?**

Yeah.

**When?**

Pardon?

**What year was the house broken into?**

11:30 Wasn't broken into, there were people living here, the ones that were living here pinched them.

**So you'd rented the house to someone?**

Yes, a couple of barmaids, and about three dozen Yanks and four dozen Dutchmen, they all had parties

here. They reckon there should have been a red light outside. I didn't know this.

**This is before the end of the war?**

Huh?

**Was that before the end of the war?**

No, this is 1942.

**Yeah.**

12:00 The end of '42, or the beginning of 1943.

**So it was while you were overseas.**

No, oh yes, yes, true. No, no, no, it wasn't while Mum was alive, no. It was after Mum died.

**So I assume then that when your mother died you rented the empty house out while you were overseas?**

I left it to my sister, she did, yes. That's when she let it to the barmaids.

**They sound like they were pretty wild times, those '40s.**

Well, you can imagine them, a big house

12:30 like this.

**Pub down the road.**

Barmaids have plenty of booze, yeah, but that's what annoyed me, because the Americans and the Dutch could go down there with taxis, and the boots of their cars were scratching on the ground, full of booze, yet we weren't allowed to buy it, and the bloke that put the order on, was a bloke named Bennett, who gave the surrender services

13:00 at Singapore, so he's no mate of mine, but that's how it went.

**If only these walls could talk, huh?**

Yeah, oh God, all languages. Yeah.

**Were you here to bury your mother before you had to return to the army service?**

Oh yes, they gave me leave, yes, I told them the story, and

13:30 I had a bad arm too. And after that they told me it's OK, I could get leave until my Mum passed away. It cost 27 pound, now it's \$5000 to bury anybody.

**Inflation.**

Eh?

**Inflation.**

Yeah.

**What happened when you went back to the service?**

14:00 Joined the army again? After this clobber?

**Yeah.**

Oh, I didn't know what was going to happen. I went back - you see, what happens when anything like this, like you get leave, or you get out, you've got to go back to a staging camp, and I was talking about the one in Gaza, now the Claremont Showgrounds was the one here, so you had to go back there, and they said, a

14:30 little bloke, he had little whiskers like this, on the gate, he said, "Who'd did you come from?" "G section, signals, attached to the 2/2nd Field Regiment." "Where are they?" "Wouldn't have a clue, in Australia somewhere." "Well you'll have to wait till we find them." I said, "Righto." So anyway they found them in a place called Church Point out at Newcastle in New South Wales.

15:00 So I rejoined them and I met this bloke I had the fight with, we got on all right together.

**So where did you rejoin them?**

Pardon?

**Whereabouts did you rejoin them?**

In New South Wales, in Church Point.

**Where's that?**

That's over a river from Newcastle, which is that big coal town, or used to be a big engineering town, it's not now.

**So how did you get there from Perth?**

Train.

15:30 **What was that train journey like?**

Oh, it took weeks, weeks. Stop, we were going across there once, Christmas time, he ran out of coal and he had to leave us on the siding and run away and get some old sleepers, to get to Port Augusta.

**Things were scarce?**

There was nothing flash on the troop travel. A lot of them travelled in cattle trucks.

**Did you travel on cattle trucks?**

No I never, I missed that

16:00 lot. The first trip across, when we first went was - we went as passengers, civil passengers, when the army took over they had a truck with a mobile kitchen on it, and you'd get your food from there. We used to get bags, or a bucket of rocks and throw it at the empty beer bottles. You'd always go and catch the train at Parkston with a cargo of beer to see you

16:30 across the Nullarbor.

**Where were all the empty beer bottles?**

On the ground, yeah, we'd drink them and throw them out.

**So they were just littering the railway line?**

Pardon?

**They were just littering the railway line?**

Oh yes, absolutely. Or you'd throw them at rabbits.

**Sounds like a booze bus.**

It wasn't always, because bottled beer was hard to get. But my sister was in a bar up there at Kalgoorlie,

17:00 so she looked after me there.

**Do you remember stopping to see her in Kalgoorlie?**

Pardon?

**What do you remember about stopping to see her in Kalgoorlie?**

Mainly, I stayed with my sister and looked around Kalgoorlie, and there was a girl travelling on the train up to Kalgoorlie,

17:30 and this wasn't a troop train, this was going as far as Kalgoorlie, there were some troops on it, and I got talking to her, and I met her Mum and Dad, he was the manager of a mine, so we used to go out there, but it didn't last long because I was only there for a few days.

**Where were your brothers at this time?**

I don't know where they were. My brother Jack was with me, he'd left

18:00 the unit and I don't know where he went. I didn't find out till I came back in '43 I think, for leave, and he was up in the cipher officer in Bathurst Street there, they had a big cipher office.

**So he'd left the unit while you were on leave getting well?**

Yes, he'd left, and my brother Charlie, I don't know what - he finished up in the Old 'n' Bolds, a mobile laundry,

18:30 my brother Gus, he was a sergeant in the air force up at Pearce, and my returned soldier brother Stan, he was a steward on the Transline.

**Which Transline? Across the ...?**

Yes, across the Nullarbor.

**Did you ever see him?**

Did we see him?

**Yes.**

We used to, funny thing, well not all the time, we saw him once, when we were

19:00 going across, the first time. We heard he was on there, so the train crew arranged for us to see him. So we said farewell on there, and we went to Ingleburn.

**That was earlier on, wasn't it?**

Pardon?

**That was earlier, earlier in the ...?**

Yes, when we first went, yes.

**So what happened in this case when you went to Newcastle?**

19:30 We started training again, we got more equipment, more modern equipment.

**Can you describe the more modern equipment that you got?**

The wirelesses were better, world range, you could get anywhere on them. The transport was good, it was all Lend Lease stuff, the trucks,

20:00 motor bikes for the despatch riders, and all the general stuff, you know, it was all modern, pliers and tools and everything.

**How long were you training in Newcastle?**

I think it was two or three months, then we shifted to a place called Singleton.

**Did you get any leave while you were in Newcastle?**

No,

20:30 no.

**What was at the base there?**

What, at Newcastle?

**Yes.**

Well I don't know, they tried to make room for all the soldiers you see, coming back from the Middle East, and they picked these places, it was a lovely spot out by the - not far from the ocean, but mosquitoes, we called them the Hexham Greys,

21:00 they'd stand up on their hind legs and go Brrrrrrr. Terrible things. The hospitality in Newcastle was pretty good, used to get leave in there pretty regularly.

**Where'd you go, what did you do?**

I looked for dances all the time.

**Meet any young ladies in Newcastle?**

Pardon?

**Did you meet any young ladies in Newcastle?**

At the dance I did,

21:30 yes.

**Do you want to tell me the story?**

Pardon?

**Would you like to tell me the story?**

I don't know, I was meeting them all the time, at the dances.

**Meet anyone special?**

No, not till I got to Cessnock, I met a lass there, and I got very friendly with her, and her family, Maxine Letts, her name was, and

22:00 they had a big store, and I met her at the dance, and they sort of took me under their wing and I used to go there and have home-cooked meals and everything like that, and dance and go to the swimming pool and everything. But it doesn't last long because you're shifted out.

**Any romance?**

Not really. Oh, I liked her and she liked me, but it didn't last long.

22:30 I mean you couldn't have a romance in war time, not there long enough. By the time you got to know anybody, it's time to shift. But ...

**Was she taken by you?**

Pardon?

**Was she taken by you though?**

Oh, we got on all right, yeah. Oh yes, we got on all right. I didn't fool around, because I didn't want to mess up all these home

23:00 meals, didn't want to get into trouble there.

**What did she think of that?**

Oh, I think she thought I was gay.

**Why?**

Because I wouldn't get onto her. I'm sure she thought that.

**She was pretty keen, was she?**

Yes, but she dived me anyhow, got somebody else. I'm sure she thought I was gay, because I didn't

23:30 want to spoil all this home cooking, trying to mess around with the daughter. It backfired on me.

**How did you resist her advances?**

Without dancing?

**No, how did you resist her advances, like her ...?**

Oh, easy, when it was advances and home cooking and home life that you've missed, quite simple, quite simple. Silly, but simple.

24:00 **What were you doing in Cessnock?**

We weren't camped at Cessnock, we were camped at Singleton, that was about 20 miles away, and we used to go up by - any way we could scrounge a lift, used to do up all my clothes and iron my shirts and do my pants and everything, and polish my boots. Always used to look nice.

**To make a special effort for the ladies?**

I always did, I still do now. I've

24:30 got my gold chain, pinkie finger ring, diamond, when I go dancing, look the part.

**Look a million bucks.**

Yes. Haven't got a million but I look it.

**How long were you at Singleton for?**

Pardon?

**How long were you at Singleton for?**

Oh, just a few months and then they ...

**What were you doing at Singleton?**

Just lounging around and training, waiting.

**Can you describe where you were**

25:00 **based in Singleton?**

No, I forget. I know it was a camp site, but somewhere in there.

**In tents, or huts?**

Tents. They used to have a canteen every night, where they could get the beer?

**You always knew where you could get your next beer, by the sounds of it, Eddie?**

Yes, I loved the beer.

**Where did they move you from Singleton?**

They got a train

25:30 load - I think we went back to Newcastle, and a train load of trucks was going up to the Tablelands, the Atherton Tablelands, and we got put on that to look after the trucks. And we finished up at Cairns and then we went up on the Tablelands with these trucks, took them off. And we were at a camp - we were camped

26:00 at a place called Wondecla, which is on the Tablelands, and the artillery came there, the second second field regiment came there, and we got all our reinforcements, and got our section going again, and we camped at Wondecla. And the trucks were dispersed out, and up at a place called Atherton they had a big canteen there where they used to dish out the beer, and

26:30 the supplies. But we had a chap, an artillery man was a brewer, so he used to make home brew for the camp, for the regiment.

**Any good?**

Beautiful, lovely.

**What did he call it?**

Jungle Juice. Yeah, Jungle Juice.

**Did it pack a punch?**

Oh,

27:00 the same as ordinary other beer, it'd be about 3% or 4%, I suppose.

**Did the authorities mind him ...?**

No, the CO was all for it, he used to send the crowd around scrounging for malt and hops and sugar.

**Where were those things scrounged from?**

Oh, anywhere, down at - I'll think of the name in a minute. But down at Cairns and - he sent

27:30 one one artillery troop down there to catch fish for the camp, or for the regiment, but they got on the good lurks, they were selling it around Cairns, making a dollar.

**Were there any Americans in Queensland then?**

No, not at that time.

**What were you doing in the Atherton Tablelands?**

Training mainly, a lot of training.

28:00 **What kind of training?**

The same as the desert, going out and messages and trying out our new sets and all that. We used to go - can't think of the name of the place now, down on the coast, it'll come to me. We were there a couple of years ago. But it was just training, everything, you know, everything you do is training.

28:30 **Can you give me an example of the kind of exercises that you did?**

The what?

**The kind of training exercises, can you give me any examples?**

The who?

**The training exercises.**

Training?

**Any examples?**

We'd go out and everybody was at a map reference, there's six figures, three two four and four two six, and you'd put it on your map and fit those

29:00 together on the map. You know these road maps they've got, they've got 1B and 1C and that, like that, and you'd find these. And you had a board and you'd write them down, where they were, and you had to keep up with them, so the CO pulled up, he said, "Where's number one battery?" "Oh, it's down there sir." And if you didn't, he wanted to know why you

29:30 didn't know where it was, because you're supposed to have the knowledge for him, being the signals who operate, and he might give you a bit of a brass, but - and Brigadier Cremore, he was a nice bloke, very straight-laced, he was very strict, but a nice fellow. I got on well with him in the

30:00 desert. When I couldn't get messages, when I couldn't ...

**When you couldn't he would let you know that he only ...?**

That's right, he said, "I could run faster than you blokes can."

**When did you leave the Atherton Tablelands?**

When? Well the word came through that - oh no, wait a minute, I'm a bit out of

30:30 myself. I was sent to a school in Maroochydore, that's north of Brisbane, they must have thought I was officer material. So I went to this school, failed. Did everything right, I knew all the - everything about wirelesses and everything, but my maths were no good, I failed at maths horribly. So anyhow, all I got out of it was an extra stripe, I became a

31:00 sergeant. And when I got back to my unit up in the Atherton Tablelands, they said, "You've been transferred to the third Aust mobile meteorological flight," and I performed - I said, "What's that?" They said, "They're just over the road, it's an air force show, you're taking weather reports, you'll be in charge of three operators, wireless operators."

31:30 So that was it, I got shoved out of the artillery and sent over the road to the air force. I didn't join the air force, but I was army in charge of three wireless operators. But I came under the jurisdiction of the air force. That was a good move, quite all right, I didn't mind. I played merry hell, being shifted, but that was the army, that if you went out to a school and you got promotion, there was no guarantee you're going

32:00 back to your same unit, they'd send you somewhere else. So that was the - I stayed with them ...

**Why didn't you want to leave your unit?**

Why didn't I? Well I'd been with them all the war, I knew them all, they knew me. And to go to a heap of blokes I didn't know, and never seen anything, can't blame them for that, poor blokes, but

32:30 I just wanted to stay with them, but they said, "No, you've got to go," and when you've got to go, you've got to go. Away I went. But I didn't regret it at the finish.

**Did you have a few drinks before you left?**

Oh yes, they had a good - this air force mob, they could get drink running out of their ears, but they weren't - you could just go to the thing and get a drink and just sign for it and pay up on pay day, you know?

33:00 Yeah. So I got to learn all their wireless sets, and their procedures, and taking weather reports, a whole bunch of stuff I had to learn. They had world range radios, you could pick up anywhere in the world.

**Did you have to learn a lot of meteorological ...?**

No, no. That

33:30 was - you'd take the block letters, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and a gap, five different figures, not letters, figures, and they'd send them in at about 20 words a minute, and as I said, it goes in one ear and you're writing with the other one, see? The previous one you write, and you get very good at it, at the finish, it just comes naturally, just coming in and going out. And you hand that

34:00 over to a flight sergeant, and he does all the weather work, makes the forecasts, puts all these scribbly lines, I forget what you call them now but ...

**Topographic lines?**

Yes, whatever. Yes, so I joined the air force and it was goodbye to the artillery.

**So how long did you miss your old unit for?**

How long did I miss it? Not long.

34:30 **You made new friends quickly in the air force?**

Oh yes. Well it's only - I've got a photo of them there, there was only three operators, myself, a lieutenant and a what do you call it, a forecaster.

**Had they been overseas before?**

No.

**Did they ask you about your time in North Africa?**

Not much, not much.

**Did you tell them anything about your experiences?**

35:00 Not really. They didn't want to talk about it, they had their own experiences of what they did. Two of them wanted to be pilots, no, one wanted to be a pilot, and he was good but he couldn't land an aeroplane, couldn't judge it, so he got wiped out and put in the ... Two of them I think wanted to be pilots.

35:30 **How long was it before you were posted to New Guinea?**

'43 I think it was, yes, '43 or '44, '43 I think it was, at the end of '43. But in the meantime I had my appendix out in Queensland.

**What happened?**

I had bad appendix.

**What was the cause of your appendicitis?**

Don't know. Wouldn't have a clue.

**What hospital were you taken to?**

I think the 24th

36:00 AGH at Rocky Creek, yes.

**What was the care like in the hospital?**

What was it like? Lovely. All the girls around, mopping your forehead and giving you needles and ...

**Sponge bath?**

Yes, lovely. They looked after you. You weren't allowed to do anything for six weeks, not like today, you have your appendix out you're at work tomorrow.

**Pretty serious operation, was it?**

36:30 No, it's not a serious operation, they made a big deal of it. The padre was the anaesthetist, he just put a strainer with some cottonwool over my face and dripped it on. They had a good dance going there, so it was all right.

**What did they use? Ether?**

Yes. Anaesthetic, yes. It's not an anaesthetic is it? What do they call it?

**Yes, anaesthetic. Was it ether or chloroform- -**

37:00 Ether.

**- -in those days? Ether, wasn't it?**

Ether was the stuff, yes.

**What does that smell like? It's got a pungent smell hasn't it?**

Terrible, all of a sudden you go bomp, you're out. You wake up and you can't breathe, so the sister comes along and pinches your nose, and you start breathing again. I used to panic, the bloke next to me, "He's not breathing sister." She said, "Save me running around, you can do it." But watching men come out of

37:30 an operation, it's a scream, they cry, call for their mothers, want to marry the nurses, the whole bit.

**Delirious.**

They're nice, they were lovely girls, yes.

**Did you take a shine to any one of them?**

Nope.

**That surprises me.**

I danced with them.

38:00 Nope. I didn't want to get involved, there's only one girl I thought I was involved with, Beryl Lord, she worked at Dalgetty's in Brisbane. She used to write to me. I met her in Maroochydore, but her mother laid down the law that she didn't want her daughter to go with anybody that drank

38:30 or swore or - as a matter of fact, if you were in the army you were out, because they were all- -

**Not good enough for her daughter.**

- -bad heathens, wanted to seduce everybody around the place. So that was - and our next move was of course to New Guinea.

**Where did you rejoin the air force from the hospital?**

39:00 Oh no, I'm sorry, this was before I joined the air force.

**Oh, was it?**

Yes, sorry about that.

**That's all right. So what was your reaction to hearing that you were going to New Guinea?**

Well, there was no reaction at all, I wasn't wrapped up in it, you get fed Atebrin tablets and green uniforms, and didn't know what

39:30 to expect. Something new. See, from the desert to the jungle you don't know what to expect. What I heard about the Japs, they weren't very happy blokes to get tied up with, but we landed at Aitape, and ...

**What ship did you travel on?**

I think it was the old Katoomba.

**Where did you board the Katoomba?**

Cairns. Went up through Whitsunday Passage, and around the top - Aitape's on the

40:00 top of New Guinea.

**What was that voyage like?**

Not bad, not bad really, because you see all the islands and it was - the sea was calm as a millpond and the food was good.

**No seasickness?**

No.

**Did you travel in convoy?**

No, there was only boat on its own.

**Did you feel a little worried**

40:30 **travelling on your own?**

Always, always.

**What did you fear most? Air or sea attack?**

Pardon?

**What did you fear most? Air or sea attack?**

What did I see?

**No, what did you fear most, an air attack or a sea attack?**

Well I saw an American, and he said, "Don't worry about the Jap air force, you worry about ours," that's when we were coming down the coast, a little bit from Aitape.

41:00 He said, "They're our worst enemies." And we found that out halfway between Aitape and Wewak, they bombed us, the American air force, and we were nearly all wiped out with friendly fire. You hear about that in the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force], friendly fire.

**We're getting the wind-up there, but we might have to ask you some more questions about that matter.**

## Tape 7

00:32 **Before, well actually it was at the end of the last tape that I did, you were mentioning to me that you were really looking forward to hearing womens' voices.**

Yes.

**Why is that?**

I don't know really, but it just was their accent, I could have sat down, when I came home, and just let you talk, didn't want to make love to you, didn't want to kiss and hug you, just hear

01:00 you talk. It's strange. But I think we all felt the same way, because it was that long since we'd heard an Australian voice, bar a nurse, but you never spoke to nurses. You're talking to men all the time, it's sort of - whether you get disoriented or whatever, I don't know. But I just loved - keep talking, you know, what's wrong with this bloke, is he nuts or something?

01:30 **It's quite a sweet thing to want to do, really.**

Yes, it was. I couldn't understand it myself, to tell you the truth, why, but I just loved to hear the Australian accent again, which was good.

**Did you miss women when you were out in the desert?**

No, no, no.

**Too much to think about?**

There was nobody there to meet, you live with men for years, live with men, the

02:00 only time we went on leave, you know, watch the belly dancers.

**You like those belly dancers, don't you?**

Yes. They were good, they were good at what they did.

**So how was it that you were selected out of your section for service with the RAAF?**

How come? Well they sent me to a school, and I got promotion, and

02:30 as I said, you don't always go back to your own unit, and this job came up with these new people, I don't know whether it was something - they had to go to New Guinea or not, but I filled the bill because I could read and write Morse, and having three stripes I could tell them what to do. It wasn't easy, but I got on all right with them.

**So**

03:00 **they essentially needed somebody who was a signaller, who also had three stripes?**

Yes, that's right.

**So that's why you got the job?**

Probably, yes.

**What did you think about this new job?**

Didn't like it.

**Why's that?**

The change part, didn't want to leave, you know, blokes that I'd been with all the time, and people can't understand that, but it's true, you get a sort of a friendship with them all the

03:30 time, and you share things. You might talk about your home life, or something like that, and I remember in Ceylon they got some Women's Weekly's there, and it said, "Australia welcomes the Americans, showing them around," and the bloke said, "Showing them around, that's my wife that bloke's got his around." Yes, he nearly went off his head.

**Gee. What were those**

04:00 **Americans like? Were they ...?**

I never had much to do with them, only in New Guinea I did.

**Were they trying to get their hands on the girls back home?**

Yes, well the girls loved it too, didn't they? Well dressed, well spoken, plenty of money. Used to go to the Embassy dance with a bottle Scotch, tied around their ankle. You weren't supposed - according to them, take beers into the dance or something. That's the story I heard, I don't know how true it is.

04:30 But my friends the Gibsons, the Gibson girls, they were Australians, they had these parties going for Australian boys, they wouldn't have a bar of the Yanks.

**That's nice.**

Yes, it was nice.

**So the trip over to New Guinea, how was that?**

When was it?

**No, how was it?**

Good, good.

**And what happened when you arrived?**

Well, we were met offshore by

05:00 a crowd of Yanks with those trucks called Ducks, you know the Ducks? D-u-k-w, you can drive them on the land or in the water. You can just come off the water and drive straight up the beach. And they tipped all our gear into those, and they had landing craft too, and just chucked our gear in there, we had to sort it out on the beach. That was our first - and I went crook at

05:30 them, I said, 'I've got wireless sets and everything.' So, "We know nothing about that, buddy, if that's yours, take it." So we had to go through the whole lot, you know, and there was a lot of stuff there, laying on the beach.

**What sort of a uniform have you been issued with?**

We had?

**What sort of a uniform had you been issued with?**

Uniforms?

**Yes.**

What, in New Guinea?

**Yes.**

Green.

06:00 It was green, always wore long sleeves and long pants. I don't think we got green short ones because of malaria, and scrub typhus. Now a lot of silly blokes wouldn't - they said, "I'm not putting all that rubbish all over me," and they got scrub typhus, which is not funny. I think that's a type of malaria too. And you get another stuff called Mary, which you put all over you to stop the mozzies,

06:30 and you ate Atebrin tablets that made you go yellow. Yeah, yellow as anything, from eating the Atebrin. But I was very conscious of all this, so I never got malaria, but I used to scrounge a bucket of hot water from the kitchen, if I could get one, and then tip it all over me and then go and jump in the ocean, and the weather was nice there, you'd be in the

07:00 lovely water and wash it all off. And I did that regularly, every day, I couldn't always get the hot water, but I could go and jump in the ocean. They got some showers afterwards, the Yanks put some showers in, we got hold of.

**So were you there next door to an American base?**

Pardon?

**Was there an American base next door to you?**

A big hospital.

07:30 They came from - I'm not sure whether they came from Guadalcanal or they were going, I just forget which. But they took Aitape from the Japs, because we could hear the artillery fire in the distance, and I thought, "Oh God, here we go."

**So you were pretty close to the action?**

Yeah, we were pretty close to the action there. But they went to New Zealand, these chaps, and

08:00 they badly wanted to go to Australia for some reason or other, I don't know why. The same thing, New Zealand and Australia, not much difference. But I said, "If you want to know something about Australia, I'll get an atlas and I'll give you a lecture on Australia." Big deal, I'm no school teacher, see? So they said, "Righto." So I got them all in, I'm talking about it, going around - the people live mainly on the coast and the mountains and the rivers and

08:30 sheep and cattle and everything like that, and they enjoyed it. It wasn't all true in every respect, I'm sure of that. But it satisfied them, nothing to do. They wanted to give me a fridge.

**A fridge?**

Yeah.

**Did they have fridges out there?**

Yes, they had fridges, they had everything.

**When you say everything, what sort of stuff did they have that you didn't?**

Everything.

**Like what?**

Well, their landing barge, the big ones, they had ice

09:00 cream things on the deck, making ice creams to eat, plenty of cigarettes, they had plenty of everything. And one thing I did get off them was one of their mosquito nets. Ours were made out of green netting stuff, heavy, and it used to cave in and the mozzies could bite through it, so I got one of theirs, which was fine like -

09:30 not as thick as a silk stocking, but similar material, enough to keep the mozzies out, and it'd fit tight down over your bed.

**What sort of beds were you sleeping on?**

Just poles, poles, put a couple of groundsheets on it, on top. I got a

10:00 couple of pillows of one of the Yanks and used them. You didn't need blankets, it was warm enough, you know?

**Sounds like you weren't very well equipped.**

Well we didn't go for all those luxuries. The Yanks were noted for that-

**Luxury?**

-and on their Thanksgiving Day I was lucky enough to get an invite to their big dinner, and they had a 44-gallon drum of

10:30 orange juice - lemon juice, and two gallons of alcohol they tipped in it. So I said to Wayne, I said, "This stuff's only lemon juice." He said, "You haven't been around twice, buddy." And boy, it'd knock you head over tip, yeah. But they'd import thousands of turkeys for them and all that, and we never saw that type

11:00 of food.

**They had turkeys?**

Turkeys, yeah, for Thanksgiving Day.

**Well what sort of food did you have to put up with?**

We were back on the old tinned stuff again.

**Really?**

Yes.

**That doesn't seem fair.**

No. We got a boat load of asparagus, I couldn't stand asparagus, but I used to get it, and bury it in the sea, till it got cool, and then I loved it, couldn't get enough of

11:30 it.

**You buried the asparagus?**

Yes, in the cans, and put it in the sea to cool down. But the Yanks had mosquito repellent which was very cold when you spray it, and you'd spray it on your beer, cool your beer down. You see, you go - I think we got two bottles a week or something, so to stop you

12:00 from selling it, when you bought it at the canteen, they'd take the lid off, but you'd take it around the corner and another bloke there for sixpence he'd put it back on again, so you trade your beer for cigarettes and that. I did a lot of trading.

**Yeah? What sort of things were you trading?**

Cigarettes and clothing and you know, a pillow and sheets and everything.

**Where were you getting this stuff from?**

They got them, pinched them from the hospital, I suppose.

12:30 **Who was pinching it from the hospital?**

The Yanks.

**The Yanks were pinching it?**

Yes.

**And they were giving it to you?**

Yes. They're the ones that wanted to give me a fridge.

**Right, so you really made some pretty good mates there who were American?**

Yeah, I did all right with the Yanks.

**Did they have some sort of a PK store that you could get stuff from?**

Pardon?

**Did they have some sort of a PK store that you could get stuff from?**

Yes.

**Sorry, PX [ Post Exchange - American canteen unit].**

PX.

**I'm thinking about chewing gum.**

Yes, I bought a lovely

13:00 tennis racquet and a box of tennis balls there, in New Guinea for God's sake, and sent them down - a chap came, he was doing a report on the - the weather reporter, the air force bloke, and he took some photos which I've got, and I made him a - no, it wasn't him, I gave him this tennis racquet and balls to take back to Beryl Lord in Brisbane, and she got them.

13:30 **Well done.**

Yes.

**So what job were you actually doing in New Guinea?**

We were taking the weather reports for the artillery and the air force, we were parked always by the air strip, Aitape and then Wewak, we were camped there, and we had our ...

**So**

14:00 **how would you find out what the weather was going to be?**

Well they knew, I didn't know what it was going to be, just give them all these figures, and they'd say, "It's raining in Perth, Eddie."

**How does that work?**

Yes, that's how they work it out, five figures, in blocks of five, you know?

**How would you get the information, you know, the numbers, the blocks of five?**

Sent. One came from Manus Island was one,

14:30 and I think Brisbane was another place, or Cairns or somewhere around there.

**So you'd stick all these figures together ...?**

Pardon?

**So - I'm just a bit lost.**

Go on.

**You stick all these figures together, in such a way that can tell you what the weather is ...?**

To the expert, the air force bloke, he knew exactly. I didn't, didn't mean anything to me, it's just letters. But I gave him the accurate

15:00 letters, or figures, I should say.

**Well how would you get the accurate figures?**

Over the wireless, Morse Code.

**Right, so that would be your daily job?**

Yes, you had a big wireless, world range wireless, and they used to come in - sometimes you'd wear earphones, or just put a speaker on, and it came over loud and clear, beautiful, sit there, give them to him and he'd -

15:30 isobars I think they are, those things, he'd do that. And he'd say, "It's raining in Cairns," or, "It's raining in Perth."

**I see what you're saying. How often would you have to be doing this weather report information?**

Every day, very vital for the air force and for the artillery. Especially wind velocity, wind velocity was very, very important to the air

16:00 force, directions and for the artillery, because it could cause a shell to drop short, they call them drop-shorts, which is very dangerous because an officer with a signalman used to go out to where the Japs are, and he's just talk quietly back and he'd ask the artillery to put the

16:30 shells 50 yards in front of him, yeah, forward observation officer. I think a lot of them got knocked over, but what a job he had, you know? "Bring it down two yards, or bring it up..." Oh goodness. No fear, nothing.

**What sort of a building were you working from when you were getting these ...?**

Just a tent, just tents.

17:00 We lived in tents all the time there.

**Did you have to have a big aerial up to get ...?**

I think we did, yes. Yes, it was another coconut job, I think.

**I like that, coconut job.**

Yes.

**Did you enjoy that sort of work?**

Pardon?

**Did you enjoy that sort of work?**

I did.

**What did you like most about it?**

I could do it. See if you're doing something and you don't know what you're

17:30 doing, it becomes a strain on you. When I first was just learning Morse Code, and couldn't do it properly, it bothered me. But then all of a sudden it clicks, and you're right. So vital things like weather reports and wind velocity, if you don't get them right, you throw everybody out of gear, and it sort of, you know, the

18:00 responsibility is with you, you're it.

**So you quite enjoyed having this responsible sort of job?**

Yes I did, I did.

**And what were the blokes like there that you were working with?**

They're nice. One bloke was a very good tap dancer, yeah, in his army boots.

**Really?**

He'd tap dance, I've got a photo of him there. Yes, he was -

18:30 we all do, we looked - you know, when's the war going to be over, let's get home. And the officer, the one that did finally finish - the air force officer said, "Eddie, I've booked you to come with me to Japan as occupation force." I said, "No, I've done my bit, I'm not going."

**You'd had a gutful by that point.**

Had a real gutful. I was top of the points, see even '39 to '45

19:00 I was right up, I had 400 points or something.

**Just rewinding you back a little bit here, what were the weather conditions out there in New Guinea like?**

Sometimes good, but then they'd come like - the tropics, down it'd come, and you go over a creek bed, going out, and come back and it's a swollen river, and Ceylon was the same,

19:30 exactly. But a lot of weather you could go out and we had swimming there and everything. But the weather was muggy, you know, but I suppose you just say, "Oh well, muggy again," and get on with your job. Can't be bothered wondering about what the weather's going to be like, because you'd be wondering

20:00 all your life. So you just got on with it and put up with it. When it was raining I'd just put my glass

underneath the tent and get beautiful cold fresh water, especially if there's a drop of Scotch to put in it.

**Well done.**

Yes.

**Was it hard to keep dry?**

Hard to keep dry? No. Well, when I say it all depends on your situation. The worst part was keeping out mould, mould was the

20:30 biggest - and it was in Ceylon and it was in New Guinea too. See, we stocked up with cigarettes, and they all went mouldy, we had to chuck them away. Your boots would go mouldy. Terrible place for that.

**So how would you try to stop mould?**

I don't know to tell you the truth, I forget how we did it. I always kept my clothes washed and clean, I never let them get to that extent, because I was in a

21:00 job that I could do it. The poor bloke out in the jungle, he couldn't do that. But I made sure that I did everything the army said to do. If they got basin of stuff to put your feet in for tinea, put them in it. Condis Crystals, you know? The blokes said, "Can't be bothered doing all that," finished up with tinea, finished up your toes drop off.

21:30 **Your toes can drop off from tinea?**

With tinea?

**Yes.**

I think so, yeah, if it gets into your bones.

**Oh dear.**

You've got to be spotless in the jungle, look after yourself.

**What sort of problems would there be out there with disease?**

Well there's this scrub typhus and all sorts of funny - insects bite you, and scrub typhus, they're on the kunai grass,

22:00 and as you're walking through, they get on you. Leeches, yeah, they live on the kunai grass, and the scrub typhus bugs get on you and they crawl up you, that's why we wore gaiters all the time, we wore gaiters before we got into the jungle, because I made sure mine were tucked into my socks, and I'd put this special stuff they'd give us to rub on there,

22:30 stop them from getting up my legs.

**You'd rub something in to your legs?**

Yes, this stuff, they give you ointment. Mary was the name of the stuff we used to put on our skin for the mozzies, just about bath yourself in it. And Atebrin was to protect your insides from malaria.

**So they gave you quite a bit of protection there from the elements?**

Exactly, if you did what you were told, but a lot of the blokes wouldn't do it,

23:00 couldn't be bothered.

**Was it just laziness or didn't they understand how important it was?**

I don't know, just laziness.

**I mean did they give you a big lecture before you got over there, and tell you what it is that you're supposed to be doing?**

I don't remember ever getting one, no, no I don't. We heard all about it, you know, to take this, I think they did give us a lecture on taking Atebrin and this other stuff,

23:30 Mary, and the scrub typhus and that. There's some deadly things in the jungle that you can catch, and as long as you keep yourself clean and that.

**How about ablutions and laundry facilities? What did you have out there?**

Your own - try and scrounge as much as you can. I

24:00 think the Yanks put up some showers and I think they were salt water, pumped. But as I say, I used to get some hot water and lather myself and then jump in the ocean, which was very refreshing, it was beautiful there. But I used to swim a lot too, out in the surf, and I also used to go out picking up these shells, I got an old Japanese gas mask, and put it on, it's tight around here,

24:30 and then you just hold the tube up and look around under the water. Little did I know that these shells, they've got a little dart in there, that'd kill you, poisonous. Yeah, I didn't know that.

**You were lucky.**

Lucky, so I gave it away. Told the Yanks about it, they didn't ...

**Was it a coral reef that you could see there?**

Pardon?

**Was it a coral reef?**

Yes. And I'd swim out, and all of a

25:00 there's sudden there's nothing, a big black hole. The coral reef stopped. And I thought, "God, those flaming octopus could come up there and grab me." I'd take to my scrapers, back into the beach again. But when the war finished, we used to fish, catch fish.

**Because I'm thinking, if you've got a coral reef there, there's got to be some good fishing going on.**

Pardon?

**There's got to be some good fishing going on if you've got a coral reef.**

No, they weren't very good.

25:30 **Yes? What sort of fish?**

Little bream things, we used to catch them, get the cook to cook them.

**Because I'm thinking they probably taste better than M&V.**

Yes, any fresh food would, anything. That's what I say, when I went on leave and that I always sort of made a glutton of myself on fresh veggies and that.

26:00 Although when I think back on the army food, it was nutritious, it had everything in there to keep you going. They used to have a nice tin of bacon, wrapped in cellophane, not cellotape -

**Cellophane?**

- cellophane, bacon, beautiful. Bully beef, the best cuts of beef, that's the only thing they could

26:30 freeze and can. The best cuts are beautiful. And if you got a good cook, tell you what, he could make a good meal, if you got a lousy cook he'd just chuck it in.

**Well how many different ways can you cook bully beef?**

Well, you can curry it or make rissoles out of it, or just plain stir fry it with veggies or something, I suppose, or just eat it cold,

27:00 slice it, lovely.

**Could you get any fruit at all on the island? I'm sorry, New Guinea?**

Not New Guinea, not much, no. In Ceylon, stacks of it. In New Guinea, no.

**Just wondering if you got into coconuts?**

I didn't like coconut juice, didn't like it at all. Never drank it. But what they used to do is get some currants and raisins, if you could get your hands on them, bore a hole

27:30 in the coconut and let it ferment, and sell it to the Yanks and they'd drink it. Used to have a kick like a mule. Jungle Juice, send you blind.

**Really?**

Oh yeah, easy as winking. Terrible stuff. They didn't care.

**Was it the Australians who were brewing the Jungle Juice and the Americans were buying it?**

Yes, they were buying it, trading, you know?

**And they couldn't get hold of any alcohol?**

They could

28:00 get torpedo juice, I don't know what that was used for in a torpedo, but it was alcohol in there, whether it was for a buoyancy tank or something to do with the steering, it was pretty powerful stuff, so they used to drink this torpedo alcohol, it was about 80%, 90% or something.

**Did you ever try it?**

No.

28:30 But they found a big stack of what's that rice stuff the Japs made? Forget the name of it. It's like a wine, a rice wine.

**Sake?**

Sake, that's it. We weren't allowed to drink that because they reckon it was poison, so we gave it a miss.

**Didn't believe them?**

Yeah, I believed

29:00 them. I don't know, I wasn't going to poison myself.

**Were there many Japanese on the island when you were there? Sorry, I mean ...**

Oh yes, there was thousands of them. They started eating one another, they ran out of food and everything.

**Did you see any of them?**

I saw two, there were some unfortunate incidents. There were six Indians

29:30 taking released prisoners, marching down the road, they were sent down and a cook shot them, he thought they were Japs. But there was two Japs in the hospital at Wewak, and they were in hospital beds, and a chap came in with a rifle, and he said to the nurse, "If you don't take this rifle off me, I'm going to shoot those two, right on the spot."

30:00 He said, "And I kid you not, I'll shoot them." And they took the rifle off him. He was away with the pixies. I saw three men outside the hospital tied down screaming and yelling, away, gone, mentally, absolute. Another bloke had a burst of bullets down here from a machine gun, waiting for transport, and I said, "Gee, stiff luck, mate."

30:30 "No fear", he said, "I'm going home, you're still stuck here." So that's the way war went.

**What sort of medical attention could they get?**

Sort of what?

**What sort of medical attention could men get in that area that you were in?**

The best they could get, the best.

**What was the hospital like?**

Very good, wonderful.

**Was it an American hospital or an Australian?**

No, Australians had their own.

**So could you actually**

31:00 **get to know any of the nurses?**

No.

**Why's that?**

Dunno.

**Were they over there and you were over here?**

I don't think they - whether they're allowed to get friendly with the troops or not, I'm not sure. But the Yanks had a big - at Aitape they had a big hospital there, and the American officers and that, the blokes used to talk to them, taking their photos with them and that. But no, I never

31:30 spoke to them, only on medical grounds.

**What sort of entertainment did you have when you were there?**

At the finish, we had Gracie Fields and when the heat went off with air raids, we had Bing Crosby and the White Christmas.

**You had Bing Crosby?**

Yes.

**That would have been pretty exciting.**

Yeah,

32:00 we used to sit, put a big white sheet up, and they'd shine it on and you could sit both sides and see the picture. And Gracie Fields. There was a couple of others came too, I forget who they were.

**Was it a combined Australian American concert?**

Probably was, I think the Yanks had their own, like Bob Hope and all that crew, they used to go there. Not to New Guinea

32:30 I don't think, they may have, I don't know, a lot of Pacific islands over there. I think it might have been a bit too dangerous for them high-priced blokes to go there.

**With the US hospital, where was that near?**

The what?

**Was there a US hospital?**

Yes. I told you, I don't know whether they'd come

33:00 from New Zealand to occupy Aitape, and then they were going to Guadalcanal or they came from Guadalcanal, I'm not quite sure. But the bloke I clobbered up with, Wayne Showman, he said, "Here's my torch," which I've still got, he said, "I'm going stateside." That means he's getting out of the army. But he'd drink anything, he was away with the pixies, absolutely, an alcoholic man.

**Was there a lot of drinking going on with the Americans?**

Oh

33:30 yes, I think it was with the Australians too, if they could get it, yes.

**Was it looked down on, to ...?**

Frowned upon?

**Yes.**

No, I don't think so, I think because the officers would be in it too, if they could get it, you know?

**Because you still had to continue your work, and you couldn't if you were drunk all the time.**

No, you weren't allowed to drink - you got a ration sometimes of beer, but you never

34:00 got to the stupid stage. It's only when you went on leave that you got stupid.

**Whereabouts would you go for leave?**

Up there, nowhere.

**You didn't?**

No, no, no.

**So you just had to stay put?**

Just had to stay put until you came home.

**What was morale like up there?**

Well in my little company, it was all right, you know, nobody was laughing their heads off, or anything like that, because they were fed up with it. But other than that we got on with our job and did the

34:30 job we were doing, and we didn't want to be messed around. When the war finished we were just glad to say well goodbye, dropped everything and went home.

**What was mail like up there?**

Mail?

**Mail.**

Pretty good, yeah.

**How would it arrive?**

I think it was flown over, probably by these Catalinas. Not certain on that. But there was plenty of

35:00 bombers going back and forth, from Australia, well I mean it's not that far, really. But we got mail pretty regularly. I used to get, I remember, a two shilling piece, I used to cut a piece out of it, and leave the crown, the Queen's crown and that, and get a piece of blue, and a piece of white toothbrush,

35:30 the handle, and make little colour patches, souvenirs out of them, that's when the war finished.

**How did you do that?**

Patience.

**That's pretty fiddly stuff.**

Yes, we just went - nothing to do, you see? We just did the weather reports, we kept them up, but the fighting had ceased, we got a ship load of ammunition in

36:00 at Wewak and the CO of the regiment, he said, "Well these Japs are going to get it whether they like it or not, I don't care if the war is over, they're going to get it." And I was listening to the news and one of the blokes said, "What's happening?" I said, "I don't know, I think the Japs have had it, they've dropped some sort of a bomb on Tokyo, on - not Tokyo..."

**Hiroshima.**

36:30 Yes, good on you.

**That's all right.**

And so - but talking about that, when duties were off, or we were having a lull, I used to listen to Tokyo Rose.

**What was that like?**

Oh, she was good, yeah, she was funny.

**What was funny about her?**

Well, anything would be funny in war time, but she used to say what the

37:00 Yanks are doing, with the girls and your wives, and all sorts of things like that, trying to break your morale down. And a lot of blokes did too, you know, they felt it, too. But I didn't have that worry because I didn't have any, so it didn't bother me. But a lot of the blokes suffered with it, if they could hear it. They didn't all hear it, but I heard it and I just told them, they said, "Oh big deal," you know? Like Lord

37:30 Haw Haw when he was doing it for the Germans.

**Did you treat that sort of propaganda with a pinch of salt?**

It was a propaganda thing.

**Yes, with a pinch of salt and a bit of a laugh?**

I took it with a bit of a laugh, yes.

**Was that generally how people ...?**

I think so.

**So it was only one or two ...?**

There wasn't too many heard it, because nobody had a wireless set that could pick up world news. But

38:00 we did have one.

**And how often would they be broadcasting? You know, like Tokyo Rose? Was it on the wireless every day?**

I think - I'm not quite sure now, it was pretty frequent I think. Because I could only listen when we weren't receiving. I used to tour around a bit on the dial, for something to do. But I'm not quite sure now, I just forget when she came on. But she had a good

38:30 speaking voice and that.

**So what would an average day be like for you when you were there?**

Well I'd get up and have breakfast, and then I'd jump in the ocean and do my washing and everything, and then I'd take over some of the weather reports and let the other blokes have a spell,

39:00 then I'd go down and talk to the chap putting the balloon up in the air.

**There was a balloon?**

Pardon?

**There was a balloon?**

Yes, wind velocity, yes. I'll show you, I've got some photos if you want to see them.

**OK. So you just stick the balloon up and you see?**

No, you fill it full of gas, and away it goes, up in the air, and you follow it with a theodolite.

**And it will tell you what the wind velocity is?**

Yes, it'll tell you, and they work it

39:30 out, how fast it's going, in what direction. Very vital for artillery and air force.

**And so after you've got the balloon up, what happens next in a day?**

Well, they take all the readings and they plot it on a chart, and we'd send it off to the artillery and the air force, I'd take it, or somebody would take it.

**Would you send it back out in Morse Code?**

40:00 The what?

**Would you send out like the weather broadcast, in Morse Code?**

It was, yes. Morse Code. It finished up, they told me, I don't know whether it's true, that some girls were on it, and they were very good at it, and they used to throw it at you really fast. So I was pretty good, I got up to 20 words a minute, which was pretty good, and that didn't bother me, I'd just - if I had to send a bit back, I pelted it

40:30 back at them again.

**So you suspected that they might be girls, and you didn't want girls getting the better of you?**

No, I don't know, I think it mostly finished up with machines, they had a machine that would just send it out. Very good at sending it was, very good. They could - they reckon that the spies during the war could tell who's sending them by

41:00 the touch of the way the thing's coming through, they'd know that so-and-so's sending that. I don't know. Could be true, could be false, wouldn't have a clue.

**So after you've sent the information out, what else happens in your day?**

The day?

**Yes.**

Nothing really I suppose.

**That's the end?**

Pardon?

**That's the end? You've got to have dinner and ...?**

Oh yes, talk, listen to a bit of the news or go for a swim or do a bit of spine bashing on the bunk.

**A bit of**

41:30 **what?**

Spine bashing.

**What's spine bashing?**

Sleeping.

**Oh right, got you.**

Yes, we used to call it spine bashing.

**So about what time would you go to bed?**

I don't know, about eight o'clock, I suppose.

**So a pretty early night?**

Well what else are you going to do? Nothing else on, there's no reception coming through, you could sit there with the earphones on and listen to somebody talking in

42:00 in Japanese or Chinese or something.

00:31 **Eddie, whereabouts did that friendly fire incident happen when you were at sea?**

The what?

**The friendly fire incident, when you were at sea, you mentioned it earlier?**

The fire?

**Friendly fire.**

That was between Aitape and Wewak.

**Yes, can you describe what happened in a bit more detail? We ran out of tape earlier.**

Well we were coming down the coast and going inland, in and out, and

01:00 just about halfway down we came in on the coast, inland, the Yanks were running the barges, and then these air force blokes came over fresh from America, and they bombed us, and nearly killed the padre and the senior officer, killed about 11 of the 11th Battalion,

01:30 yes.

**What was your reaction?**

Didn't like it, didn't like it one bit.

**During the actual shooting, where were you?**

I don't know where I was, to tell you the truth, I was around there somewhere.

**Below deck?**

Pardon?

**Were you below deck?**

I wasn't on a boat, I was inland.

**Oh, I thought you were at sea.**

No,

02:00 well we came in to sea, and then we pulled in, then we went out, and we came in again. Probably because of the terrain and where the Japs were, so we went in where the Japs weren't, but the artillery and the 11th Battalion were there, and they were looking after them, up in the hills. I was just reading the story of the 11th Battalion, and one officer was going out on the observation post and one of his own men shot him, thought he was a Jap.

02:30 Yes.

**How did that friendly fire affect relations between the Aussies and the Yanks?**

Don't think it bothered them. It happens. It just happens. Nothing happened to the Chinese officer either, nothing happened to the blokes that shot the Indians, thought they were Japanese.

03:00 As war went on, life got cheap, you know? Everybody felt the same, am I going to get home? Oh well, if I'm not, stiff bikkies. But you know, you wanted to get home, but a lot of them didn't make it. I was lucky, I made it. But you know, you don't know. And it got that way that did we care whether we got home or not?

03:30 And that's a thought that often comes into my head, did we care so much? We were there to do a job, so be it if we get killed. And I don't suppose I'm the only one that thought about that, but I thought about it quite a bit. I've seen it in the desert, death and destruction, stacks of it. Not so much in New Guinea,

04:00 but I've seen men out of their heads, probably finished up committing suicide or dying or something, they were away with the fairies, completely. So you don't know, in wartime you don't know what's going to happen, you think you know, but you don't know, don't know what's going to happen.

04:30 **You mentioned that there were a lot of blokes away with the fairies. Did you say there were troppo?**

Troppo, exactly, yes. That's the latest word coming in now, if you get Alzheimer's they reckon you're away with the pixies or the fairies. But no, that's true, yes, troppo, gone troppo, a lot of them. It was similar to I suppose shell shock in the First World

05:00 War, they were absolutely shocked out of their minds. Well, could you wonder? I was glad to get home.

**How were those blokes who went troppo treated?**

Very well, very very well. Oh, they're good staff there, nursing staff, doctors, did their best for them. But

- what can you do? Have they gone
- 05:30 too far, or what?
- What did yourself and other soldiers think of ranks alongside you going troppo?**
- Don't know, never discussed it much, don't know.
- Is it something you chose not to talk about?**
- Well I suppose that could be it, because you don't know whether you're going to go troppo yourself. See, something upsets you -
- 06:00 perhaps civil life or something, it backfires on you, it all depends on your makeup how you're going to handle it. I can handle it, but a lot of the poor blokes can't handle it. For some reason my genes or makeup I could handle it, but some of the blokes couldn't, they just went bad.
- Why were you**
- 06:30 **going to Wewak?**
- Well we wanted to chase the Japs out of it, which they did successfully, 6th division started at Aitape and they took over from the Yanks, and chased Colonel [Lieutenant-General] Adachi I think his name was, he handed over his sword at Wewak, and surrendered, because he said to the colonel, he
- 07:00 said, "Are you going to give me your sword or are we going to start this war again?" He said, "We're prepared to go on with it, so give us your sword or you'll be the first one to go." So he had no option, it's like what do you call it, the bloke in Singapore, the Japs didn't give him any option, just said to him, "You've got to surrender," which he did, and everybody that
- 07:30 went to Singapore got caught. But Brigadier Stephens, he didn't mess around with him, he said, "Give us your sword, or over you go." I think he finished up getting hung anyway. Very cruel.
- How much time did you spend in Wewak?**
- We were there for about a few
- 08:00 months, a few months there.
- What kind of patrol work were you doing there?**
- Soldiering?
- Were you doing any patrol work?**
- No, we were doing the same thing as we were doing before, weather reports. You didn't wander around.
- So did you leave the perimeter at all?**
- Did I what?
- Did you ever leave the perimeter of the headquarters?**
- Not much, nope.
- 08:30 Only once, I went and I came back, because you didn't know who was lurking in the jungle, or what was buried in the ground, put your foot on it, blow you up.
- Why did you leave the perimeter once?**
- Because Japs had been there the day before, and a bloke told me I was mad.
- Why had you decided to leave the perimeter and go out there in the jungle?**
- Why?
- 09:00 Curiosity, I suppose, having a look.
- What, did you just go for a look by yourself?**
- No, I had two friends with me.
- Tell me the story.**
- Well it was just a matter of somebody told us there was a Jap camp with all postcards in it, if you take a walk up the path there you'll see it. That path was 200 or 300 yards long, I suppose. This was at Aitape, and
- 09:30 an Australian patrol came down and gave us a blast for being there. But we weren't armed, we didn't carry any arms, there wasn't much to see anyway. The navy had the best lurk, they were getting all the tyres off the trucks, and cars, and taking them home to sell to the taxi drivers.

**Really?**

Yes, it's a fact.

**What other sort of souveniring was**

10:00 **going on up there?**

There was nothing - I didn't have - I used to make souvenirs when things quietened right down, used to make dinner gongs, the smoke shells had a brass cone on the top of them, with all the timing on them, you'd take those home and you make a little thing like that and hang a gong on it, and get a bullet with a handle on it and make a

10:30 little gong, dinner gong. Some were melting down Perspex out of the Jap planes and making souvenirs out of that, and the fuselage, the aluminium, making maps of New Guinea, they were very clever at it too. A lot of souvenir-making went on in the finish.

**I notice you have a sword near the front door.**

Yes.

**Did you souvenir that?**

Nope, I don't know

11:00 where that came from, it was given - I don't know where it originated from, to tell you the truth, from New Guinea somewhere, but it was in the house when I took it over, so some Yanks or someone must have brought it here and left it. I didn't bring it, couldn't carry anything, we just left everything there, in New Guinea, beautiful wireless sets and everything, the

11:30 whole bit.

**Why do you keep the sword near the front door?**

In case - I told you, if somebody breaks I'll stick it through him. A chap came into the Captain Stirling one day and he said he's buying Japanese swords. There was one bloke there, he got shot by the Japanese, five of them line up in the river, and shot, and he was the only one that survived. He said, "I've got one." "Oh good," he said. He said, "Well, bring a Japanese to stick on the end of it, you can

12:00 have it." Yeah. He nearly died. It's got no souvenir value or nothing, roughly, just something somebody's left there, I don't know how it came here, to tell you the truth.

**What do you think of the Japanese?**

Hate them. Hate them.

**Where does your hatred come from?**

Taken so much of my life, didn't

12:30 kill me, but they sure took a lot of my life. Same as the Italians or the Germans, but I don't hate them as much as I do the Japanese, for some reason or other. Making me go and live in that stinking jungle. And I got into my dear friend we went to New Zealand, and I was grizzling about the Japs, and every grey-headed Jap that came, I said, "I wonder if he's one them that belted the blokes on the Burma Railway," and she told me

13:00 that - she said, "You're mucking up your head, you're messing mine up too, get it out of your system. It's gone, history." Can't.

**What stories were you hearing about the Japanese brutality in those prison camps while you were up ...**

None. Only when I came home. Only when I came home. Except for the blokes that were troppo.

13:30 No. No.

**What do you think of the younger Japanese generation?**

Well they're probably all right, just like you, they don't hurt anybody, they had nothing to do with the war, it's the old blokes I've got a snout on, don't like 'em. Don't know why. It'll go out of my system, I suppose.

14:00 **Maybe you can get it out of your system today, who knows?**

I can't, no. I don't know what it is, there's some things in life you hate, and some things in life you love, and it's one of those things of nature, you can't, you know - like my friend, he went into the army with flat feet, came out with flat feet and got a big fat pension. So it's the luck of the draw. But I don't

14:30 hate him, he was smart. Oh dear.

**How would you compare fighting in the jungle to fighting in the desert, Eddie?**

Oh, no comparison, the jungle's worse. If you were walking along in the dark in the jungle, and all of a sudden a big jungle rat falls down, jumps down near you, your hair goes like this. It doesn't happen in the desert,

15:00 it doesn't happen. And you hear so many tales about the Japanese, you know, they'll grab you and slit your throat before you know what's happened to you, and they're gone. And a lot of them speak with Australian and American accents, see? And they caught a lot of Yanks like that, speaking with an American accent, and the poor Yanks thought they were Americans, and got up, and got shot.

15:30 The same could happen with Australians. Yeah.

**Apart from the fact that it was war time, do you think the jungle itself played a big part in those blokes going troppo?**

No, I don't think it would, nope. No, the people that did all right out of the war in Japan - in New Guinea, were

16:00 those that stayed behind and got all the copper wire, the smart ones, took all the signal wire down out of the trees, and all the scrap and that, and sold it, made a mint. My friend Dick Gibson had his cousin over here when I came on leave, and he said, "I hope the war never stops." I said, "I've a good mind to smash your teeth in, but I'm curious, why?" He said, "Because I've got a contract making batteries."

16:30 I said, "Now I should smash your teeth in." I don't know what stopped me, I really don't know. Only because I knew them. And that's a great thing to say to a soldier who's just come back, hey? Three years overseas, he hopes the war keeps going forever, because he's got a battery contract. I don't know why I didn't smash his face in.

**It's appalling to think that he was profiting out of**

17:00 **the ...**

Of course he's profiting, a lot of them made money out of the war, stacks of them, not only here, England, everywhere. A couple of my friends were manpowered out of the army and they were making munitions, making a packet, every week. Plenty of money. I was on five bob a day, and doing the rough stuff. But, that's the way it goes. However,

17:30 they're dead now, and I'm still alive. Justice perhaps?

**Just deserts. How long were you in the islands?**

When did we go over? At the end of '43, and we finished up there in

18:00 '45, so it'd be a year, 18 months, something like that.

**What did you miss most about home?**

Oh, well you hear of blokes being institutionalised you know, and you get that way in the army, that, was going home going to be any better than where I am? Because

18:30 your friends are gone, everything is, you know, you've got to start a new life, you've got to - as luck happened I had a job to go to, I was told to get it quick because they were going like - you know, jobs were getting scarce, so it's a toss up on your make-up, how you feel, you know? We had a bloke at the dance,

19:00 and he was belted to pieces by the Japs, and he said, "They were only doing their duty, they were only doing as they were told." And I said, "Oh, for God's sake, what's wrong with you?" But he forgave them, they belted hell out of him. Not me, I won't forgive them for causing me to go out there for half of my life, my army life.

**How long were you in,**

19:30 **it would have been Wewak after you heard the Japanese had surrendered?**

Oh, a few months, that's all. They wanted to get us out, save carting stuff in there.

**You mentioned you left a lot of good equipment behind.**

No, all that was left, we just walked out.

**At Wewak?**

Yes, took our chip bags and our personal stuff and left the rest there.

**Was that difficult to waste all that good equipment?**

20:00 Well I don't know what happened to it. What's the good of it? You could buy a fighter plane for 250 dollars, what are you going to do with it?

**If you could get it home, I suppose.**

Yeah. I mean now if you could buy one for 250 dollars you'd make money. But if it's in - look at the Jeeps, the Yanks made a jetty out of Jeeps, to run their barges in. All the rest of the stuff after the war was dumped over

20:30 the other side of Garden Island, we weren't allowed to sell it. Although probably some did sneak through on the market.

**You must have thought it was a waste though?**

Of course, but you can't - of course it was a waste, all that good material, but what are they going to do with it? The war's finished, it's only built for war. The vehicles,

21:00 unless they were modified, they were no good for civilian life, they drank petrol like it was going out of fashion, and they were good 4-wheel drives for going through mud, but other than that, no used for them. Not comfortable, well you've seen them on Anzac Day, the little Jeeps, they've been done up. I used to drive one around a bit in New Guinea, good for what they were built for, but useless for anything else.

21:30 So I don't know.

**What about your radio equipment?**

Left it there, don't know what happened to it, just turned the set off, left it. Memories, left 'em, not all of them, definitely glad to get home and start a new life. Didn't know what to expect when I got home.

**How long did it take you to get home?**

22:00 Well I'll tell you the story about that. I met this lass Beryl Lord, I told you, but her mother didn't want anything to do with drunken soldiers or anything like that, so I got on a troop train and got home at about a couple of months after, I think. We landed in Brisbane and

22:30 they put us on trucks and gave us a march through the city at dinner time, and we went into Yeerongpilly and then we got leave pass to the staging camp at the Showgrounds at Claremont, and that's where I finished up.

**Tell me about the parade.**

It was in trucks, we were all stuck on trucks, and some had Jap flags and so forth, and we were driven

23:00 around Brisbane and straight to Yeerongpilly, and just given a leave pass to go where we liked. And I went out to this lass's place, and spent a couple of days there with them, got bored stiff, and went into town and got full. So I was on a troop train the next day.

**Did they ask you to leave?**

Yes, it is hard to believe, but true.

23:30 Truth is better than fiction.

**Were you unpopular with the family when you got full?**

Didn't want to know me, nope. I met some of the blokes there, and they said, "Come out to the sergeants' mess," and I said to them, "I can't go, I'm staying with this family and they don't like anybody that's been drinking." "Oh God, oh well, do what you like." I said, "I'm coming." Didn't mean that ...

**So**

24:00 **they asked you to pack your bags, did they?**

Yes, more or less. Oh, I packed them myself. My heart was back here.

**How did you get back to Western Australia, Eddie?**

Train.

**What kind of ...?**

Took about eight days or nine days to get back.

**What was the atmosphere like on board?**

Let's

24:30 get home.

**Were you travelling with a few buddies on the train?**

No, not many, no. Some of the blokes I didn't know, they were in the - infantry blokes, we had one destination, was WA, some air force and so forth. I was glad to get home when I got home, went through all the paraphernalia

25:00 that you go through to be discharged.

**Can you describe that, what happens?**

Yes, they give you a book and they mark off all your - you go through medicals, and if you're OK then you get a - if you've got a rifle you hand it in, a gas mask, hand it in, and you can just go - it takes about a fortnight to go through all the

25:30 procedures and get tests and medicals and that. Quite busy, the old blood out of the ear, there's nothing in it.

**How long was it before you were discharged?**

I reckon about a fortnight or more.

**Were you at Claremont for that fortnight?**

Yes.

**What was the atmosphere like there?**

What was what?

**What was the atmosphere like at Claremont?**

They were all glad to get home.

**All the blokes running amok?**

Run amok?

**Yes.**

26:00 No, I don't think.

**Were you allowed to go to the pub?**

Oh yeah.

**Where'd you go? To the pub in Claremont?**

Yeah, the Captain Stirling, the Highway, yeah.

**Were those pubs full of ex- well, returned servicemen?**

Probably, yes. We used to go for about I suppose about a month after we all came home, we used to go to the Landborough Bar opposite the Town Hall in Merrick Street,

26:30 of a Saturday morning, play darts, but then as life went on and we married and that, it was all - Anzac Day we used to go to each others' houses, and like they'd come out to my place and we'd go out to Bassendean or somewhere. And after a while that petered out because the family came up and a few of my section died, so I just gave it away, and we stopped.

27:00 But there's a few I visit, a couple now, but that's all. It's all gone, history, all gone.

**What were your plans when you were discharged? What work were you looking for?**

Well I went back to what I was doing before the war, exactly the same.

**Was that something you had to plan, or was it already planned for you?**

Well we had to sign a leave, sign an authority for leave for the duration of hostilities, I think that was the

27:30 wording, or similar like that, with the Metropolitan Water Supply. So I signed that, which meant that they paid me holiday pay, not full pay, just holiday pay. So when I came home, I met - my brother was with me, and he had a handful of notes, and I said, "Where'd you get that?" He said, "I've been up to head office, and they paid me my holiday pay. Go

28:00 up and you'll get it." I mean it wasn't any big deal, it was only a few quid, but it was money. We got some other money paid by the Vets Affairs too, I forget what they call it now, about 350 pound or something. Long service pay or something.

**Were your brothers discharged at the same time as you?**

I'm not

28:30 sure on that point, because he left me, I don't know where he got to. I did hear he was up in the cipher, my other brother, I don't know where he was discharged, but he married and lived in Mount Magnet.

**Did you see each other after the war?**

Not much.

**Did you go your own way?**

We all went our own way. Well, on my part, there was plenty

29:00 of overtime coming on, because they wanted to rebuild the water supply, and I was grabbing every bit I could get my hands on, I needed it, because we wanted to get married and have children, and that's the way it went.

**Tell me the story how you met Audrey.**

At Claremont High School. I used to go to the club, I saw her in the

29:30 distance at Claremont High School, but then I left and I got a part time job before I was waiting to get a job at the Water Supply, or it was after, I forget, as a mechanic down at Claremont, a motorbike mechanic. And she used to come with her friend and talk to me, and then she'd take her friend up here and said, "I'm going to marry Eddie and live in that house".

30:00 So we did. And the first one I met on the trolley bus was Audrey. So we had a pretty happy life together, till cancer took over.

**So sorry, where did you run into each other? On a trolley bus?**

Pardon?

**You ran into each other on a trolley bus?**

Yeah. Do you remember the trolley buses?

**No.**

You don't.

30:30 They replaced the trams, they didn't run on rails, but they ran on electricity with two poles up, and those grey poles you see along the Stirling Highway, they used to be trolley bus poles. And Nedlands is the only one that's got any left. And they went right up to Swanbourne and turned round and came back, it was silent, ran beautifully, comfortable. And they cut out the trams in 1955.

**It sounds a pity they**

31:00 **never kept the trolley buses.**

I don't know why they give them away, I think they called it visual pollution, all the wires.

**I think the motor car companies might have had something to do with it.**

Yes, they might have done, I don't know. But they were lovely things to ride in.

**So you bumped into Audrey on the trolley bus, after all those years?**

Yes. The first I met that I knew. So we

31:30 got together again, we used to go out and go to the pictures and she worked at a delicatessen down in Claremont, down alongside the picture show there.

**Where was the picture show in Claremont?**

Pardon?

**Did you say Nedlands or Claremont?**

Claremont. There was one in every suburb.

**Where was the Claremont picture show?**

Down - they call it Claremont Arcade now, just near Bunnings.

32:00 And the other one was the open air pictures, that's run by Zenith Musicians now, that was the open air pictures. So we used to go to them. Sixpenny box of Fantales and Bob's your uncle. Big spender, I was.

**Did you have any difficulty settling back into civilian life, Eddie?**

32:30 It was strange. Clothes were the worst part, you couldn't buy clothes. I had to go to Kalgoorlie to get that suit made, because my sister knew a tailor up there, to get married in. Never had a suit. Only had army clothes.

**That's a long way to go to find a tailor.**

That's right. Well there was plenty of tailors but they had no cloth, or they didn't want to sell it, they had

33:00 too many mates that wanted suits. But I believe some people got suits out of the army, I don't know. I didn't get one. Maybe I wasn't smart enough. I didn't get any tools, because I had a job. A lot of people, a lot of them got loans for houses, but I didn't because I owned one. I owned this.

**I take it you're the youngest boy in the family?**

Youngest, I am,

33:30 the last.

**What were the arrangements for you to take over the house?**

Mum left me it in her will, see?

**The youngest boy?**

Well I was the one that looked after her. My brother Charlie kicked up a fuss, but my sister had a good yarn to him, and told him that he'd never put a penny into the house all the time, and Eddie was the one that looked after Mum, and Eddie is the one that should get the house.

34:00 So he just melted away into the darkness, and I got the house. He never contributed anything, in any of his life. He was away up at Mount Magnet working there, and going round the gold fields trying to make money. I don't know where the lass came from he married, but they reared a family in Mount Magnet, Kalgoorlie.

**What about your sister?**

34:30 My sister? She married a - first in 1924 to a chap named Les Whaling, and he was in charge of the Eagle & Globe steel company here, he ran it, it was in Wellington Street. He was a First World War man, and he went melancholy, he went completely melancholy,

35:00 didn't know who he was or anything. So he passed on, and then her next venture into marriage was a bloke named Kilpatrick, I think. He was a seaman. My sister worked in the bar, and she was a good barmaid. And then they split up, and he nicked off. And then she met another English seaman, Bluey Godmore, he used to do convoy work up in Durask [?] during the

35:30 war. And she couldn't stand him, but they finished up getting married, and he was the best of the lot, used to look after her and that. And then he had a bad stroke, and he went, he's gone. My other brother Gus died of cancer, Jack drank himself to death, he

36:00 collapsed in a heap, and Stan, he just got old and died. He said he didn't want to live anyway, he'd had enough. And he was about 85. So that's the way it goes in life.

**So you're the survivor of the**

36:30 **family?**

Yes, I'm the survivor.

**How important is Anzac Day to you Eddie?**

Very important.

**What do you do on Anzac Day?**

We used to go to each others' places, but I always carried our banner. Two years now, a little girl cadet wanted to take it off me and carry it. I said, "No dear, not this, this is mine, I'm going to carry it". Yeah.

**And what do you think of the growing**

37:00 **popularity of Anzac Day Eddie?**

I think it's great that they should remember the Anzacs, you know? Some of them reckon it's a lot of baloney I suppose, it's history, forget it. But you can't forget it if you were mixed up in it. I can't forget it. I wasn't at Gallipoli, but I've seen enough in the desert and in New Guinea to satisfy me that - you know, I hope the young people do remember it.

37:30 This flag burning business, I would have gone and wrapped it around the joker's head if I'd have caught him, no hesitation. Complete. I'd have gone burkers, absolutely troppo, I couldn't have helped it.

**Well it's an insult to the men and women who've served this country, isn't it?**

Pardon?

**It's an insult to the men and women who have served this country.**

It's an insult to anybody, whether you served or not. Absolute

38:00 insult. We've got no - a lot of young people, they don't seem to have any pride in anything. I think their attitude to life is one door shuts, another one opens. They get greedy, want everything yesterday. I don't say all of them, some of them are good hard working - but my experience with some of them, you don't want that money, give it to me.

38:30 **What lessons did you learn from your service, Eddie? That perhaps a few young people could learn?**

I don't think you could teach anything to the young people about war, but companionship, depending on - not always, but in a tight corner you could depend on your friends, if you got into the rough stuff.

39:00 And you had mates that you visited all the time, and went out with, had a few beers perhaps. But there was always that companionship there, and that feeling of security, that if you went out on leave and a bit of a blue started, you know that you've got somebody to help you.

39:30 Never always started, but sometimes it did. But those are the sort of things that you miss when you come back into civil life, you're looking for them all the time. You found them - I found them in Audrey, and my friends, but it wasn't the same. So what I'm trying to get at, it's not exactly the same feeling. But you know, when you're living with men for

40:00 five or six years, it sort of grows on you. As I said, I just wanted to hear the girls talk when I came home. Never mind chasing them round and trying to get onto them, just to hear them made me happy. Just to hear them talk, get back in the Australian way of life. Didn't last long because work commitments and getting on with it and raising a family, takes all the

40:30 other thoughts out of your mind, you've got to get on with your life. As luck happened, I had three lovely kids, well educated, they're making more money than I ever did, so they're quite happy. I've got seven granddaughters, had one grandson, the poor little bloke died, but they're all well educated, making good money.

41:00 **Well the family's future sounds very bright Eddie ...**

The only thing is that when my sons go, the Roberts name will disappear.

**A few girls in the family?**

Because there's nobody to take it on.

**Well, I'd just like to hope that you keep dancing and keep driving Eddie -**

Oh, so do I.

**- and thank you for spending the day with us, and sharing your experiences with the archives.**

It's been a pleasure, I hope I've helped you some way or another.

**You have, it's been a pleasure meeting you. Thanks very much.**

Thank you for being so kind and listening to

41:30 me.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**