

Australians at War Film Archive

Joseph Madeley (Joe) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 19th April 2004

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1856>

Tape 1

00:39 Run down on...?

The beginning of your life to where you are now in point form.

Over a period of what, ten minutes?

However long it takes.

You want my name and all that sort of thing?

Got all that, but for the record can we have it all on the tape? Off you go.

Right.

01:00 Well my name's Joe Madeley. Joseph Noble Madeley I was christened, Noble being a family name of course. And I was born on a farm in a little place called Coreen down near Albury, Corowa way. I was born on the farm. My Dad was a soldier from the First [World] War... he'd do a soldier settler's farm away near West Wyalong. A little place called Weethalle. And when I was about four we moved up there and I lived on the farm, grew up on the farm of

01:30 course. In those days I could drive a team of horses when I was about nine or ten. I did my schooling there at Weethalle school. Then I went to Yanko Agricultural High School but I was only there for twelve months and Dad was sick, had to come back on to the farm. So I left school when I was fourteen and worked on the farm. I was... Well I was the second son, I had a brother two years older than me.

02:00 And my job mainly was to trap the rabbits and go around and fix fences and look after the sheep and that sort of thing. And then when I became... Dad was a returned soldier from the First War. I was always very interested in the army and I was always very proud of the fact that he was a soldier. And as soon as the war broke, by then I was about eighteen, nearly nineteen and I wanted to join up but Dad wouldn't let me.

02:30 He said, "No, no, the war'll be over by Christmas anyhow." But I finally persuaded him and he let me join up because I'd never been away from the farm. And I thought there was a bit of excitement, too, getting away. So I joined up in Wagga Wagga in New South [Wales] with a lot of other Riverina chaps. We trained there for a few months and moved to Tamworth for final training. Come

03:00 home on final leave from there and then sailed to the Middle East - Went over on the Queen Elizabeth. And we arrived in Palestine, did a little training there and by that time our 6th Division had moved up the desert and chased the Italians - only Italians there then - right back up as far as Benghazi. And then we moved up and relieved them and they went to Greece, the 6th

03:30 Division and we took over the frontline positions. But by that time Germany had realised that the Italians weren't holding their own over in the Middle East or North Africa, so they sent the Afrika Korps over there under General Rommel, and he was a different proposition. In no time he chased us right back into Tobruk. We were in Tobruk for eight months, of course.

04:00 Saw the siege right out. Came back out of Tobruk after we were relieved, did a little time up in Syria, little bit of leave when the Battle of El Alamein started and they sent us back to El Alamein. By that time the 6th and 7th Division had come home. We stayed on for the battle of El Alamein. When the battle of El Alamein was over we had a big parade in Gaza on the airstrip where we were farewelled by

04:30 General Alexander. We came home on the Aquitania. We arrived in Sydney on the 27th February, which was marvellous coming in through the [Sydney] Heads, too, just as the sun was rising. And after a little leave we went up to the camps again up on the [Atherton] Tablelands. Did training there for two or three months then we sailed to Milne Bay up in New Guinea training there, amphibious landing and all that sort of

- 05:00 business. Oh, we did quite a lot of that before we went actually in Cairns. And then we did the first amphibious landing since Gallipoli. We landed at Lae and we didn't strike much opposition there and headed towards the township of Lae. Before we got there, the 7th Div [Division] were coming from the other direction and they got there before us, which has always been the disappointment to us. And then we
- 05:30 turned back from Lae and marched up... back to... Where did we come back to? Oh, some little place just back from Lae, and did more training there. And they decided to do another amphibious landing at Finschhafen, which was further on, further north in New Guinea. So back on board the ship, landed at Finschhafen, a lot more fighting there of course. And after we'd
- 06:00 taken Finschhafen, which we were fighting for a couple of weeks I suppose, we took a place called Kakagog and then up the Sattelberg Road and went inland and very heavy fighting there. But that's where Derrick got a VC [Victoria Cross] with the 48th Battalion. We came back onto the coast and chased the Japs up along the coast up to a place called Blucher Point. That's as far as we went. Then we came back home
- 06:30 again. That's another funny thing. I was born on the 28th February and we came into Sydney, got off the ship in Sydney Harbour on my birthday and we got on the ship to come home again from New Guinea on my birthday, the 28th February. Came back to Australia, had a little bit of leave and then went back onto the Tablelands again; we were training then. We were training for twelve months. We were on the Tablelands and absolute boring it was. We felt we were
- 07:00 wasting our time there. But we finally... They loaded us up around about Anzac Day in 1945 and took us to Morotai, to Morotai Island, where we were... Although we didn't strike any Japanese there, but they were on the island but we were sort of the front run doing patrols. We boarded a ship again there and we invaded Borneo.
- 07:30 We landed at Brunei. Brunei Bay. Once again there was very little opposition. The 17th Battalion landed before us. We were the second wave and a couple of wounded Japanese that was about all. But it must have been easy because the day after we landed General MacArthur landed. He came ashore and some of our generals. We were there for about eight or ten days and then
- 08:00 they took us back on board again and we made another amphibious landing at a place Lutong, which was the oil fields. Before we landed the Japs had lit all the oil field and there was... Oh, it was a spectacular sight all going up in flames, the oil fields. But by evening our flag was flying over the refinery anyhow. Then we pushed up on the coast towards a little place called Muara. And we finished up on a place called Canada Ridge.
- 08:30 That's where we had the last contact with the Japanese. We did patrols out down the main road which went inland - Reim Road. Made contact a few times but not a great deal of fighting, but we had a few Japs killed. And that's where we were when we heard that the atom bomb had been dropped on Japan and the war was... declared the war finished. There wasn't a great deal of excitement because there were still Japanese
- 09:00 about and they were still shooting at us even though the war was over - they didn't know. But after a few days it all quietened down. I think we were more excited when we heard that we didn't have to have our letters censored - you could write home whatever you liked - and more of a cheer went up there than when the war finished. And by that time they were bringing soldiers on the five year plan. Five years overseas, five years' service, and at least
- 09:30 four years I think it was, overseas. You got points for so many years in the army and so many years overseas. And if you were married you got more points and children were points. Well of course I was only single and I was only young, but I had the five years up so I was one of the last to come home out of the 13th Battalion. And I was discharged on the 5th December. I went 1945... I went straight back on to the farm but I couldn't settle down on the farm driving
- 10:00 up and down the paddock on a tractor on your own - no-one to talk to after all those years. So I went back to Sydney and got different odd jobs. I started off as a tram conductor, as a matter of fact, because it was the easiest job to get. Then had many, many jobs. Cane cutting, and I worked in the mines and I... Oh, I even sold vacuum cleaners at one stage. And I finished up down in Melbourne. And
- 10:30 I got a job with a motor car firm assembling motor cars. I had no idea how you assembled motor cars. I never heard of them because I'd been on the farm all my life. But I was going to stay there till I got settled in Melbourne and I finished up I was there for twelve years and became a foreman. And we had a franchise to build Mercedes Benz cars and they put me in charge of that, and I got sent to Germany to see how the job was done and get to know people over there that used to send us all over the spare parts and what have you, so they'd know
- 11:00 who they were in contact with. And then when the franchise finished of the Mercedes Benz, by that time my Dad had gone blind with glaucoma and he'd sold the farm and was living in West Wyalong. And I thought it was a good chance to come back. He wanted me to come back to New South. So I came back to New South and got another job in the motor car industry assembling motor cars, and I was only going to stay there a few weeks, too, until I got another job,

- 11:30 but I finished up there for ten years. Then by that time we'd built a house at Eastwood. Oh they closed down where I was working. I could have gone to Leyland Motors but I said, "No," and I finished the last ten years working with RCA Records making records and cassettes and all that, and I finished up as a production manager with RCA Records. And that's where I was when I retired.
- 12:00 Since retiring, I've been very active with the Rats of Tobruk Association. 9th Div Association, and also the 2/13th Battalion, of course, who I keep in close touch with. And travelled around. My wife and I went overseas three or four times and I've been on a couple of pilgrimages back to Tobruk and I've been over to Poland when they launched a new medal. At that stage I was the
- 12:30 International President of the Rats of Tobruk and I got invited there for the launching of the medal. And I've been to Afrika Korps reunion over in Germany. And now I'm looking forward to going back on a cruise up the Mediterranean and into Tobruk and Tripoli and all those places in this coming November. That's where I am now.

That's a fantastic summary, thank you.

- 13:00 **Now we're going to go right back to the beginning. Tell us about your father. He was in the First World War?**

Yeah my Dad was born in Shropshire, England. They were both born in Shropshire in England. And Dad, my Dad's father was a master builder but Dad didn't like the building and he was working for a butcher and he became a butcher. But when he was about nineteen... He always wanted to own his own land. He'd heard all about Australia so

- 13:30 at nineteen he came to Australia. He'd met my mother by then, of course, and I suppose they were childhood sweethearts really. And he came to Australia and did a lot of farming and share farming work to get to know all about the farming business. And by then the war he was butcher on Stud Park Station out near Jerilderie, away out west, Deniliquin I think it was.
- 14:00 And the war started so Dad joined up. And he was in the 15th Field Company Engineers, which he was always very proud of to tell me. Then he was sent overseas and went to France of course. He fought in France and Belgium and Villers-Bretonneux and Ypres I think they call it now. And Amiens and on the Somme he was.
- 14:30 And on his first leave back - he got leave back to England - he and Mum were married. He'd sent her an engagement ring from Australia before, while he was working of course. They were married when he got back to England. After the war... He got gassed fairly badly but it didn't sort of affect him greatly after the war; he seemed to get over it okay. And after
- 15:00 the war they packed up as soon as he got his... No, not before... He married my mother as I say on his first leave. So by then Jack was born - that's my eldest brother - and they came straight out to Australia. And Dad got a job as a share farmer working on a farm out near Corowa, a little place called Coreen. He worked for a Doctor Bird. And
- 15:30 that's where I was born. Mind you I was born about three or four months, five months I think it was after they got to Australia. And I was born on the farm - at that stage there was no hospital handy. Dad used to have an old horse and cart and go into the little town called Daysdale and brought the bush nurse out in the horse and cart out to the farm, so I was born on the farm. And so were my next brother and my sister and another younger brother,
- 16:00 Roy. Now he worked for this farmer, for this chap Dr Bird, for about twelve months, two years, then he moved to another farm called Wongamong, which is still there right near Coreen. And he put in for soldier's settlers property for those returned soldiers. They became available up around the Riverina so Dad put in for one
- 16:30 and he won one of these blocks. So as soon as he stripped the crop where he was down in Coreen he packed. And we had two wagons, covered wagons, and he drove one and my uncle drove the other one and we had another chap on a pony, he drove all the loose horses and cattle. And my mother came behind on the old spring cart
- 17:00 with all the food on it. And she'd go ahead and work out how far they'd get that night, where there was a waterhole to feed the horses, and she'd make camp there, and then when we arrived the food was all ready. And of a night-time we'd just sleep on the ground wherever we were. The weather stayed good, thank goodness. And we were ten nights on the road getting up to where the farm was. Each night we slept on the side of the road. And
- 17:30 I can always remember... Well I don't remember but I've been told plenty of times, I was only four at that stage, that was 1924. And the tenth night we stopped just outside of the farm. Now the farm was... When I say a farm it was just scrub there was no... Nothing had been cleared; it was all timber. In fact we had to use the axes and chop trees down so as you could get on to the farm
- 18:00 it was that thick with timber. And Dad had a chap come and put a boundary fence, but for a start up he just had a bell on the horses and on the cattle so as you could find them the next morning. And we slept in a bit of a lean-to tent we had and us boys all slept under the wagon, of course. And we were like that until Dad and my uncle managed to build a bit of a hut with a dirt floor and just an iron walls and iron

roof. Cold as

18:30 charity in the winter and like an oven in the summer time.

How many children were there?

We finished up with nine. At that stage there was... When we travelled up from Coreen there was five of us and my eldest brother was six, so we were a bit of a handful. But we had some marvellous, funny experiences on that trip up to, while we were travelling up. Like once the

19:00 cart that my mother was driving, the belly strap goes from one shaft around underneath the horse to the other shaft to stop the shafts tipping up. And it broke and up it went and tipped her and the babe in her arms, and all the littlies out. And she had a poddy calf in the back and also a big boiler of stew for our tea that night. And from all accounts the boiler finished on the poddy calf's head like a helmet.

19:30 But anyhow that sort of thing happened. And another time the horses got away and Dad had to chase them on foot and rounded them all up. But us children thought it was wonderful of course. It was great fun.

What was your childhood like on the farm? What did you do?

We had a wonderful life on the farm really. We didn't have anything like toys and all this sort of thing. I remember I didn't have a pushbike or anything; we made all our own things. If we wanted

20:00 a wheelbarrow we made it, or scooters we made them. And from a very early age we all had our jobs we had to do. I had to trap the rabbits; that was my job. As soon as I was old enough to set a rabbit trap I had to do the traps because the rabbits were terrible. I can always remember Dad told us about this... A chap... He was always trying to get a rabbit trapper on the place to clean the rabbits out. And this chap arrived late one evening with a horse and sulky and

20:30 a few rabbit traps hanging underneath and he had a dog beside him of course. And Dad... He said... Dad welcomed him in... Of course it was always lovely to see a visitor. And the chap said, "What are the rabbits like here?" And Dad said, "There's millions of them." And he said, "Well I'm the rabbit inspector." And they used to come around and if you had too many rabbits you could get fined for it. And Dad said, "Oh well you'd better come and have a look at them." Anyhow he said, "We've got to do something

21:00 about those rabbits." But he stayed the night of course and had dinner and breakfast with us. And we made our own fun, like we could ride horses, we had ponies and we could ride them when we were only just old enough to sit on. Used to have to get a box or something alongside so as we could on board. And we chased... We went rabbit trapping and we had dogs and we'd chase a fox, and we used to... We all learnt

21:30 to swim in the dam. We'd go in there, no clothes on of course, all in as we were. And it was... And then we had... The nearest neighbours were about two miles away and there were some boys there. Sometimes they'd come to our place, sometimes we'd go to theirs. And our school, we used to walk to school. We had the school just about on the corner of our property for a start off. It was one of those subsidised schools. You had to have thirteen children there to keep it open.

22:00 If you didn't have thirteen they'd close the school down, so of course... We just had thirteen and two left, so I used to piggyback my younger brother - he wasn't really old enough to go to school. He was only about four but we'd take him along too to make the number up, and another family did the same thing with their little boy and we kept the numbers up. But it was... We had a real...

22:30 And even though the Depression years we still had our own sheep and Dad'd kill a sheep and we had a field of our own vegetables. We had our own cow so we had our own milk and we could make butter and we had... And same with fruit - we had a couple of fruit trees although water was scarce. We used to cart water. So we lived fairly well. Only plain, but it was... And then later on

23:00 of course they had a picture theatre in Weethalle - the little town was called Weethalle. It was eight and a half miles away. And the pictures used to be on a Saturday night. We I'd sell rabbit skins to get enough money to go and my brother Jack, he was a little bit older, any dead sheep he'd take all the wool and you could sell the wool off the dead sheep. And another thing we used to sell was charcoal to the blacksmith. They always used charcoal in those days for their fires.

23:30 And we'd sell charcoal. We might get a shilling or sixpence for a bag of charcoal. Well that was enough to go to the pictures. All those sort of things. We had a happy life. It was very good. Life was rough but it was good. I think it was a good grounding for us and learning to look after yourself. Like I could go out of a night around

24:00 the rabbit traps and no problem of finding my way home. I could tell by looking at the stars, home must've be over in that direction. And so I think it must've fitted me out well for the later years when I was in the army when we had to do it a bit rough. I was used to that sort of living. Well I suppose I was. And then I did... Then our school closed down and we had to go into Weethalle school, which meant driving the horse and sulky in every morning,

24:30 nine miles. Get up early and yoke the horse up. Jack's job was to yoke the horse up and I had to milk the cow and my younger brother Bill, he had to cut up kindling wood, that was the morning wood to light the fire of course for the next morning. We each had our own jobs.

What other jobs did you have apart from milking the cow?

For me, milking the cow and then bagging up chaff for the horses. And helping the

25:00 littlies get their things ready for school. And washing, we always had to wash the dishes of course of an evening. That was all of our jobs. One washed, one wiped and one put the dishes away, not that we have many dishes, it was generally pannikins and tin plates. No fear of breaking them. And later on of course there was the harvesting that you had to drive the horse along on the harvester. Or you'd drive the ploughing and the sowing the wheat.

25:30 And carting wheat into town to the silos after the silos were built, or before the silos it all used to be stacked in the railway yards for the trucks'd come up and cart it back into the city. But there was always... And fences to be mended. Like we had floods and it washed all the fences away and you had to put the fence up.

26:00 Then we had plague of grasshoppers like they're having nowadays apparently. They were terrible. So many things happened that could go wrong on a farm. I know, I can remember Dad, he was only at the second choice to get that farm. And the chap that had the first choice he came and had a look at it and refused to take it. Well years later with floods, and grasshopper plagues and rabbit plagues and emus and kangaroos... Dad used to curse that chap

26:30 and say, "Well why in the hell didn't he take the farm? It would've saved me all this."

What were your schooldays like? What did you learn at school?

School was very good. It was very basic. Like the first school was only a one-teacher school. But afterwards when we went to Weethalle School, we used to have our own classes. And we learnt a lot of reading and writing and arithmetic, but we never had anything like

27:00 algebra, not at the school I went to. And oh writing... Well I suppose arithmetic... Maths was one of the main things. And history too. We had a lot of English history and Australian history. And geography. Completely different to how they seem to teach these children now.

What did your mother tell

27:30 **you about her life in England?**

My mother lived in a little village called Upton Magna. And hers was a very quiet life. And then as soon as she left school... She left school when she was about fourteen. She went into what you call... Oh I forget the name of the word. Into some people's home learning how to be a good housewife. You know,

28:00 how to lay the table, which cutlery went where. And how to wash and how to iron, and curtains. And she was always very good at that, and had to learn table manners and how to set the table properly. And all that sort of thing. And that's what she was... Still she was in... Oh there's a word for it. I can't think now what it is. In service that was it.

28:30 She was in service. And then when she... Of course when Dad arrived over from the war, well they were married and she still stayed there with her mother and her father on the little property that they had, just out of... this little place up from Magna not far from Shrewsbury.

How did she adjust to life in Australia?

I've often wondered how she ever did it. To come on to a farm

29:00 after her upbringing. Like it would have been very strict and everything had to be done just right and to come onto the farm where it was so, everything was so rough. But she went along... She was very good. And even we had a bushfire once, and it practically came right up to the door. And Dad was out with my uncle when the fire had

29:30 started. But it had broke back and it was heading straight for our house. And she was there fighting the fire with Jack on one side and me on the other and we had little sugar bags and she had a bran bag belting at it. And when Dad come racing back he realised the fire was getting near our place and he came racing back on the horse. And all the littlies... There was only Jack and I... Bill was the eldest

30:00 and then there was three others I think. And Mum made them go and sit in the dam. We had a big dam close handy. He had to take the littlies down there and sit them in the dam so they'd be safe. And those sort of things. And she was a very good cook and could make a meal out of anything really. So the plainest things, she didn't have to have like you've got nowadays, and it was all wood fires.

30:30 But she coped very well indeed. The shortage of water and all the problems. Droughts and shortage of water, dust storms and bushfires and what have you. But she was always looking forward to the time when they'd have enough money to go back to visit England, but they never ever

31:00 did get there. Dad did in later years after my mother died. My mother died when I was fifteen. And that was a bit of an upheaval because we had one little... The ninth boy, he was only about three or four weeks old at that stage. So my aunty took him and they were going to have him till he was five years old and then he had to come home.

How did your mother die?

Well she just had the baby and she had too many...

31:30 Well she had septicaemia or blood poisoning or something like that. I mean nowadays she wouldn't have done. But she was in the West Wyalong Hospital and she never came home from hospital. And that was a big upheaval of course, but by that time my eldest sister, Nancy, she was about twelve and it became her job to cook. And my little sister was

32:00 Sue. Had another brother fourteen. No, Nancy was older than that. What was I? Fifteen, Nancy was about thirteen. And another brother was twelve, eleven. And another chap was about ten, nine or ten. But we managed and we still all stayed together on the farm. Only the little chap that my aunty looked after,

32:30 that was Victor. But there was a very bad drought that year so Dad got Jack and I jobs down back at Coreen where we used to work. And we went down there and I worked on a wheat farm and dairy farm. And I used to have to milk the cows and so forth while Jack was driving a team of horses for a chap, like doing the real farming.

33:00 And we were there for about twelve months or more before we came back home to Weethalle. By then I was nearly seventeen, I think I was, when I came back home again. I rode a pushbike from Albury home to Weethalle. Got back just Christmas Eve. And I didn't go back again. I stayed on the farm, or worked for different neighbours. That was until the war started of course.

Now before the war started, how

33:30 **aware were you that things were heading towards a war in Europe?**

Well we knew things weren't looking real good, but Dad always said, "Oh no, they won't have another war." He was always sure there wouldn't be another war. He said, "No, after the last one they definitely wouldn't be silly enough to have another war." But of course they did and we sort of had an idea. And I was working for a chap called Don Graham and he was a captain in the First War.

34:00 And he was sure there was going to be a war and even then he had me sloping arms. And I could do all that business even if I went into the army from this Captain Don Graham.

Can you describe for us what's sloping arms?

Well you've got the rifle alongside and up over and onto your shoulder and that sort of thing. Sloping arms with a rifle. That's the first thing you learn when you go in. How to march, left turn, right turn. And then you get the rifle

34:30 and straightening arms. Nowadays they've got a different sort of rifle. We had the old .303. And Don Graham, when the war started he wanted to go into the army. He wanted me to look after his farm for him while he was away. He said, "No Joe, you stay here. I'll go." I said, "No, no not on your life." So I went with a... I've got a very good friend a chap named Vince Rowitt. He still lives

35:00 at Long Jetty; I see him every Saturday morning. I've known him since I was a boy and he'd come from Adelaide. And never ever been off the farm or anything, or farming and he was going back to Adelaide to see his family. And he said, "What about coming for a holiday with me?" Well the chap, Don, wasn't too pleased about me leaving, neither was me Dad really. But we went over to Adelaide and we picked grapes. That's the first different job off the farm.

35:30 I picked grapes and then we went trapping rabbits away out near Oodnadatta and went broke of course and came back to Adelaide. We had an old utility truck and we decided to join up. But a chap, an old digger said to us, "Look, if you come from New South Wales, don't join up in Adelaide. You go back to New South Wales to join up and you'll always be pleased you did. Because when you go on leave, if you're here

36:00 and your family's in New South Wales, you've got to travel all the way back to Sydney to see them and most of the time you couldn't get home for a weekend to see them. So you're a long way better off joining up there." And I was always pleased I did. So we came back to Weethalle. Dad gave us both a job of course on the farm until we went. Dad had to sign the papers and he wasn't very pleased about it. He said, "Whatever you do,"

36:30 Dad was in the engineers, "Join the engineers or in the ASC [Army Service Corps] where you've got transport. Keep out of the infantry, whatever you do." And what did I do? I joined the infantry. Because why I joined the infantry. We went to a camp in Wagga Wagga. We asked them which would be the first lot to go overseas. We always thought the war would be over before we got there. So they said, "Oh, the infantry go over first." So I joined the infantry. So when I came home and told my Dad I was in the

37:00 infantry, oh goodness me, he couldn't believe it. He said I must've been off my head.

Tell us about signing up. Where did you go?

Well at that stage you filled your form in and send it in. You didn't go to a recruiting office or anything like that. You just had... Dad had all the forms there. What was he? He was something or other... The recruiting officer or something for around that district. And you filled in and you send it to... I don't know

- 37:30 where it went to. And you had to wait then. And you got word back to go and see your medical officer, which I did in West Wyalong. You had to be passed as medically fit. Then I got the little letter to say I was passed medically fit but I had to wait. There was nobody... There was no call ups just at that moment, at that time. So I went to work in a mine; there was a tin mine close to us. Gibsonville Tin Mine. Because tin wasn't worth anything until
- 38:00 the war started and then of course it went all up in price and there was tin mines springing up everywhere. So we worked at this place, Gibsonville, both this Vince and I. And I was there when I got word to say to report to Wagga camp at such and such a time on a Monday morning. So I left by train of course from Weethalle with quite a few chaps from Weethalle. There was about six or seven of us. All arrived there and stayed the night in the hotel. They had a ticket for us, got free
- 38:30 accommodation. And we joined up the next morning and went and signed the... Put our hand on the Bible the next morning and we became... Went into camp... We were the first troops into Wagga camp so we were treated very well there. Cause as we went in the chaps that had been in the day before they were all waiting at the gate to tell us, "You'll be sorry," as we were marching in. But I adapted to it pretty
- 39:00 well. I didn't mind getting up of a morning and the PT [physical training] and all the marching we were doing. And I knew how to slope arms. How to march and left and right turn. So I enjoyed the training.

What were your thoughts going into the camp for the first time? What did you think about going to war?

Well it

- 39:30 didn't worry me. It was, "I'm going to get away." The excitement to be going overseas. Get away from the farm and do something different. And all the mates that I was with it was really a wonderful experience. I really did enjoy it. And even the training and all that, I thought it was marvellous. I had a uniform.
- 40:00 Getting out of the old dungarees and sweatshirts I used to wear on the farm. And it was really... And to come home on my first leave in uniform. I was very pleased. And Dad of course was very proud of the fact that I was in uniform. And then of course we had marches through the Wagga camp, through the city of Wagga. It wasn't a city then.
- 40:30 And all the people cheering and that sort of stuff. It builds you up a little bit when you weren't used to that sort of thing. And even just sleeping on the hard floor didn't worry me because I was used to sleeping a bit rough.

Tape 2

00:33 Jo why did you have to leave school?

Well my Dad got very sick so I went back onto the farm. I came home on a holiday. I forget which holidays it was. That was in 1933, that's right. Came home on holidays and someone had to help out on the farm.

01:00 So I just didn't go back to school again.

What was wrong with your dad?

He had... Well I always think since it must have been something from the gas. He had gas during the war but he was very sick for a while but he came good afterwards. And then I just never went back to school again. Dad did want me to go back after, oh,

01:30 six or eight months but I refused then. I said, "No. I'm not going to try and start up again."

Did your dad ever tell you stories about the war?

Very, very little. Very little. Although the only times I ever heard him talk about the war was if we had a visitor, some old army chap. And they'd talk about the war and different things that had happened. And we were only littlies then. We used to sit and listen and take it all in and think it was marvellous.

02:00 And I was always proud of the fact that this school we went to - the little school at the corner of our farm - our Dad was the only returned soldier. None of the other kids. And I thought that was marvellous. I suppose it was a silly thing but that's how it affected me. I thought it must have been a

soldier.

The house where all of you lived?

Yeah it was pretty rough. It was just one room

02:30 with hessian bags hanging down to make three rooms. Hessian bags then out to the kitchen on that side with a big open fire. Well the cooking went on the open fire. Then all us children were in the next room. There was two or three beds and some on the floor and so on. And my mother and father were in the third room which just had hessian hanging down. No ceilings and no lining. It was just tin all around and roof and dirt floor. That's when

03:00 we first started of course. We were like that for, oh, I suppose twelve months, a couple of years like that. That was on the farm. Because the main job then was getting the country cleared so as Dad could sow a crop. The house didn't matter.

So did the house improve?

Oh yes. In later years we... Dad built... And Dad and uncle... were a bit of a bush carpenter

03:30 and built a house. And we even had floorboards and lining and it was quite a nice home he built afterwards. And then in later years Dad bought the farm next door as well. Or he procured that one. And it was a beautiful home. But of course I never lived in that one because I was away at the war and when I came back from the war I only went back a couple of times to help Dad strip a crop, but I never lived

04:00 in it. But the ones on the farm, they weren't mansions but they were happy.

Where were you in the order of children?

I was the second. My brother was about a year and a half older than me. Then I was next, then Bill, Nancy, Roy. Then we had Robert, Arthur, Sue, Vic. I think that's nine, isn't it?

04:30 I don't think I've forgotten any.

Were any of the kids born on the farm?

Not at Weethalle, no they were all born in West Wyalong Hospital. That was always a problem getting in there too till we managed... Dad bought... Our first car was an old T-Model Ford. And Dad had taken Mum into stay in town and we'd look after the farm. Jack by about that time was about, oh, anything from fourteen,

05:00 fifteen. Leave us all on the farm. I don't think you'd do that with children nowadays but that was no problem. We could sort of carry on. We all knew how to cook a meal.

Why do you reckon your dad was unhappy about you joining the infantry?

Well he knew that the infantry had a... Like the foot soldiers. Like you're the first... When there was a battle on you were the first into action with a

05:30 rifle and a bayonet I suppose and you didn't, you walked everywhere. Had to carry all your gear and you slept wherever you were - you didn't have a bed to sleep on at night. Whereas if you were in something where there was transport at least you could carry extra things with you. Your blanket roll or something like that. And you had somewhere to sleep. He thought the infantry was the most dangerous. And I suppose it was but each think the other one's got the worst job.

06:00 We used to think the chaps in the tanks had the worst job. And there was no way we'd ever be in the navy because if you happened to get shot in the navy you'd get sunk or you're going to drown. If you're in a plane of course and it gets hit, you're killed, and if you're in a tank and it catches alight you can't get out. But in the infantry at least you... We always used to think we had a chance. I think each one thought their job was the best one.

Now you weren't the only one from your town to join up, were you?

06:30 Oh no, no. There was quite a lot of others joined up. I knew a chap, Keith Bowl joined up with me. We put our... And Lance Boardman... We put our hands on the Bible at the same time. So our numbers were... Lance's ended in four, Keith's ended in five and mine ended in six. Keith Bowl, I was with him right through until he got badly hit. And later on I'll mention that, but when we were leaving Weethalle

07:00 Keith's mother came to me and she said, "Joe, look after Keith, won't you? He's only a baby." And he was about four months younger than me. So I always felt that you know, I had to look after Keith although I didn't have to do anything; he was a man too.

So it sounds like you didn't have much problem adapting to military life?

I didn't

07:30 have any problem at all. I liked it. I'd been used to being out at night-time and finding my way around.

And I could... And the last two months before I went into the army of course I was working in the mines so I had a pick and shovel... I could swing a pick quite all right and handle a shovel, all that sort of work. And digging trenches didn't worry me. And even getting up... I was used to getting up early because on a farm where you've got horses, daylight you're up and going.

08:00 So when the bugler came around of a morning it didn't worry me.

What about other blokes, especially from the city, how did they handle it?

Some of them were all right but there was a lot of grumbling and complaining and you know, what they were going to do with the bugler and all that sort of business. And the food and the beds and you know, nothing was ever right with some of them. But most of them, only young chaps

08:30 and they adapted fairly quickly. They were all good fellows and keen to go. They learned fast.

What sort of stuff were you learning at Wagga?

Well we learnt out on the range firing. The only automatics we had was an old Lewis gun from the First War. They were little old things and we learnt that. And we learnt finding our way

09:00 around at night-time with a compass, and training of course. Plenty of marching. And drill. And attacking this and we attacked half a dozen hills and I've taken every hill around Wagga I think at some stage or other. And that was what we were training at.

And where did you go from Wagga?

Up to Tamworth.

09:30 We went by train to Tamworth. And we got out at... The camp was out of Tamworth... Manila Road. And we were there for three or four months at Tamworth. Still training, exactly the same thing. But we knew we wouldn't be long before we were going overseas. And then we were... At that stage we were the 4th Reinforcements to the 2/13th Battalion. See the 2/13th Battalion

10:00 had already gone. It became part of the 9th Division. And we knew we were going to join the 2/13th Battalion. And the 13th Battalion in the First War had a very, very good reputation. They had lots of decorations and they were well written up, and of course they told us all the history and we had to be as good as them. We had a big tradition to live up to. And

10:30 so we were all quite proud of the fact that we were going to join the 13th Battalion or the 2/13th Battalion. The 1/13th Battalion were the First War.

Did you know where the 1/13th Battalion was?

No, we knew they were somewhere over in the Middle East. We knew they were in the Middle East but just where they were we weren't quite sure. But I had a faint idea...

11:00 I don't know where I got the idea that we might be going to England and I was looking forward to going to England. I thought now I could see some of the relations over there that I'd never ever seen. That was another thing in the back of my mind. I might get leave to England. But anyhow I didn't. By that time there was, what did we have in our lot? Oh the 4th Reinforcements. Oh a couple of hundred of us I suppose. All heading over.

And had you stayed with your friend from Weethalle?

11:30 Yes, he was still with me. He was still in the same section as me in Tobruk and at Alamein until he got hit. And we had quite... And leave, too, we had in Tamworth. And they treated us very well in Tamworth, too. We had a march through the town at one stage and everybody cheering us and all that. And it was really good. And

12:00 we used to have concert parties at the camp. They'd come out from town, different ones, and put on a concert for us. And we were treated like royalty we were in Tamworth. A lovely place.

What were your thoughts as you were marching through the town with everybody cheering you?

Oh chest out, head up. Very proud of ourselves. We were doing a wonderful job. And yes, it was

12:30 a great experience for any young fellow that had never been anywhere or ever done anything. I wasn't the only one of course, all the other chaps as too.

You mentioned you were keen to see England. What thoughts did you have of the mother country and fighting for it?

Well it was always... Like seeing as my Dad and my mother had both come from there it was always... And to Dad it was always home and Mum, especially, it was always home. And it always felt as if it

13:00 was the home country and it was... You know, we were only just part of England. We... In those days you were part of England and the Union Jack and we used to fight for our country and all that sort of business. And going to England seemed to me to be the culmination of everything to get back there,

where my mother and father had come from.

So in

13:30 **your head, do you think you were fighting for England or Australia or for adventure?**

Well a bit of the three of them, I think. England... I think with me especially. I decided I must join up when the Italians came into the war. I was in Adelaide with this friend of mine, when we were trapping rabbits. And I remember they came into the war and I thought, "Gee, I'll have to... I must join up." You know,

14:00 it didn't seem right that when Germany was getting the better of England and then the Italians come in as well, to me it seemed all wrong. That was just my way of thinking. So we decided then and there that we were definitely going to join up. And that's what I did as soon as I got back to New South. And to be going to England was you know, to me it always was the mother country.

14:30 **So you had a feeling that maybe the Italians were coming in to kick England when it was down?**

That's right. That was just the feeling I had. Yeah. Which I think was possibly reasonably right too. They weren't going to miss out. And it looked like at that stage that things were going real bad for England.

What did you do with your final embarkation leave?

15:00 I know we had a big party at our place to give me a send off. And didn't... I didn't... like I didn't drink then at all. But went into Weethalle and they had a ball there to give us - all us diggers that were leaving - to give us a send off, which was pretty wonderful. And then we had a party on the farm of all the

15:30 neighbours all around. They all came and cheered us and told us what good blokes we were, which was a wonderful boost, too.

Were any of the local ladies charmed by your uniform?

Oh we had our moments. Yes. I'd suddenly found out that there

16:00 was a female sex by that stage. Because on the farm, like everybody was your friends. The women and the girls and I'd grown up with a lot of the neighbours. When I say neighbours, they were a couple of miles away. But not really... Like I didn't even have a girlfriend really when I went overseas. I wrote to a lot of them and a lot of very good friends I wrote to.

16:30 But no one that was sort of... Didn't look like getting married or anything like that. Nothing like that style. No. But I found that out in Wagga very quickly that once you had the uniform on, you'd go to dances and there was always someone that you could talk to and someone that you could take home. It... What should I say? Increased my education

17:00 very quickly.

There must've been other young blokes in the district who hadn't joined up. What did you think of them?

Well I had a very good friend and I went to school with him. A chap named John Austal. Now he never joined and he was young, he was able. And he was still my good friend even after the war and right through the war, and when I came home on leave I went and saw him. And I went

17:30 up to his funeral last year up in Weethalle. It never entered my head that there was something wrong because they didn't go, they should have been there. I knew everybody couldn't go. And although my brothers went too. My eldest brother and my brother next to me went. But the fourth brother, he was a little bit young at the start. He had to stay on the farm so he never got away.

18:00 And I always used to feel a bit sorry for this chap, this friend of mine. I felt he'd missed out on a lot. He was still... All he knew was Weethalle sort of. Nothing wrong with that; it's a wonderful spot. And it's still home to me Weethalle. But I never held it against him that he hadn't gone. There were others that didn't go too. Not a great many, mind you.

18:30 But no, never upset me at all. I never thought anything about it really.

Just briefly, your two brothers who joined up, where did they, what did they end up doing?

My brother Jack went into the... He was an engineer and he was up at Bougainville during the latter part of the war. And my brother Bill was in the ASC; he was up in New Guinea.

19:00 What did they call them? Dropping rations to the troops in the jungle.

The biscuit bombers.

Biscuit bombers, that's it. He was with the biscuit bombers dropping the food out. And he's always had

a very bad... He went deaf of course because you'd open the doors and push it out. And there was no earmuffs in those days. You just took it as it was. So it was always... He went totally deaf afterwards. But and they

19:30 were there... Jack got hurt badly... He didn't get wounded but he got badly hurt. He was carrying a mortar base plate on his back and fell or something and hurt his back and he was out of the army before I got out. Oh and Dad went into the army... Back in to as one of the... on the defence force. He got two medals. I've got both his medals there that he got for the Second World War. Of course he's got his First World War medals.

20:00 And he became a lance corporal and he was very proud of the fact that he was a lance corporal in the Second [World] War. He was in camp away down Wollongong way somewhere. In the defence forces, the Australian Defence Force, I think they called them in uniform.

Wow! So lots of the men from your family.

Yeah.

When you went down to Sydney to embark, was that the first time you'd ever been to Sydney?

The first

20:30 time that I can... Like I knew... Dad took us down there once, oh we were little kids. I was about five or six I suppose. We went down there, we went down there in a T-Model Ford truck and we all loaded up in the back of the truck, and Dad and Mum in the front of course. And we drove down to Sydney and we stayed at Gunnamatta Bay, which is just out of Cronulla. So I had... That's the first time I'd seen anything like that. The sea and,

21:00 oh, couldn't understand why there was so much water and yet we didn't have any on the farm. Obviously I didn't understand... It was sea water of course; you wouldn't drink it. So I had actually seen it but when only a little fellow. But this time when I came down was the first time I'd been able to go anywhere. And I went to Luna Park and, oh, goodness me, it was mind boggling for me!

21:30 The height of the buildings and all that sort of thing! A new experience!

And so describe to us your embarkation and the ship and the journey out.

When... yes. We came down by train and I'd written a letter to tell... Of course nobody was supposed to know we were going. We left at midnight from Tamworth.

22:00 Marched out of the railway station and there was thousands of people there to see... No-one knew we were going of course. But there were, "So long, John," and "See you, Jack," and all that sort of business. Girlfriends of different ones. We were there for three or four months, of course. Yeah. So we got a big send off even if it was midnight from Tamworth. And we arrived in Sydney early in the morning and went onto the barges

22:30 and there wasn't a great many people there. We went on at Darling Harbour. We got on the boats and the Queen Elizabeth was anchored out off... What point's further on out as you go around that corner? I can't think. So they took us out there on these and we went up onto this great boat. On board. And there was little boats out everywhere

23:00 going around and people waving flags. And people with names you know. There was no-one there that I knew of course because none of my family knew that I was going at that stage. But the odd one happened to see their family coming around on these little barges, little boats. And that was marvellous, to see them all and all the cheering and there was bands playing and what have you. And we went on board and they showed us where we were... Put our gear into our cabin.

23:30 We weren't in cabins. Where were we? Yes, a great big cabin we were in. It wasn't actually a cabin. It was just a big room that we were. Bunk beds. And then we went back up on top and looked over the side and waved and then she set sail up the Harbour. Saw Sydney disappearing in the distance. And we hadn't got outside of the Heads and I was seasick.

24:00 The first time I'd been on a boat and I was sick. I was seasick all the way to the Middle East. We pulled into Adelaide. I can remember pulling into Adelaide and I was doing something down in the cabin and somebody came racing in and said, "Joe, there's someone up there, someone on one of the... wants to see you." I thought, "Who the hell is...?" And I came up and leaned over

24:30 and there was somebody there, "Joe Madeley." And it was this friend of mine, Vince, that I'd been trapping rabbits, it was his sister. How she knew that we were coming on that boat I don't know. But she was there, so... And I went and saw the officer and they let me go ashore. So I went ashore in Adelaide and Doreen had her car there and took me back to her place. Her mother's place. She was only a girl then.

25:00 And I stayed ashore overnight in Adelaide. Came back on and... Her and another chap, her friend, drove me around Adelaide and showed me some... met some of the people I'd met while I was in Adelaide for the few months. Got back on board just in time for the boat to leave. It was great. And then they took us

around to Fremantle. But of

25:30 course we couldn't get into Fremantle, the Queen Elizabeth was too big. We had to anchor her way out so we didn't get ashore there at all. We were anchored too far out. We were there only overnight and then away we went. Oh, wait a moment, whoa, whoa. I've made a mistake. It wasn't that time when the lass from Adelaide was there. That was

26:00 when I went back on a pilgrimage back to Tobruk in 1961. No, the first time I didn't go anywhere near Adelaide. We were way down south on the Queen Elizabeth, of course.

You must've been a popular man in the cabin if you were throwing up all the time?

Oh. We got about half way across... Left Fremantle and I was that sick I was up on top and I couldn't come down.

26:30 And Keith Bowl, the friend that I joined with, he used to bring my meals up for me. Of a night-time he'd bring a blanket up for me and I slept up on top, right on top of the deck. And so I was close to the side. But I wasn't the only one, I wasn't the only one. And we pulled into Trincomalee Harbour - that's India. And we stayed there for a couple of days I think. That was a marvellous sight too at Trincomalee. There was the Queen Elizabeth, there was the Queen Mary, there was

27:00 all these big boats all in a circle around one another. And Nieuw Amsterdam and the Aquitania was there. All these big ships anchored in this small harbour. We were there overnight and set sail the next morning for Port Tewfik and of course I was sick once again. I couldn't get... They put me in hospital just after we left

27:30 India, I was so sick. And then we came ashore at Port Tewfik. No we didn't. We came onto another boat which took us up the Canal, the Suez Canal. And had our first sight of foreign people and so on and foreign lands.

You must have lost a lot of weight for all that sickness.

I did, I did. And

28:00 I had another... As we were going up the canal a chap had a dixie full of... Trying to make some tea with boiling water and the boat lurched and he poured the boiling water into my shoe. So I came off the boat and straight into hospital when I got to the Middle East. We got a train... We got off at El Kantara where everybody got off, which is about three parts of the way up the Suez Canal. Had a meal there and then on board a train and by the time we got

28:30 to [El] Mughazi, which was a staging camp, my ankle... I had blisters hanging out all over my shoe. But they wanted me to go into hospital at El Kantara but I wouldn't. I said, "No, no. I'm right. I'll put up with it." And they put me in hospital. I think it was the 5th AGH [Australian General Hospital] at Gaza. But I was only there for about a week. There was a group going up to...

29:00 We knew then that the 13th Battalion, 2/13th, were in Tobruk. Were heading up to Tobruk so I couldn't get out quick enough. To get back to the battalion... I didn't want to miss out. All my mates were going, you see.

What did you know about Tobruk before then?

Very little Very little. We knew it was in the desert. Or going up in the desert was mainly what we were thinking. "Oh yes, we're going up to the desert." We didn't know that they were under siege or anything like that.

29:30 Describe that arrival at Tobruk then?

Well we came up... The reinforcements I was with came up by boat. The Hero, HMS Hero. Little destroyer or something, and it rocked and needless to say, once again I was sick. I had my arms wrapped around one of the stanchions on the side as it'd go up in the air, and as it'd come down, I was sick.

30:00 My goodness, I didn't eat anything. We left Alexandria Harbour. Actually we were in camp at a place called Amiriya just out of Alexandria overnight and there was an air raid on Alexandria that night. And that's the first time we saw anything to do with the war, of course. Cause all the tracer bullets coming down and the tracers going up. It was quite a good sight from where we were of course. And then we went on board the Hero and

30:30 I was still... Up to Tobruk. And we landed there at night. You could only come in at night of course, when it was dark. And I was that pleased to step ashore I wouldn't have cared where it was. And they put us straight onto trucks and we had... The battalion... When we arrived were up in the front line at what they call the Salient, which was the worst part of Tobruk to be in. So we went up and joined them right in the front line,

31:00 which wasn't a very nice introduction to the war. And... But well the feeling was good to think that we'd at last arrived. For me, anyhow. We arrived at the 13th Battalion there that had gone up just before me. They were a week before and old mates that I met. It was in the dark cause you couldn't move around

the daylight.

31:30 **How were you lead up to the front line then?**

We went up so far by trucks up to our blue line, which was second line of defence. And the last bit we walked up, of course. Or they marched us... Well we did end up with somebody showing us the way. We had some of the chaps had come back to show us the way up and what to do, and then they put us in

32:00 as much as they could with some of the old hands. I went in a hole with a chap named Rex McDonald and he was an original, so he'd been up at Benghazi and that sort of thing. He knew his way around and gave me a few instructions of what I was to do and what I wasn't to do. Especially what I wasn't to do.

Tell us what those instructions were?

Well, whatever you did in the day time, don't put your head up,

32:30 not above the parapet, because the Germans were very close to us... Well Germans were only in front of us then. And they were very close and they had snipers and there was quite a few who got hit with snipers. And in the day time try and get as much sleep as you could because at night-time - every night we were out on patrol. Not the same people every time, but every second night you'd cop it to go out.

33:00 And how to try and keep the dust from getting in your rifle so that it'd fire all the time. And make sure you had plenty of ammunition and your grenades were all primed. And as much as he could possibly tell you. And he also mentioned about the patrols that we were going out on and how far we had to go. And also to be careful of booby traps. The Italians had left a lot of little... They looked like little mail boxes

33:30 about so high, they were. Painted red. And early in the piece chaps'd pick them up and as soon as you picked them up they'd explode. And they wouldn't kill you but they'd blow your hand off or something like that. And then there was... Or you could give them a kick and they'd go off. And he warned me about those sort of things. And also, they had little jumping jack mines which were buried, just with three spikes sticking up out of the ground. And you put your foot on them and there was a

34:00 explosion which blew them up about so high, and then another explosion which blew them all apart and they were all full of little bits of metal and pellets and what have you. And just get you about waist high. But when you got used to it - oh, you never got used to it - when you got to know, as soon as you put your foot on there was a little click went. And it gave you time to flop down onto the ground so it'd rise up and it would miss you. But we did have a lot

34:30 of chaps wounded with those. And Rex explained all that to me. Be very, very careful. It was like walking along on hen eggs when you're walking along on patrols, you're feeling for these jumping jack mines.

So, as young Joe Madeley is put in a trench in his first night at Tobruk and told about all these horrors, what's happening in your mind?

But what brought me to earth a lot was, chaps that had been killed that I knew,

35:00 that I'd joined... that I'd been in camp with Wagga with. Like a fellow named Jack Stewart and Bob Pagington. And other names that I could mention that got killed before I got there. And then another old Weethalle chap came along and he didn't help any. He said, "Oh God, Joe. None of us are going to get out of here. This is terrible. We'll all be killed, you know." He was a chap

35:30 from Weethalle. He lived through the war too, and I saw him many times afterwards. I told him how he boosted up my morale the first couple of nights I was there in Tobruk. And then of course, came the actual action. We were doing these things ourselves. And you come... In that sort of a position you learn very quickly. You learn quickly. And

36:00 another thing I can always remember, he said to me, "Another thing Joe, when you go out there don't bother challenging anybody. If you do you're dead." He said, "Shoot first and worry about who it is after." And that always stood us in good stead too, because if you stopped a, "Who goes there?" sort of... Well that's it.

36:30 And that's the sort of thing that you learn. You did know if there was another patrol out somewhere you were going to look out for. You got all that information before you went out. Where your machine gunners were, where the back-up troops were, if there was another patrol out, whereabouts they would be. And where the German machine gun posts were or where their artillery was and you got all that information, so you had a pretty fair idea of what it was like out front. And that's

37:00 probably what all the patrolling was for so as we could pinpoint where all those positions were.

You must in those first couple of nights been quite terrified?

I don't know whether I was terrified or whether I was too silly to be terrified. I was... I suppose I was nervous, yes. I wasn't terrified. Never at any stage was I ever really terrified.

37:30 I was nervous and a little bit, oh, you know, on edge. And I'd jump at the slightest sound. But not... I don't think I was ever terrified. Most of the fellows took it very well. They learnt to adapt and there was odd ones where the nerves got the better of them later on after a period of time. I don't think anybody's

38:00 nerves can take it for any period, day after day. But

What were your trench positions like?

Well they were just below the ground. Every night you'd dig a little bit more to make the hole a bit bigger, a bit more comfortable to sleep in. There was two of you. And you couldn't get up. Like you couldn't get up during the day. And to make it worse, dysentery was very bad. Well there was no way you could get up and go out.

38:30 You'd get blown to pieces as soon as you got above the ground. That was... This was in Tobruk in the Salient I'm talking about, not everywhere in Tobruk. This was just where we were, at this stage. And you'd have a couple of weeks up there. Well you had your shovel there of course. And used that and hoy her over and then bury things at night-time or when you got up. And oh, tins or whatever you may have, like bully beef tin.

39:00 **I guess when most people think of trenches they think of those really well developed First World War trenches.**

Well we didn't have... Nothing like that. There was some Italian positions that we took over which were all concrete, which were very good. But that might be our headquarters. But we found that you couldn't fight from them because you got down in the concrete, you couldn't see anything. So we were up on the ground and dug our own. And we dig them, crawl trenches, about two foot deep

39:30 or about a foot deep so you could just crawl below the ground where another couple were situated. Where the machine gun was there and around here and dig a bit of a hole here so you could get your machine gun out. And you'd sleep out there as well - you just slept on the ground where you were.

So your actual sleeping trench was only a few feet deep?

Oh yes yes yes. We'd probably... If we didn't think it was deep enough we might dig it a bit each night, a little bit deeper. After a few shells came over you'd always hear a bit of digging going on.

40:00 Yes, they were actually terrible places really. Fleas and flies and the dust. And the food wasn't the best. And the bully beef'd be that hot when you opened it the fat'd run out of it. It wasn't very appetising but it kept us going. And occasionally we got a little bit different. We might get some beans or we might get some... a tin of potatoes

40:30 or something like that. Or a bit of cheese as a bit of difference. But the food was... And the water of course... Shortage of water. You couldn't wash or anything. But everybody smelt the same so I suppose you didn't notice it.

So you'd have to relieve yourself in the bottom of your trench.

Oh yes in a tin and just hoy it over the top. You always had a bully beef tin or a beans tin or something there.

Tape 3

00:32 **So what did you have with you in the trenches when you were living in them?**

What, you mean in the way of equipment? Well we each had a rifle of course. And each section, there was about nine men to a section if it was full strength, generally about eight or six. You had a Bren gun, that was the automatic and then

01:00 the rest had rifles. And later on we had those Thompson submachine guns. That what they used, the American gangsters used. They were all right. The only thing is they had a magazine, it was a round one with all the bullets in it and that used to rattle. And so they were no good taking out on patrols because they'd rattle and they'd hear you. And another thing too, the slightest bit of dirt get into them

01:30 they'd seize. And that wasn't any good if you were in a tight situation and you went to fire, and it wouldn't fire. So they weren't very popular the Thompson submachine guns. But we did have the... We each had a rifle and bayonet. And then we also had a... To each platoon we had a Boys anti-tank rifle. That was a big... I forget what size it was. And it was supposed to penetrate tanks but I never ever saw a tank knocked out with one of them.

02:00 We still had it when we went up into the jungle and we threw ours off as soon as we stepped ashore. We hoyed it into the nearest bush. We'd carried it all that time and never did anything with it. And on top of that it stirred up the dust. When you fired it the recoil was so bad the dust'd fly up and it'd what we used to call 'draw the crabs' because they'd see where you were and someone'd get stuck into you. But they were the weapons we had.

02:30 And then we had hand grenades, of course. They were little hand grenades which were very good. A long way better than the German, the Italian hand grenade - they were only poor little things. But ours

would kill at a certain... All depending how far you could throw it of course. They were either four-second ones or seven-second ones. All according to which fuse you put in. If you put a longer fuse in it took seven seconds to ignite. Well

03:00 if it was close up you'd pull the pin out and hold onto the lever and as soon as you let the lever go it'd ignite. So if they were close handy... And it was no good throwing a seven-second grenade if the chaps were only a few yards away. So you'd hang onto it a second and then throw it, on the four seconds. And they were the weapons that we had in the pits with us. Later on we gradually acquired quite a few Italian weapons.

03:30 And we had a Spandau which was the best gun there was, it was a German one. A Spandau; it was fed with a belt. And it'd fire, under any conditions it'd fire and fire about twice as far as our gun. So it was always a prized possession if you could manage to capture one of these Spandaus, if you had one of those.

What about personal items in the trenches?

Well I always had, like most people had a spare pair of socks.

04:00 And your shaving gear. And you'd always have a tin of billy beef tucked away, oh I always had that in the haversack. They only had the little haversack, that was all you had. And that was about your personal items. Toothbrush and that was it. Nothing else. Oh most of us always carried a wallet I suppose. Or a watch - I had a watch they gave me before I left Weethalle.

04:30 But nothing... I mean you might have a photo or something in your wallet. But that would be about it. Nothing really because being in the infantry you had to carry everything.

You talked about, before you talked about fleas and rats in the trenches, how did you handle that?

Well the rats were...

05:00 They'd sneak out and try and eat some of the food or something. Actually we tried shooting them at one stage but they were, that was something else you had to put up with. Like fleas, I think fleas were the worse. Goodness me, you'd be practically crawling with fleas! And terrible - they'd get everywhere, in your hair and under your arms and all the other parts! They were shocking!

05:30 And of course the flies too. Like they made bread for us up in Tobruk in a bakery there. And you might get bread and you'd... And we always had cheese or something we'd put on. Or sometimes we'd get jam or marmalade jam or something. Well you had to keep the flies away. I suppose you still ate dozens of them.

06:00 But they were shocking, the flies were. Into everything. Especially if someone got killed in your trench near you, there was no chance getting him out. This was... I'm talking about in the front line in Tobruk, in the Salient area. There was no chance of getting him out of the hole until dark when an ambulance came up. Well by that time in the real hot sun it's not the most pleasant area to be.

06:30 And that was a very sickening sight at any stage, and the feeling to know that you couldn't get out and give them a decent burial and those sort of things.

What was your daily routine like while you were living in the trenches there?

Lying down, pulling a blanket over your head to stop the dust and try and get some sleep. And we always seemed to have a pack of cards. You might play cards, you might tell a few tales

07:00 and tell a few jokes. And crib [cribbage] was another game that... I had a collapsible little crib board and Donald and I played crib. But to be quite truthful, boredom was one of the worst things too. Doing nothing in the boiling sun, just sitting there. Like I've been back since and how we ever lived I don't know. Like I wouldn't last a blinking two hours now. But the

07:30 first couple of days, even though I'd grown up a little bit rough sort of on the farm, I thought, "Oh, I'll never live here. This is worse..." I'd never seen anything like it. With all the heat and everything else, it was against you and shells coming over every so often. And mortar bombs. The conditions you were living under! But

08:00 gradually you sort of got used to it. Not washing or shaving. You had one lot of water and you used that for everything. And it wasn't real good. I think that was the worst part of it. It was a sort of a pleasure to get out of the hole of a night-time and go out on a patrol to get out of it and get out in the fresh air. And

08:30 even though it was dangerous and the nerves were a bit on edge. But even though your nerves were on edge there was some exhilaration about it, you felt... Or I did, I know. It was like sneaking on a fox or a rabbit or something. And I'd always been used to that from the time I was a little boy, and it reminded me of that a lot. And they used to fire a lot of flares the Germans, always did. You'd hear a pop going and as soon

09:00 as you heard the pop you'd flop down onto your stomach and a bright flare'd go up and light up the

whole area. And they did that all the time. Right through Alamein they still have these bright flares. We never ever did. We only fired a flare if we had a bit of a battle and we'd... When the battle was up, you'd had a victory or you'd taken the post, you had to light a green light to let them know that you'd taken the position. But the Germans used it all the time. And another thing

09:30 they used a lot that we didn't was tracer bullets. Every tenth bullet in these... their Spandau guns was a tracer. So you could always see the tracers coming and every one of those tracers'd is going to be heading straight for me, too, I might add. But as long as it was long range you could see the tracers going over. You could just about stand up and walk underneath them. Or we used to crawl under them if we were coming home

10:00 back from a patrol and they opened up. You could sort of crawl underneath because you could see all the tracer bullets going. And all those sort of things that sort of kept you alert anyhow.

Tell us about these patrols. Who did you go with?

You always had a... No, not always. There was different patrols. You go out on one patrol and it might be just a

10:30 recce [reconnaissance] patrol we used to call it, to find out if they'd... make sure the Germans hadn't moved any machine guns in close. You see we always made sure no-man's-land sort of belonged to us. And make sure they hadn't been moving up any more, make sure the guns hadn't moved or if there were any more troops coming up. We'd sneak right up near where they were and look at what was going on and then sneak back again. We wouldn't fire any shots - you'd bump into one of their patrols or something.

11:00 And sneak back. And we used to do things to keep them on their toes like tie something onto their barbed wire or delouse a couple of their mines. And they'd know when they came out at night that we'd been right up against them. And kept them on edge all the time. And then there'd be fighting patrols go out where, well the recce patrols, might only be a corporal in charge of it. Or it might be,

11:30 if you were going out to a much deeper one, probably a lieutenant. And then you'd go out on a fighting patrol where they'd moved a machine gun post in closer which was giving us a bit of a problem. So we'd go out at night and try and clean the machine gun post. That was called a fighting patrol. You'd go out with possibly a full platoon, maybe a full platoon strength. And you'd have an artillery support and you'd have Vickers machine gun support and you'd have automatics yourselves and grenades and

12:00 sneak up as close as you could and then rush them and sort of clean up the post. That was a fighting patrol. And so all patrols weren't the same. And then we had patrols just up and down... See there was barbed wire just out in front of us. And there was an anti-tank trap and then the barbed wire. And you'd go out and patrol up along it, backwards and forwards, a couple of men here,

12:30 and a couple of them up the other end and you'd go backwards and forwards. And you'd meet one another and go back again. That was just to make sure that they didn't have a patrol coming in close handy. You could give the battalion warning or the company warning that there was a patrol out there. A German patrol.

What did you think of the Germans?

They were good at that stage. Well we, yeah,

13:00 we never ever hated them or anything like that. But they were good fighters and we thought... We never underestimated the Germans. With the Italians we always thought we were a long way better than they were, of course. And as long as you had Italians out in front of you it didn't worry you quite so much. But with the Germans you knew you had to be on the alert all the time. Because they were... A lot of difference if it was Germans. You knew that you had... that they

13:30 were just as good as we were at the fighting business. And they were brave men and we knew that they had Rommel in charge of them. And we knew they were good. Kept us on our toes. And their artillery was good and their guns were good and their tanks. And they had an eighty-eight millimetre gun which was better than any of ours. Like one of those'd hit a tank and blow it to pieces.

14:00 And so we knew that we were up against a pretty good enemy in the Germans. But when we took them prisoners we treated them well. We fed them and I even shared my rum issue with a German POW [Prisoner of War]. He was a nice sort of a bloke. He could speak a little bit of English. Yeah. I even shared a hole one night with... in Tobruk. We were

14:30 guarding some German prisoners of war. The only time we ever did, just our platoon. And we had to put a fence in between the Germans and the Italians. They used to fight. They didn't get on too well at all. And it was so... When I got relieved it was so far to walk back to where I had to... outside of the compound I thought, "Cripes, I'm wasting..." We were having two hours on and four hours off

15:00 and I thought, "I'm wasting half an hour walking back and then they wake me and I've got to walk all the way back." There was a hole close hand and I thought, "Oh, I'll hop into that hole." So I said to Rex McDonald, who had relieved me, "Whatever you do, don't let anybody cut my throat during the night, will you?" He said, "No you'll be right." And just then a shell came over and I dived into this hole and two Germans jumped in on top of me. But they were just as frightened as I was. So we hugged one

another. And of course

15:30 when the shelling stopped this German looked at me and he said, "Bloody Italians." And I agreed with him. Yeah it was the Italians. So we just had a bit of a grin at one another and away they went. But we shared quite a lot with them when we were looking after them as POWs. And I understand they treated our chaps pretty well too. Like with the frontline soldiers. Mind you, no matter what army you're in, there are some rough diamonds

16:00 as well that don't do the right thing. But you'll strike that anywhere. You could have struck a German who'd hit your over the head with the butt of a rifle too.

When you talk about the rough diamonds, are you talking about the Australian Army?

Yes. Yes.

Can you explain what you mean?

Well I've seen that in regards to POWs. Treating POWs like they were animals.

16:30 And I don't know whether it made them feel good or something. And even though I objected to it, it didn't make any difference. Mm. They'd abuse them and give them a kick or something if they weren't moving fast enough. But they're probably the same. Mind you, there probably wouldn't be very many of them but there were an odd one two.

17:00 And there were quite a few. During the actual fighting it wasn't necessary. But in the heat of battle you don't stop to think. You haven't got time. If you stop to think, you're dead. You've just got to keep going.

What was it like to kill somebody?

17:30 When you get going, like in the infantry and you get going, and there's fellows falling and there's chaps crying and screaming and there's bullets coming and everything else, I don't think you're really human. It didn't mean anything, and that's true. And later on at Alamein we had them, we were firing at them and they were running and there

18:00 were some of them running towards us and we'd heard about chaps with, an Italian with a grenade in his hand come running towards us and we thought he was going to surrender and everybody stopped firing. And he threw the grenade. They told us that anyhow. Whether it was right or not, I don't know. So even though they were running to try and get past us because we couldn't shoot back because our own people were behind us. So if they got past us before they got shot. And you're firing, well anything that moves you're firing at.

18:30 So well it didn't mean anything. It didn't mean anything. Not at all. It was just... It wasn't as if you were like human or anything else. You didn't think of it like that, not in the heat of battle, not in the heat of battle. You didn't have time to stop and think. You just had to just keep going. Oh and some

19:00 terrible things happened, but it's a war after all and you're there trying to kill one another. And I've spoken about that with the Germans over in Africa. I'm good friends with lots of German Afrika Korps blokes. And we drink just the same; they're just the same as we are. And we often say now, "What a pity. If we'd all been on the same side we could have ruled the world." That's what this German chap

19:30 always tells me. And another thing, that's later on of course at the reunion... a few beers. And he said, "Oh Joe, I'm glad we were both such bad shots, missed one another." And even when the war was finished, that didn't worry me. It wasn't till years later I used to get nightmares. Like my wife used

20:00 to wake me up at night and shake me. I was swinging my arms around and screaming out. I saw all these sort of things happen and I thought how terrible it was. It was shocking. But at that stage to live you had to shoot at anything. Yeah.

When you went on the night patrols, can you describe for us what you saw? How much could you see?

20:30 Well you couldn't... like Tobruk... this is the patrol, we're still talking about Tobruk. Well Tobruk at patrol it was very, very flat. That's depending on where you were of course. But you couldn't see very much at all because it was just... There were no trees and nothing like that, and no buildings. It was just desert, flat. And possibly you'd go out and you wouldn't see a thing.

21:00 And you'd go out, a bright moonlit night without you having to run into one of their patrols or a machine gun post or... which you wouldn't see anything. Very, very rarely. Occasionally. If you were in a fighting patrol it was different of course. You went out for a particular job to do, to either break some guns or else

21:30 a machine gun post. But patrols very rarely you ever saw anything. Very rarely. Like it was a desert and all you did was walk along very warily to make sure you didn't... Another thing they had was a booby trap, was a trip-wire about that high off the ground and you'd catch your ankle in it and it'd pull the pins out of a grenade or something, or a

- 22:00 bomb that they had buried just below the ground. And they had a pin in it with a wire across to a trip-wire. And as soon as your foot touched that you stopped dead. And they were prevalent in a couple of the places we were too. But they're the sort of things you felt for all the time. Your nerves were sort of on edge all the time you were on patrol. But as far as seeing anything, I went out on lots of patrols and never saw a thing.
- 22:30 And then, funny things happen on patrols too. Terrible things really when you think back. We were on a patrol one night and we had a very funny chap with us, Chris Davidson. He was right alongside me when he got hit too later on, when Keith Bowl got hit on the other side of me. And there was a dead German and he was crouched down and he had his hand out. He must've died.
- 23:00 People die in funny positions. And he was with his hand out. And we were right close to the Germans too and Chris said, "Oh cripes, how're you going mate? I bet you've been waiting for someone to shake..." And his hand came off! Well, we... I nearly died trying to stop laughing, you know. I jammed my hand over my mouth and my fist in my mouth because it looked so damn funny with Chris standing there with ... I suppose
- 23:30 it's terrible really for you to hear that things like that happen. But things like that happen all the time. That was Chris's joke: "How you're going old mate? I've bet you've been waiting for someone to shake your hand for ages." Just to sort of break the tension a bit. Oh God, we abused him. "Don't ever do that again Chris, you'll get us all killed." He was a lance corporal, Chris. Very funny man. I used to go and see him in a nursing home later on, a few years back. He's dead now.
- 24:00 I went to his funeral.

You talked about releasing the tension. What was it like to live always fearful for your life?

Well talking about breaking the tension, there's always something to break the tension. And it's a funny thing, when you did, no matter where you were, everybody'd start laughing. Sort of an hysterical sort of a laugh I suppose it was. "Oh everybody, did you see that?" Or, "Did you see so

- 24:30 and so?" When the tension was broken it was as if it was a party or a picnic. And it was always like that. We went out on a patrol one night and we had to go out so many hundred yards, or thousand yards, whatever it may be, and then we had to turn to the right and go along so far and then come back again to our positions. And unknown to us the
- 25:00 Germans had moved a jolly machine gun post up closer and it had barbed wire around it. But it was open at the back. And we went right around and we're coming back home and everyone was sort of relaxing a bit, "Right, now we're on our way home." And we walked right in the back of a German machine gun post. Well one of them woke up first and I can always remember he yelled something like, "Englander kommen. Englander kommen." [The English are coming] And then they opened up. But they all
- 25:30 were firing in the other direction. You see they got such a shock, too, to think that we'd suddenly arrived on them all of sudden, and nobody saw us coming in the back so they were all firing out the front. So all their tracers and everything coming up the front. So we were off for our lives and we were running as fast as we could. I was right on that end, I remember when we turned I was out there and of course we all ran and had to go back that way so I was the last bloke over here. Anyhow they finally got around to us and firing at us and throwing grenades. But they must've panicked a bit because
- 26:00 not one of us got hit. And there was about ten of us I suppose and we were right inside of their barbed wire. And I was running dead last and I passed one... I remember I passed one chap. I remembered we'd come out of a bit of a gully, and I thought, "Goodness, if we can get back into that gully the bullets will go over our heads." So we got back into the gully and all the others are there waiting for us. We'd all joined up and you should have heard it. You'd have thought it was a party we were having. Everybody sort of relaxed and were
- 26:30 laughing about it now. So and so fell over and somebody else jumped over the barbed wire. And the way they were running and I can remember this John Dickinson, I shouldn't have mentioned the name I suppose, but we had one fellow that used to exaggerate a bit and he said, "I fired a couple of shots here and I fired a burst there." And I said, "You bloody liar Dicko. I was running as hard as I could and you were a hundred yards in front of me." And those sort of things. And we laughed all the way back to our
- 27:00 battalion positions, back to our own barbed wire and got inside.

When you were on the front line at Tobruk, how could you tell your progress?

In what way?

How could you tell how the battle was going?

Well we had a front line as I say. And you'd know if the Germans broke through anywhere. As long

- 27:30 as we held our positions. We weren't trying to take any ground off them. We were just had to hold our position. They told us we had to try and hold it for about three or four weeks because they were pushing the British back and it looked like they were going right through to the Suez Canal and so on. And they'd take Alexandria, Cairo, and up into the oil fields in the Balkans. So they wanted us to

- 28:00 hold it there because as long as you held it... This was the only good harbour. And they wanted us to hold it for a certain time so they could build up their armaments back along the Suez Canal. Like Alamein. Anyway it was supposed to be six weeks but we stayed there for eight months. But we weren't going to attack anything and take any ground off them, only what ground they took off us, we'd take that little bit back again. We just had to keep the perimeter. So without the Germans broke
- 28:30 through well we knew we were going along all right. If we heard they'd broken through somewhere we'd know that we'd lost that little bit. "Righto, well we'll attack there and take that little bit back again." Mind you, with some of those we lost a lot of men doing that too, but we managed it for the whole time we were there. So then when the Germans attacked Russia, that was a great night for us when we heard that.
- 29:00 We thought, "Goodness me that means he's got to fight on two fronts now." So we were very confident that we'd hang out. And we used to listen to Lord Haw Haw, the German news in English. And he always... He was the one that called us 'rats' in the first place cause we were living like rats in the ground. And we should surrender and all that, and England was just about to fall and
- 29:30 all the other jolly things that were happening. In Tobruk, why don't we show a white flag and surrender, because we were surrendered and it was only a matter of time. And Britain had deserted us sort of and we weren't going to get any help. They'd drop off the Mediterranean. But we used to all try and get somewhere where we could hear that news. We thought it was great fun listening to that.
- 30:00 It never worried us. But as you say, in our part of the war we knew... Well we always thought we were winning because we owned no-man's-land and they never got it. After the first few weeks, they broke in a couple of times but we chased them out again. They had tanks and everything. At one stage they came in with about thirty-eight tanks. But for the first time, like all over Europe, once the tanks broke through
- 30:30 the infantry used to surrender. But we didn't. We let the tanks come over the top of us and then we attacked their infantry and left the tanks to our anti-tank guns and our twenty-five pounders and they lost about eighteen tanks the first time they tried it. And we took about two or three hundred prisoners and I don't know how many we killed of their infantry. That was... But they came in just as if they were going to... like they'd done all over Europe. They just come straight up the main road.
- 31:00 And we were all just waiting.

Tell us about that?

That was before I got there. That was when they first came into Tobruk. The siege started on the 10th April. Well I didn't get there until the end of April, the start of May. I come up with the reinforcement. I wasn't there at that stage. I've read about it. But it's history how the

- 31:30 tanks came wandering straight up the road and our battalion was one side of the road and 17th Battalion was on the other and just let the tanks go through, and they rumbled on and then we got into the infantry and made a bit of mess with them. Plus there was a dust storm and they got lost in the dust, of course. And then they tried to get back out again and ran into our anti-tank guns and they... It was a bit of a slaughter. And that's where we won the first Australian
- 32:00 VC there in the war. The Edmonton one at that stage. That was Easter in '41. But I wasn't there then. I was still learning the trade back in Palestine.

I understand you were on the front line in Tobruk for three weeks?

Something like that, yes. Around about two or three weeks each time and then they'd bring you back out. But when you came back out, if you come back out to the blue line -

- 32:30 that was the next line of defence - well you still had to dig trenches trying to improve the blue line wherever you could. They had different programs for us to do, or if there was a fighting patrol went out well you always had to have a section of a platoon ready to help them if they got into trouble so you could get out quick. Or if the Germans tried to break in somewhere they could move you, the company
- 33:00 or the battalion or whatever was needed to wherever the danger was. But as long as... And then one time we came right out to what they call the dust bowl. That was near Fort Pilastrino and that was well back under a ridge. And you could wander around there in the day time. And we did get a swim there. They took the trucks down to a little wadi... a wadi is a creek I suppose. They call them wadis. And you couldn't
- 33:30 be seen and there was a beach there. And oh, it was marvellous to have a swim and a wash. But by the time you got back through the dust and everything on the back of a truck you were just as dusty, but at least you were clean underneath. And it was very good to get back there and you got better rations and things like that.

How were the rations better at the blue line?

Well you could have cooked

- 34:00 meals all of the time, whereas up in the front line they'd only ever come up after dark. And trucks had

to bring it up so far and then they had to carry it the rest. Well you weren't always sure it was going to get there. They tried to give us a hot meal every night. Our cooks were marvellous really, how they did it. Trying to give us a hot meal. We had a hot box about that big and only about this high. Big steel ones, handle on each end of them.

34:30 And one night one of our... Each section had to send a couple of men back to get their section's rations. And these two, we were watching them... It was a moonlit night. And one on each hand and they were coming in. And they started to shell, the Germans did, just as they were coming up. And the front fellow went down and the other fellow had to run, and this fellow went down and this chap ran. Well they were like this. Well we thought it was a hell of a joke and yet they could've got killed

35:00 of course, but it was something a bit different. And another thing too there was a sort of... a bit of an armistice sort of thing, an unwritten armistice. They had their meal time around about the same time and you could hear the rattling... ours too. And very little firing. Sort of an unwritten... Mightn't get up there till about ten, eleven o'clock at night but there'd be

35:30 a sort of a stop and a bit of quietness. Not always, mind you. But it was never quite as heavy as the other times.

I understand there was another time when you heard a German singing?

Yeah that was... We had a chap with us called Peter Robinson. Oh a big man he was. Have you heard of Peter [actually Paul] Robeson, an American Negro? He sang a lot like him.

36:00 And we heard them singing and so big Peter got up and he started to sing 'Silent Night'. And in the desert there's like no sound at all, it's absolutely quiet. And there wasn't a moon or anything, it was just a starry night and the noise rattling over the desert. There's nothing to block it. And he sang 'Silent Night'... absolutely beautiful. Rolled out over the desert. And the Jerries were listening too. And when he finished everybody clapped, even them. They clapped

36:30 too. So it shows that they were people like us, they were just doing what they were told I suppose. Yeah. And another time we had an armistice. Like the Germans took some area called the Salient. Actually we never got it all back - we did take some of it back but not all of it. And they had that right through till the finish. And there was

37:00 one of our battalions tried to take part of it back and there was a big battle out in front. And next morning of course there was dead and there was wounded and that lying out there. And a German chap... There was a white flag came out on a stick and one of our officers put up a white flag. And they went out and had a bit of a natter, so next thing the ambulances were out there and we were picking up dead and wounded and so on. And the stretcher bearer out of our platoon he went out, Noel Goodworth.

37:30 And he was telling us, he said, "We bandaged up everybody, didn't matter whether it was Australians or Germans or whoever it happened to be, first one you came to you bandaged up." He always used to say, "They're some mother's son." And the two officers, they exchanged cigarettes out there. And that went on for three or four hours I suppose before they'd cleaned up. And for the first time in the day time everybody was sitting up on their

38:00 trenches, you see, like rabbits sitting on top of their holes everywhere. The Germans were the same. And then when it was all over of course somebody fired a shot and the chaps disappeared just like rabbits in a hole. Down they went. But it showed that... That's what I always thought - they were like us. They were just doing what they were told. For their Fatherland.

Back at the blue line,

38:30 **what else was there that wasn't on the front line? Was there a hospital there?**

No, we had a hospital back at the beach, right back in that wadi area I told you about where you couldn't be seen. We had a hospital there, the 4th AGH.

How far away was that from the front line?

Oh well from the front line it was about eight miles from the front line back to the beach. So it'd be about seven or eight miles back

39:00 to get to the hospital. But we had a casualty clearing station about half way in between. There's a fig tree there. I don't know whether you ever heard of the fig tree in Tobruk which was the famous landmark, and down underneath it was a big cave. And that was where our casualty clearing station was and that's where you went first to get bandaged up or whatever it may be. Or to say whether you're alive or dead and then sent on back to the hospital.

39:30 I was never ever there. I was never at the casualty clearing station actually. I was very lucky in Tobruk.

What else was there between the blue line and the hospital on the beach?

Oh there was our artillery, anti-tank guns. There was transport. There was anti-aircraft guns. Guns everywhere. And mines. See we had minefields in between... out in front of us. And minefields between the blue line

- 40:00 and the front line in case the Germans broke through. There was everything. Everything you could think of. There was the ASC, there was ration dumps, there was ammunition dumps. There was work shop where they fixed up the trucks, where they fixed guns. All that sort of... plus all those troops that you've
- 40:30 got to have out of the line to keep the other troops in the line. Like the Army Service Corps, their headquarters and the headquarters of the battalion... Not the battalion, they didn't get back that far, but the divisional headquarters and the brigade headquarters, they were all back that way.
- And how many days or weeks would you have away from the front line in between each stint there?**
- It varied quite a lot. It could be anything. The first time I understand... See I went up the second time...
- 41:00 They were only out for just a few days and they were back in again. But another time we were out for about six, everybody had to take their turn. We were out there for nearly six weeks at one time. We were still in the front line but not in the Salient area. There were other parts of the front line, and it wasn't nearly as bad because the Germans were a thousand yards away. You could put your head up during the daylight and that sort of thing. But not sit in the heat, otherwise they'd
- 41:30 get you. But otherwise it wasn't nearly as bad.

Tape 4

- 00:31 **Joe, just a few more questions about life on the front line there. How did you keep your rifle clean in the dust?**
- We just wrapped a bit of rag around it, of course. But the rifles are very good, those .303s. They'll fire under lots of conditions. You can drop that in the water and pick it up and fire it straight away. Even if you've got dirt on it it'll fire as long as the firing pin's clean. So we'd just wrap a bit of dirt around that part of it.
- 01:00 With the machine guns, of course like, the Bren and so on, you had to be a lot more careful with it and cleaning it all the time. Never ending job cleaning your weapon.
- What regular attention did you get from artillery and mortars?**
- Oh well, every day they'd fire. Some days worse than others. Some days you might only have two or three shells come over. Another day
- 01:30 for some reason or other they'd open up... I never ever got around to counting them but they'd be on and off all day. And then we had an odd day you wouldn't get anything, nothing. You'd go all day and not have a shell, not a thing. That's when I say boredom used to set in and that was shocking really.
- Were there regular periods of a day when shelling was more likely?**
- 02:00 Yeah just in the evening they always used to shell. And that's when the air raids would be on in the harbour too. That was another... a little bit of... what shall I say... oh, a change of an evening when the air raids... As long as you were up in the front lines you could sit up and watch the air raid. All these Stukas diving and tracer bullets coming down and others
- 02:30 going up. And they used to drop flares which'd float down onto the harbour. Of course you had to duck your head if they decided to... As they were pulling out sometimes they'd strafe along the front line. But you got used to that sort of thing. We used to fire at them too but I don't think we ever hit any. You'd think you could, and miss them. But they were a bit hard to hit.
- 03:00 **When you went out on patrols at night how did you try and minimise the noise?**
- Well we had what they call jungle... A sort of a soft-soled... Oh, desert boot that's right. Soft-soled boot it was that you pulled on. Take your big old hobnails off and put these on, which were very quiet. And you walked sort of, I don't know, you'd just walk on the flat of your feet and made sure you could... before you put your foot
- 03:30 down, what it was going to go down on. And keep as quiet as you could. And make sure you didn't have anything that'd rattle like a belt buckle hitting against your rifle butt. All those sort of things. And nothing that ever rattled in your pockets.
- What sort of state of dress were you in most of the time?**
- Anything in Tobruk. Any clothes at all.
- 04:00 We had some with Italian shirts on or trousers and some had a German shirt. Or we had some of our own, like half of ours and half of theirs. Whatever there was, but mainly in our own army... What do they call them? KDs [khaki drill], that was the light trousers we had and our own khaki shirts, mainly in those.

04:30 But anything else that was around, well you used.

Was there no danger of being shot by mistake if you were wearing German kit?

I suppose there would be. Nobody ever did. Nobody ever got shot.

You mentioned you used captured German machine guns. What about other lighter weaponry from the Germans or the Italians?

No,

05:00 we used their guns for anti-tank, for anti-aircraft, and we used their two-inch mortars was another one we used. The Italians had a little two-inch mortar and there was oodles of ammunition. See we couldn't waste ammunition because it all had to come of a night and you had to rely on the navy getting it up and a lot of our boats were sunk. So we used their ammunition wherever possible. And there was always plenty of their ammunition around. And little

05:30 Italian two-inch mortar with this little bomb you used to drop down the barrel and away she'd go. We'd use that quite a lot. And we always managed to use some of their bullets to fire through some of our rifles too and we used quite a lot of those. Their rifles were never as accurate as ours so very few of the boys... Well we had tried them of course. Very few ever used them. Then they had another little gun, a little automatic, but it was never any good. We used to always

06:00 scrub that for our own.

What was your leadership like?

Well good. There was an odd one, like others will tell you, give you a different... I've had a friend staying with me for the last week who was in Tobruk with me and his opinion of some of the officers... He'd give you a completely different story to mine. But I always found them very good.

06:30 Very good. But completely different to the English officers. Like when you got up in the front line you're all sort of one - you shared everything together, and you talked to them the same. And they took their turn as well in the front the same as you did. Where the German officers were lower officers even in battle. They still had to be saluted and stood to attention to talk to them. And the result was... I've said this before,

07:00 and there's a lot of trouble over it too in the newspapers. But it's very true. When an English officer got shot they were a bit lost because the officer gave all the orders; they all relied on the officer. Whereas with our lot if an officer got shot well it made no difference; we just carried on the same. There was always a sergeant or a corporal or even one of the privates would take over and we'd keep going. Nothing would sort of alter, even if you did lose an officer.

07:30 But with the others they were a bit... At Alamein especially it came out. An officer got killed there and they were sort of running around in circles waiting for somebody to give them an order. They couldn't understand us not saluting, that was absolute beyond the Pommies. Mind you, they were good.

08:00 They were good. I had nothing against them. And their Vickers machine gunners were Northumberland Fusiliers. As long as you knew you had them backing you up you were very, very confident. They were wonderful and their artillery were great. We only had battery of 2/12th Artillery was the only artillery we had. That's twenty-five pounders. We had all British artillery.

08:30 You could always rely on them for support and dead on the spot too; they were good. But as I say their officers were still officers even when they were in the front line.

Besides the radio, what German propaganda were you subject to in Tobruk?

That was about the only thing. Oh I've got some... They dropped pamphlets on us telling

09:00 us how we were to give in, to surrender, that the British had been overtaken and all that sort of thing and come forward and show white flags, and we'd be taken prisoners and treated well, and all our supplies coming up to us had been sunk in the Mediterranean. All that sort of thing, all on these pamphlets. But all it did was get our fellows out at night racing around trying to find them

09:30 as souvenirs. They did the same thing at Alamein, dropped pamphlets on us. You are having... The Yanks are having a good time in your country. What about you? And, you are defending Alamein but what about Port Darwin? That was another one they dropped on us. We got those... But that's all it did, got us out getting them as souvenirs. It didn't make any difference to us. Same as old

10:00 Haw Haw. We sort of treated him as a joke.

Now you had a bit of an abortive evacuation from Tobruk.

Yes, that's right. When we were relieved... Our Government had us relieved because everybody was getting sick and that we were getting down in strength and our nerves were going and all that. So they decided we'd been there long enough and they should relieve us. So the Poles came up and

- 10:30 relieved some. And we had the British 71st Army. They took over from the army that was in there. And gradually over the... Boats could only come in to take us out about three nights of each moon and we knew just what that was. When you got there you learnt where the north star was and you learnt when the moon would be up and when it'd be sinking. And had to come up at night so's they could get back past
- 11:00 Mersa Matruh by daylight because otherwise they'd get blown out of the water. And ours was the last battalion to leave and all the other battalions had gone. They got down onto the wharf and the boats had taken them out. So we got down around about October... Oh I don't know what date. I've got it written down somewhere but it doesn't matter. All of a sudden we're sitting on our boat to come up called the Latona and we'd handed all our rations to the crowd that was taking over from us. I think it
- 11:30 was the Border Regiment, the British Border Regiment that took over from us. And we gave them our ammunition and all the spare weaponry, German weapons and Italian weapons. And grenades, ammunition and all our food that we had over, we gave that all to them and down we went to the wharf. And we're sitting there, came around about twelve o'clock and we thought, "Oh the boat'll soon want to come in or it'll never get back to Mersa Matruh." And about one
- 12:00 o'clock in the... About half past one or something there came the order, "Righto, pick up your gear, back onto the trucks." And the trucks turned up and we got on. Our boat was sunk on the way coming to get us. And we had to go back again. Now of course we were on nobody's ration strength - we weren't supposed to be there. And they dumped us... They took us back and they dumped us right near a big British ration dump, barbed wire all around it, and there were Indians guarding it. And
- 12:30 of course we had nothing to eat because we weren't supposed to be there. Nobody to feed us. So I took a couple of fellows, three chaps out of my section, and we raided the ration dump. And we had cases of sausages on our shoulders. We went inside and took these cases that we found and put them near the barbed wire. Then we came out and picked these cases up and they were full of sausages. We hadn't gone... It was a bright moonlit night. Hadn't gone very
- 13:00 far and all of a sudden three British officers grabbed us. A captain, a major and a lieutenant. Marched us straight in in front of our old colonel. And wanted us charged and so forth, stealing rations and so forth. So finally we were court-martialled, the four of us. One of them was Keith Bowles, who was the chap from Weethalle - he was still with me. And I remember writing to Dad and telling him don't be surprised if he didn't hear from me
- 13:30 for a while, I looked like I was in a bit of trouble. We all thought we'd finish up in the boob back in Palestine. But we had an officer with us. These English officers... Our colonel was 'Bull' Burridge - he was always called 'Bull' because he had a big rough voice and was a rough sort of lad. But oh a good soldier, he got an MM [Military Medal] in the First War. And they told him what he had to do. Well it was the wrong thing to do, tell 'Bull' Burridge what he had to do. "These men had to be charged. They had to be this, that and the other." So he said, "I'll handle this." And chased them out.
- 14:00 And he said, "Now what are you fellows...?" And we told him and he wasn't annoyed. He said, "I'm not annoyed with you for getting in there and trying to get some rations for yourself." He said, "The fact is that four of my men allowed three Pommie officers to arrest you." He said, "That's bloody terrible." And he blew us up. Anyway we had a solicitor with us, Barton Morne, he was after a Queen's Counsel later on. And he said, "Morne, I want you to get these men off." And he got us off. He had them tangled
- 14:30 up that much when we were in the court martial, he said it was no good having the four of us and each one going up and so on, why not just charge the one and that covered the other three? And they agreed, which they shouldn't have done of course because as soon as they did... I was the one they picked out to be tried. And the charge read that 'stolen four cases of sausages'. He said, "Wait a minute,
- 15:00 how could one man possibly carry four cases of sausages? That'd be an impossibility." And that was the sort of thing he got us out on, plus the four cases were there and the sausages had all gone. There was no evidence. And they were the sort of thing he got us out on. It was impossible for one man to carry four cases of sausages. So we were off scot free. In fact he nearly convinced me I wasn't even in the ration dumps. And weren't these three officers, they said, "They
- 15:30 didn't even get a red line in their pay book." I marched past these three officers, all of us did, and back to our company headquarters. That was the start of our stay in Tobruk after we were left behind. They put us up into a very easy area, the Derna Road area, where there was a big cliff in front of us and there was no fear of any Germans getting there and it was pretty good.. We had a funny episode there. One of the Poles came up,
- 16:00 a Polish officer. And one of our chaps, Ken Crutchett from Caloundra, he was on picket duty. And they ran to tell us that the Pole was coming up. We were used to get a sit rep, that's a situation report. Every hour they'd ring through. And we got this message, Jack White, he was also from out that way, Temora or somewhere. And before we had a chance to tell Ken, this officer arrived. Well Ken challenged him and of course he answered in Polish, which is very much like German.
- 16:30 And he was silhouetted out on the skyline and I can remember Jack White and I looking and here's Ken with a rifle and bayonet and this poor old Pole trying to tell him. And Ken standing their like this. And we were laughing that much we couldn't get out to tell him it was a Pole that was there. But anyhow they left us there until... That was the only front line we went into. We didn't go into any of the Salient

- or bad areas. And then the 8th Army attacked from
- 17:00 back down Alamein way and Mersa Matruh to relieve Tobruk. You know, drove the Germans right back to Sidi Rezegh and Eduda [?] and those places. And that's where the big battles were taking place while they were trying to get the Germans out. And our crowd had attacked from in Tobruk too, but they were getting knocked about and they didn't have a full battalion, there was only... Our
- 17:30 battalion was there of course. We hadn't been in action at all. So against all the rules we were supposed to never go in again, they sent us in. And we went up to Eduda... Was a bit of a hill there that the Germans had. And we had to take that and we attacked it one morning. We had bad luck just as we were about to start off. A shell came over and blew one of our platoons to pieces, practically. Oh, quite a lot of people got killed that morning.
- 18:00 And anyhow we had rifles and bayonets and we've charged up the hill at them and anyway we finally took the hill at Eduda. And afterwards there was a lot more fighting around there. The Germans cleared off. They chased them all back, right out of Tobruk, right out of the desert, right back past Tripoli and Az Zawiyah.
- 18:30 We came... After our attack, the only one we did. Oh we did a little bit more fighting but not much. We came back inside the perimeter then. And we took patrols out but the Germans had gone. We went miles out and we yelled and fired and nobody opposed it. And they'd all gone. And a funny thing happened then, too. They told us to go for a bit of a look. We were walking around Tobruk and that was the
- 19:00 7th of December. Walking around on top of the ground was wonderful. And we got an order from our officer that we could go and look over the battlefields. Anybody standing on a booby trap or getting wounded was a self-inflicted wound. And the only one that ever did get blown up was him. And he's still alive. Oh he's a good bloke. He never come back to us after that cause it hit him in the legs and made a bit of a mess of him. He had his foot off the other day
- 19:30 actually, poor old John. And we came out by road. We were there... On the 16th December we came out by trucks. I say by road, but there was no road. We went straight across... We headed straight for Egypt. And the first night we stopped right on the Egyptian Libyan border. And that was our first night out of Tobruk.

So when you had to fight your way out

- 20:00 **at Eduda for example, you were attacking uphill in daylight?**

In daylight it was, yes. In daylight. The first morning out there, we got off the trucks and we're all getting ready. And next morning they were on the ridge at Eduda. There was all these people moving about and shaking their blankets. It was the Germans. They were on one hill and we were on the other.

- 20:30 So we went back down the hill and got all prepared and so forth. But we attacked them in daylight.

How much open ground did you have to cover?

Oh three or four hundred yards, I suppose. They were sort of a little bit out of our sight till we got to the bottom of the hill. It wasn't a hill like that, nothing like at Anzac or anything. It was just a low sort of a hill. But that wasn't the only time we attacked like

- 21:00 that. We did at other times as well.

What's going through your head when you're running up hill against German positions?

Get there as soon as you can. And they were firing and so forth. We were kicking up such a hell of a din and I don't think they were used to rifles and bayonets. And yelling our heads off of course, cause they told us to yell and scream,

- 21:30 make as much noise as you can and charge. And we did, we really let our heads go. But we did lose quite a few men of course. And unfortunately those that were wounded there and the ones that were wounded in the shell that had landed... came out on a boat called the Chaktina [?]. And it got sunk and all those poor fellows were all drowned. We lost about twenty something men drowned, not only our
- 22:00 fellows, there were other English fellows and Poles on it as well. So if we'd have come out when we should've come out all those chaps that were killed and drowned at Eduda, well they shouldn't have been there. But I've always felt sorry for them, for their relations and that, to think they were so close to getting out of Tobruk, that that should happen.

When you are charging

- 22:30 **with a bayonet and screaming your head off, what's it like when you get in there amongst them?**

Well I said just a while back, well I suppose you're not human beings really. You're just going and your life's on the line and you get it over and done with as quick as possible. And it's terrible really, but at that stage you don't

- 23:00 notice it. I think you're past being... I've always thought since you've passed being human because it's you or them. And you only get a split second. You don't hesitate. It never worried me greatly. It wasn't till years later that I used to get
- 23:30 nightmares about such things. But at the time, no. And that was another thing. When that was over everybody sort... Well you didn't have a chance. Everybody had to dig in because of a counterattack and all that sort of thing. But your nerves relaxed a bit and you're talking louder than you should. And laughing when you shouldn't.

Were there ever men that you saw that couldn't take the strain?

Yeah.

- 24:00 Yeah. Not so much Tobruk and there. Alamein was different. Alamein, it went on for days and days at Alamein. And some of them... an odd one or two. But some never came back to us, others did come back. But you just carried on as you normally would.
- 24:30 Never said anything to them or anything. They just became another part of the section or platoon whatever it might be. Not a great many, mind you. But some chaps just couldn't take it. The nerves get the better of them. Like even getting towards the end of the war the nerves were getting the better of me. I was a lot slower getting up than I was in the early days. Good fellows.
- 25:00 Real top notch men. But just weren't made for... Like to have... The tax there was on your nerves for such a long period. It never let up. The battle of Alamein especially. Never let up for eight or ten days. Well goodness me you weren't built to be able to withstand that sort of thing
- 25:30 I don't think. But that was the Tobruk one.

I wanted to ask you, I know that it's a bit further on, but after all that you'd been through at Tobruk, how did you then feel later hearing that it'd been almost given away again?

We were up in Syria when we heard that. Well we couldn't believe it. "Who the heck...?" It was the

- 26:00 South Africans were there. There were still British there too, but the British didn't want to surrender. And when they surrendered their officer marched them out into... What's the name? Prisoner of war camp. Formed them all up and marched them, even though they weren't supposed to. They were abused and so on but they all marched. They didn't want to give in.
- 26:30 But of course it was no good just a small little group trying to fight on. But I can always remember saying to Rex... Rex McDonald was still with me, Keith Bowles... "To think of all those flaming holes I dug there and now the Germans are living in them. And all those hours we spent out at so and so and so and so." But of course by then they'd built up all their what's the names at Alamein.
- 27:00 It was so absolutely necessary that Tobruk should be held. It was still a blow. It shortened his lines of communications. Instead of the boats unloading in Tripoli they had to come all those thousands of miles down out in the desert, they unloaded everything in Tobruk which was less than half way. But it was a blow. We couldn't believe it.

So after leaving Tobruk where did you move back to then?

We moved back into Palestine. We came back to a place called Buqbuq. The first night we come by trucks and we had a meal right on the water at the Turkish Libyan border and then we came to a place called Buqbuq, which was near, not Bardia,

- 28:00 Salum, near Salum in the Sidi Barrani. And that's when the rail line ended there. And we got on carriages there but they weren't sort of passenger carriages. They were open carriages for cattle and all that sort of thing. There was no seats in them, no brakes on them or anything and there was no... It was just an open carriage we got in. And the only brake on it was the engine. If the engine stopped you could hear the
- 28:30 carriages, bang, bang, bang. And you'd sort of brace yourself for your carriage, bang. But we were about three days coming across the desert down to Amiriya, unloaded there, had a marvellous meal at Amiriya. And then we came back to Hill 69 in Palestine not far from Gaza. And all the other battalions were there that had come out before us, they all lined the roads. We came in
- 29:00 the trucks at night. And they'd given us all their beer supplies and everything. Donated to us. Well we didn't have to go on parade for about two or three days. They left us in the clothes we were in, dirty, grubby old things, half German, half Italian and left us. And I can remember it rained. On the first night we got there they had a beautiful big meal for us. And there was white bread and butter. And we hadn't had
- 29:30 bread and butter. And I had a slice of this bread and butter - it was so good I had another one. And by the time the main course of a roast dinner and everything, I'd eaten that much bread and butter I had hardly any room because our stomachs had got used to small... And your stomach sort of shrinks up and you can't eat much. There was all this beautiful food and I was full on bread and butter. But it was

beautiful. And then of course the beer was on for us. And my old friend Bill Newman he was carrying...

30:00 Cases of it we were getting. And it was raining and there were slit trenches and he dropped straight into a slit trench. But at least he had his head up and the beer... So we took the beer off him and kept on walking, left him to get out. And we stayed in the tents. They brought the food into us, into the tents. And I can remember our company commander was Herb Cooper and he was very good, always thought a lot of the chaps. And our sergeant major, he'd come out early and he was always very strict. And he called

30:30 in the parade... still had the parade... A Company. This was about two days later. And there were so many on picket duty and there was so many on leave and there was so many on parade. And he had, twelve I think it was, drunk in the tents. And the company commander said, "Sergeant major, those men aren't drunk. They're sick." So we always thought the world of old Herb after that. We weren't drunk - we were sick. And they let us send messages home.

31:00 Little forty-five records, you know about that size. Five or six of us on each record. I've still got the record. Dad got it out when I got home. And we went on leave and I went to Jerusalem and I went with Keith Bowles and we went up to Bethlehem and saw the Church of the Nativity. Went to the Wailing Wall and couldn't understand why everybody was

31:30 banging their heads against it. Seemed stupid to us, but that's the Jewish business. Had a great time there. We were only back for... Oh, did a little training... New uniforms and everything. And then we got leave again into Tel Aviv. And we had a great time in Tel Aviv. Played up a bit of course. We were staying in the Hess Hotel. Hotel Hess.

32:00 **What do you mean by played up, Joe?**

Well we had a few drinks here and there. And met some of the other lads on leave. And sort of took over a café there. And one of the managers, as long as we paid him enough he didn't mind if we did take it over. Right on the beach it was. It was lovely to be able to sit back and drink a beer.

Some of those towns in that area were pretty famous amongst the Australians as fleshpots?

32:30 Yes, yes. Some of them were. When we were there I went on leave to Gaza at one stage too with Keith and a few others and it was all little mud huts and I can't believe what it looks like now when you see Gaza to what it was then. Just little... There was nothing really. We only stayed there a few hours and then came back to the camp again - we couldn't be bothered. There was nothing. Tel Aviv was quite nice. But of course there was a part of Tel Aviv,

33:00 the old part of the city which was called... Oh, I've forgotten the name of it. And it was out of bounds so of course that was the first place we went. And there were all the houses of ill repute and everything else. A terrible hole of a place; it smelt. But Tel Aviv was very nice. I mean all built since the First War. And parts of Jerusalem were the same - there were parts you wouldn't be seen dead in,

33:30 but there were other parts that were quite good. But it was marvellous to wander around Jerusalem and see all the places you'd read about in the Bible and heard about and so on. And to be there and actually see it was a wonderful experience, something I've always been pleased that I got to see. But we were only there for about, well we came out on the 21st December,

34:00 we arrived back in Palestine. And on February about the 2nd or 3rd we had to pack up again and head up to Syria. So we weren't there very long. Some of the chaps went on leave to Cairo. I could've gone to Cairo but I went to Jerusalem instead. And then I wanted to go to Cairo the next time but some of the friends wanted to go into... Mates wanted to go to

34:30 Tel Aviv so I went with them to Tel Aviv. So at that stage I didn't get to Cairo.

What did you think of the locals there?

They were still living in the biblical age a lot of them. You know with the donkeys and you'd see them ploughing with the field. They might have a camel and a bullock yoked up together, or a horse and a camel or something.

35:00 And a single... An old tree with a piece for a plough ploughing it. And sowing the seed by hand, you know, spreading it all out. And with their crops they'd just throw it up in the air and let the breeze blow all the husks off and all living in the past. I couldn't believe that people could live under conditions. They lived under worse conditions than we did in Tobruk I'll swear, only it was quite as dangerous maybe.

35:30 But the huts they lived in! And the little old ladies, they'd have their goats in with them or their sheep or whatever it may be, all slept in the one sort of a hovel. And terrible conditions. And the food... All eat with their hands! And it was quite a... What shall I say? Enlightening to see them and realise how well off we were back in Australia when you see them.

36:00 **How did you get on with them?**

Got on well, got on real well with them. Extra good. We traded them plenty of food and tins of bully

beef, packets of biscuits and all those sort of things we'd take and trade with them. And they were good and they'd do our laundry or any sewing we wanted doing. Mind you, we had to be very careful and tie everything down. They'd thieve anything.

36:30 All our rifles... We'd have a pole in the middle of our tent and the chain around all the trigger guards tied to the pole so they couldn't sneak off with them. And blankets you couldn't hang out or they'd disappear. But that's just them - that's the way they were brought up. But it wasn't the sort of country I'd thought it'd be. Actually it was the first other

37:00 country we'd ever seen as it was, sort of a... What can I say? A bit of an awakening to see how other people lived.

What were you doing up in Syria?

Syria... To start off we were at Tripoli. Was our first stop. And there was an oil refinery there and we were guarding the oil refinery of a night-time. And we were training and we were up and down hills and taking this hill and that hill once again.

37:30 Doing parades and a march through the city. And we had the Duke of... Was that Tripoli? No, that was Tripoli, yes. The Duke of Gloucester, I can remember came and we had a parade for him. All our best bib and tucker. So they told us what a great job we'd done and so and so forth. And we got a bit of leave from there too. A few of us went up to

38:00 Bikari which was up in Lebanon. And it was a beautiful spot. There was snow and everything else. We had a wonderful time there. Gosh they treated us well. Just for three or four days.

Was that the first time you'd seen snow?

No. We had snow in 1939, we had snow in Weethalle, out in the Riverina.

I knew if I asked that question you were going to say

38:30 **something like that.**

But that was the first time I'd seen heaps of it. The snow at Weethalle only laid on the ground for a few hours. But that was the first time I'd seen snow like anything like that. Crikey, yes. It was a wonderful sight.

Was being up in Syria up there almost like a holiday?

It was. It was a bit like a holiday, yes. We got plenty of leave and we got plenty of sports. And... they sent me to a sigs [signals]

39:00 school I remember while I was there. Learning morse code and what's the name, flags and so on. And that was a bit of a picnic too. Everyone enjoyed it. That was one of my best marks. I got 88% in the final exams. It was just like A.B.C. And I also got into problems there. I also seemed to be in problems for something or rather. Not going on a swimming parade.

39:30 And I had to front the same chap that was out there, Captain Daintree, who was our officer in Tobruk when I was court-martialled. He had a look through my pay book and gave me a dressing down and said, "You know it's only your animal cunning that's kept you out of trouble for so long. You haven't even got a red line in your pay book. I don't know how you've managed it." But all in all around Tripoli we had some great parties in

40:00 Tripoli too. And be able to go to the pictures. And my brother-in-law was over there too. He'd come over as a reinforcement for the 2/24th Battalion. And I was able to meet him plus the chap I used to work for that had a farm next to us at Weethalle. He was over there with the 6th Divvy [Division], the 1st Battalion. I went and saw him. Then we went from there up to Aleppo.

40:30 And once again we were guarding a oil refinery. In fact we were up in Aleppo when we heard that Tobruk had fallen. That was a... Much the same as Tripoli. Plenty of leave in the city and look around there and played a lot of cards. Everybody that came into my section had to learn to play.

41:00 Came to our section had to learn to play solo. Like with cards. We all played poker, but solo was the main game. And we put in a lot of time playing that. But mainly just... And parades and what have you just the same. But for a start off, when we got to...

I'm going to stop you, Joe.

Tape 5

00:32 **Sorry Joe, you were saying about Syria and Turkey?**

When we first arrived up in Syria we didn't go straight to Tobruk we went to a place called Latakia first. And our company was sent right up onto the Turkish border because the Turks of course were on our

side at that stage. They were sort of... We were right on the Turkish border and we were patrolling the Turkish border. The Turks were patrolling their side as well. And

01:00 while we were up there, that's where the first lot of snow was. We got snowed in there for three or four days. And all we could do... We cooked in the hut we were in. You couldn't go out on parade or anything. And we got on very well with the villagers there; they were Armenians. All Armenians. And went to church in the Armenian church. They treated us very well there. And

01:30 Keith Bows and I got a job looking after our canteen. We had a canteen there so Keith and I were running the canteen for a while which got me off parades of course. Anything to get off parades. And then when we got snowed in of course... There was a bit of a cliff at the back of our place and we were trading with the natives down below. We were dropping and sock over and they'd give us a bottle of wine, then we'd drop them over the other sock. Or a boot over.

02:00 You wouldn't put the pair over at the one time because away they'd go. So you'd put one boot over and get your bottle of wine and then drop the other boot over. So we were living rather well. And we were up there... Oh, must've been up for two or three weeks right up on the Turkish border. Then we came back down to Latakia. We were Latakia doing patrols and we were parading

02:30 and what have you, all that sort of thing that goes on. And then we marched from Latakia to Tripoli. Took us about five or six days I suppose it was. And it's on newsreel, everything. What's his name? The newsreel cameraman for the war. Different towns we marched through he was there taking our photos as we marched up. All the townspeople out of the way for us of course.

03:00 And that's how we arrived up in Tripoli. But Latakia... We played a lot of football. Different battalions and different companies we played football, soccer and hockey and really just got in... improved our condition after we came out of Tobruk. Then as I say we went to Tripoli and we were

03:30 there for a few weeks. And then went up to Aleppo by train. And while we were up in Aleppo of course all the other divisions had come home. We relieved the 7th Division and they were on their way home and they knew they were coming home and we thought, "Oh, we'll be next." Then we got to pack up and we were leaving the next morning from Aleppo. And we were in town, we were on leave when we got told to come home.

04:00 So we got a chap with a horse and a gharry to drive us home. There were three of us and of course we'd had a few drinks. Got about halfway home and the old horse collapsed. Down he went. So we got out and one of the chaps said, "I know how to get him on his feet." So he opened a bottle of beer and poured it in the old - a mule it was - the mule's ear and he jumped straight to his feet and away you went and we hung on. And he got us right home. Beer's good for lots of things you see. And left

04:30 next morning by train heading back down south. And we pulled into some little station on the way coming down and there was a chap there with... He had beer and he had it in a big barrel. And he was, "So much for a beer." Well of course we were only there for half an hour. And only two or three got a drink. And just as we were about, just as the train started to pull out one of our chaps, Ted Rothington, big brawny fellow he was,

05:00 he jumped out, he grabbed the cask and threw it onto the train and away we went of course. So we had beer in our carriage. Well we stopped the night at... Not Beirut... A bit past Beirut before we crossed the border anyhow. And then they unloaded us onto trucks. And we were still hoping we were coming home until we got... We stopped out in the Sinai Desert we stayed one night there.

05:30 And then we got down to the Suez Canal and of course we turned to the right and we knew if we had turned to the left we were heading to Tewfik and home, but we turned and we knew we were going back up the desert again because we knew that Rommel was on his way down. So that was into Alamein. And the 13th were a bit lucky for a start off at Alamein because we'd spent all that extra time in Tobruk.

06:00 So they didn't put us straight into the front line. The first night we were there they put us into a beautiful well-made positions, concreted, and there was beds and everything there. Oh we had lovely beds and there was blankets and everything else. And we thought, "Oh this is beautiful." Just outside Alexandria. And we were only there the one night. The next night we were on trucks and up into the desert and we were what they called, oh, something

06:30 battalion. We were moved everywhere. Every night we moved somewhere different in case Rommel looked like breaking through somewhere they'd shoot us up there. But we never actually did any fighting. That was for about the first week we got to Alamein. And then we got put up into the front line and of course we were there then right through until the battle started. We went up there in July, I think it was.

07:00 We had many battles before that, but not the big battle.

What sort of scraps did you have before that?

We were up along the coast we were, where we had our first big battle. And they attacked us one night and funny thing, we were playing cards and we were playing poker. And for the first time and the only time in my life I had a routine flush, that's an ace, king, queen, jack and ten of hearts which can't get beaten, it's an unbeatable hand.

- 07:30 We had all the money in the middle and everything else and all of a sudden they started to shell. Over they came and the rifle... So everybody just grabbed the money and I never even got a shilling for my beautiful hand of poker. So they attacked us that night and I was with Rex McDonald in the hole and we fired a lot of shots. They got us right onto our wire but we had all our guns trained
- 08:00 like out of the platoon firing across the front of us and the platoon here firing across the front. And we had two great mates of mine, Ken Crutchett who comes from Caloundra and Jack Stewart. We had a Spandau and they were on the Spandau and they gave us great covering fire too. So they only got as far as our wire. Next morning there was quite a few dead and wounded lying out there. And we carried the wounded in
- 08:30 and bandaged them up. But we were patrolling again much like Tobruk - every night we were out somewhere or other patrolling. And they shelled us every day and it wasn't the best of spots. And they shifted us from there around to another area where they... Which wasn't quite as bad. The Germans seemed to be a lot further away - we were away from the coast. But it was still the same, shells
- 09:00 all the time and patrols. And occasionally you'd go out on a deep patrol and have a bit of a battle with some machine gun post or some area where the Germans were. They had an O Pit, which was an observation post and we'd do what we could, clean it up. And we were patrolling most of the time.
- 09:30 They brought us back then to Trig 33, which is right on the coast. And Trig 33 is still there. It's where our big war memorial is there now for the Italians, and the German war memorial's not far from there. And we were astride the road. And that was a pretty busy sort of a spot. We were fighting all the time but no... We didn't do any hand to hand fighting at that stage. At all. It was all from a distance.
- 10:00 But they brought us back from there at the start of October I think it was. We came back out of the line and we came back onto the beach, onto the Mediterranean and then we started training. We knew there was going to be a big battle coming up. And Montgomery had taken over. And we were training then with tanks
- 10:30 attacking at night and marching for miles and miles with all our pack on and everything else.

What sort of training were you doing with the tanks?

Well we were marching along behind the thing letting the tanks come past us and then going in alongside them. And different signals we had to give them and they'd give us when they were going to turn to the right or turn to the left so they wouldn't get run over and how to get in touch with them. Like is somebody's in a tank you can't get in touch with them much, only banging on the jolly

- 11:00 side or something.

When you were doing this training, did you think that it would work in battle?

Yes because we had that much of it. We'd never seen so many guns, artillery and so many tanks and so many trucks. And by that time too our air force had got the better... See in Tobruk we didn't have an air force at all. Any planes you saw coming you could shoot at cause you knew it wasn't ours. But when we were at Alamein we had all this air force and we had all the artillery firing

- 11:30 all the time. We had plenty of transport and plenty of guns. You could get what you want. Ammunition, plenty of ammunition, which we never had in Tobruk. We always relied on the navy to get it up to us in Tobruk. But here we had transport just bringing it straight up from the [Suez] Canal or from Alexandria. So we were sort of very confident. Mind you we tried to take a point there at one stage.
- 12:00 Not our battalion and they got very badly beaten up by the Germans. Lost a lot of men. The 26th Brigade - wasn't our brigade. And we worked with other battalions. And keep a straight attack and keeping in a straight line. It was marvellous... And then the work we did there.
- 12:30 And training with the Vickers machine gunners. We formed our own machine gun platoon, and training with them to fire over our heads or give us covering fire when we were... when we dug our positions so they'd know to dig that much further up here with their guns where they could cut right across the front of us. And marching with... like artillery. We had to... They taught us to march at a certain pace when we were attacking, not to get any faster or slower
- 13:00 and somebody'd count the paces so the artillery could land just in front of us and keep lifting. And we'd keep walking at the same pace so that we wouldn't run into the artillery or they wouldn't drop their shells on us, which was very, very good later on - we appreciated it. Of course we didn't appreciate it so much then. We thought it was all a lot of hard work. And then another time we attacked with all of us on the tanks and jumped off and went tearing up a hill or something or
- 13:30 other. So it was very heavy, hard training, but very good training. Lots of things we hadn't known before. And another thing they did too... Oh about a week before, they started sending us on leave into Cairo, which was a hell of a surprise. When I got my name called I had to go into leave in Cairo. But whether that was just a sort of, make the Germans
- 14:00 think that there was no chance of us attacking because, "Oh they're sending all their men on leave,

there's no way that there's going to be a battle or anything." Whether that could have been the reason I don't know. But I got leave into Cairo with another chap, Archie Brown. A bit of a wild sort of lad too. And that's where the first met the Yanks. And of course it became a battle then, who was going to drink who under the table. No-one was going to give in first. We had some great times in Cairo for the four days we were there.

- 14:30 And we went out to the pyramids and Sphinx and so on. And I remember they wanted us to ride a camel. Now we were both from the country and both horse riders. And when you get a horse there and you ride around, of course there's the old Arab he leads him around. Well that was no good to Archie and I so we just kicked the old Arab out of the road and away we went. You're not supposed to gallop those horses because they're all stallions and they're likely to drop dead in the heat.
- 15:00 But that didn't worry us. With the poor old Arab running behind us - crying his eyes out he was. And we galloped around. And then we went over to the Sphinx and we got our photos taken sitting on a camel which you had to do of course. Like this was the last day. I said to Archie, "Cripes we've been here for three days and we haven't even seen the pyramids and the Sphinx yet. We'd better move out of the pub and..." So we did. And I've got a very good photo there of Archie and I sitting on
- 15:30 camels just near the pyramids. And we came back and had our last night with the Americans. And incidentally we did have the pleasure of being thrown out of the picture theatre while we were there too. Because we knew all the Egyptian National Anthem and of course we had a bit of a parody for that. Well Archie and I, we'd had a few drinks and they started to play this and we
- 16:00 stood up and sang the parody of course.

What were the words to that?

Oh it was, "Queen Faraida [Queen of Egypt], Queen Faraida and so on and so on. We were all black so and so's but we dearly love our king. Inter quist, quist catia mungarea barden. 'Inter quist'... very good. 'Mungarea'... the food's very good and there's plenty of it. That's inter quist, quist catia mungarea barden." But we sang of course

- 16:30 our bit of course about Queen Faraida and so forth. They didn't appreciate it. So they hoyed us out. And luckily... I don't know why they didn't put us in the boob I'm sure. But we went back and joined the Americans, and had our last night with them. Back to the camp the next day. And then only about a week later of course we moved up for the actual battle of Alamein.

Well we'd

- 17:00 **better move on then to the Battle of Alamein and you tell us your account?**

How long have I got to tell you about the Battle of Alamein?

As long as you need, mate.

We moved up the night before. Yes that's right, the night before we moved up there was quite a lot of trucks and tanks and guns in the moving up, all night they were.

- 17:30 And we knew... They got us all together and they told us what was going to happen. This was going to be the battle to end all battles. This was going to be the finish of Rommel and drive him right out of the desert. And the artillery would open up at twenty minutes to ten and then we'd go in at ten o'clock. Well whether... What are they called? The thing in there where all the guns were. And this is where the German artillery is and this is our
- 18:00 infantry here and they've got a machine gun post here and we're going to do this that and the other. But of course that's all right till you start and then everything goes haywire. And we were issued with plenty of ammunition and extra rounds and they gave us extra rounds for the Bren gun. Extra magazines which we filled up. And they had a little chap called Jackie. He wasn't little; he was nearly as big as me. He hadn't been with us long. He'd joined us up in Syria. And
- 18:30 he had the job of carrying all these extra magazines, Jack did, I remember. And I think I had eight or nine men in my... Oh by then... About three nights before they'd called Tom Duncan from West Wyalong and myself... An officer came in and he said, "Righto, Joe, you two are going to be in charge of sections." They'd offered us stripes but I never ever wanted stripes, I had enough trouble looking after myself. They'd leave so many
- 19:00 men out of battle before you go in in case you get wiped out so you've got corporals and sergeants and a few officers and so on to reform the battalion in case everybody gets... So they'd taken my section leader, he was left out of battle. So they gave me... What section? I had 4 Section. Chris Davidson had 5 Section and Leo Cunningham, one of the originals, had the other section. That's the platoon, you see. About nine in each section, plus the platoon headquarters.
- 19:30 Well we learned everything what we had to do and where we had to start and who we had on our right. We had the 17th Battalion there and we've got the 51st Highlanders over on this side. And then... Oh, and this Jackie Low. We'd been playing cards - it all used to go down on a slate - and he said, "Before we go I think we ought to clear up our debts. You never know, some of us might get hit. We'd better square..." So we squared up all our debts.

- 20:00 And twenty minutes to ten of course the artillery opened up. And it was absolutely deafening. Burst your eardrums. For a start there was all the flash of lights and then it was like swooshing of a million birds or heavy wind overhead as the shells were going over. And then the crash came to us from the... The shells were there before you got the noise of the explosion. And then of course the Germans opened up and oh my God, it went on for twenty
- 20:30 minutes and you couldn't hear yourself think. And it was absolute bedlam. And then at ten o'clock we marched... Heading off up to where the Germans were... All in our sections of course. And my platoon was the reserve platoon. There was 7 and 9 Platoon in front and then the platoon headquarters and then our turn was next. And we've crossed the start line and of course the shells... We realised
- 21:00 then what a great thing to have this... We kept on marching and the shells were dropping and I thought to myself, "My God, this'll be a walkover." Like my nerves were jumping and I was a bit tense but a feeling of exhilaration too you know. You're getting going, everything... the blood was pumping. I thought, "There'll be no German left alive and those that are will be all shell shocked. We'll walk right over the top of them." This was the first night, mind you. Well we did over their
- 21:30 first line, but then they'd all fallen back onto their second line and, oh, they gave us merry hell, they did. And I can always remember seeing our company commander, he got hit and he... Oh I had two or three hit before we got there. Tommy McClelland and Jackie... some other Jack I had. They got hit in the shins with I think it was their own shrapnel. And the company commander got hit and then Tom Duncan, the chap from West Wyalong who I had... went right through,
- 22:00 he was... There was a machine gun post he was having a go at and he was running short of ammunition and he was screaming out for ammunition. And I knew Jackie Low, he was just there. He was next in my section; he had the ammunition. And I said, "Jack, quick, race over to Tom and take that ammunition." And he stood up and as he stood up he got hit. Whack, right in the stomach, I'll never forget that. It's something that's haunted me a bit afterwards. Not then but in later years. And I thought it was me
- 22:30 that gave him the order to stand up and take ... So he went down screaming. And Tom was still yelling out for ammunition so I went over to Jack and got his ammunition and said, "You'll be right." And I yelled for stretcher bearers and he was crying for his mother, too. Marvellous the ones that cried for their mother. Two or three I know that got hit and it was their mother they thought of and Jackie did too. But anyhow, he died. I raced up alongside Tom Duncan and slid in alongside him.
- 23:00 And there was a bloke lying there with his head on his arm and he had a bullet right through... and the blood was all over his face, you couldn't see who he was and I said, "Tom, who's that?" He said, "Oh that's Lochie, they've shot Lochie." Well Harold Lachlan was our sergeant and he was an original, and wonderful... everybody loved him. He didn't drink and he didn't smoke and he didn't swear. As a matter of fact we got him to sing at one concert without... all he'd sing was "Please don't burn our outhouse down, mother is willing..."
- 23:30 That was his song. 'The Outhouse'. He was the only one to ever say 'outhouse'. But Tom and I... I gave him his ammunition and he put it onto his... and we were all firing with this. And the runner came over to us and he said, "Look we're pulling back to..." Wait, we were supposed to go in with tanks but the tanks got onto a mine field and couldn't so we went in without them." And the runner came from platoon headquarters and he said, "We're pulling back to where those positions were dug until the tanks catch up." And I looked up and the fellows
- 24:00 were all coming back. So I said, "Come on, Tom." And he wouldn't. He said, "No, they've shot Lochie." And he was firing away and was taking all the army on his own and he was sort of around the twist. So I grabbed him by the heels and I pulled him back out. And he came out and we raced back with them. And we were there for about half an hour I suppose and the tanks caught up. So we attacked again. And this time everything was going all right. Oh our platoon commander got killed too. Norrie. So that was our
- 24:30 company commander and our platoon commander and our platoon sergeant.

So you took over?

By that time I'm just about... There was another chap senior to me, another corporal. I was still only a lance corporal. But it didn't make much difference. All the best laid plans, see that took us off to the side because of the machine gun post where the other fellows were heading up here and we were heading over there and there was... it was... I didn't think anybody could live. It was absolute bedlam.

- 25:00 There were tracers coming and there was shells and anti-tank guns. And there was tanks, by this time the tanks had caught up. Anyhow we attacked again and this time it was pretty easy going... well I say easy going but the Germans started to run. It was like a grey line in front of us and they were just moving, running. And we were firing as fast as we could. And they were... I said a while back... some of them were running towards us with their hands up because...
- 25:30 well they were running. You didn't stop, you shot anything. If it was moving you were shooting at it. And as soon as they could get behind us they were safe because we couldn't shoot backwards. And we'd heard... somebody had put down... when somebody was coming into surrender he had his hands up and he had a grenade in his hand and he threw it and killed the chap. So of course, they told us that anyhow. Whether it was true or not I don't know. So we were shooting anything that moved. Well you had to. If

you hesitated you were

- 26:00 dead. And everything was going very well and then one of the tanks ran over a mine. By this time it's, oh, I suppose two or three or four o'clock in the morning I don't know. And although it was a bright moonlight when we started, by now you couldn't see anything; it was like dark with all the sand was churned up, and the smoke and the cordite... the smell was nearly absolutely choking you with the smell of cordite. And
- 26:30 the Germans must've reformed and there was a tank, one of their tanks was firing at us and the chaps, why they did... I have never known why all of a sudden all our fellows went down and started to fire. I suppose it was because you all got killed if you stood on your feet. And I went down and I had Keith Bowl - that's the fellow from Weethalle whose mother told me to look after him - along one side of me and Chris Davidson, this funny bloke, on this side of me. And then King Cole, who was driving a carrier
- 27:00 but the carrier had got knocked out so he jumped out and grabbed a rifle and came with us. And all of a sudden these gunners sort of got right... and the tracers were coming and I was lying down there and a funny thing, it crossed my mind at that moment and I was crouched down and I thought, "God, I wish I was back trapping rabbits in Weethalle." Why something like that goes through me head, at that stage, God only knows. And they started to pick them off and I could always recall seeing them.
- 27:30 There was old Whizz Nicholls got hit first and then Ronnie Blackwell and then King Cole and then Chris Davidson got hit alongside me and I thought I was going to be next. I had to be next but I didn't, I wasn't frightened. I'd past being frightened I suppose. Like I was beyond it. And I just sort of braced myself and the next thing Keith Bowl got hit on the other side of me.
- 28:00 And the first thing that entered me head when Keith got hit, "Good God! What'll Mrs Bowles say?" Funny thing I thought of. "What'll Mrs Bowles say?" Anyhow when I got back to Weethalle of course she thanked me very much for looking after him. But then Chris was yelling out so I got a bandage... I jumped on my feet and they were still shooting. I suppose they were but I don't know because all I could think of then was getting these two blokes.
- 28:30 So I wrapped Chris's arm up. I said, "Where are you hit?" He said, "Ooh." The blood was dripping off his arm so I thought, "Oh, must be his elbow." So I wrapped a big bandage around his elbow and said, "Away you go." And I saw him back in hospital and he wasn't hit in the shoulder at all. He wasn't hit in the elbow at all. He was hit up in the shoulder and I'd bandaged his elbow up. He said when he got to RAP [Regimental Aid Post] they took the bandage off and there was nothing there. "I got hit up there." Just the blood was dripping... Anyhow putting his hand in his shirt must've ... And then I grabbed Keith, and Keith was a big man. Oh, big heavy man.
- 29:00 He was a dead weight. And he was spinning around and he got hit in the foot. And I'm sure that it was our tanks... Our tanks must've hit him because they were firing over us and through us and everywhere else. I thought, "I'll pick him up in one of those fireman holds," you know you pick them up over your shoulder and one arm around his legs. I picked him up and he was that darn heavy we both collapsed and we got tangled in barbed wire. And that's the first time
- 29:30 I started to panic. I thought, "Oh my God! We're gone! We'll be dead!" And I remember my Dad had told me, he said, "Joe, whatever happens, if you get into a tight spot, don't panic, because if you panic, you're dead." And I thought of that and I forced to control myself and I could feel the panic, you know it was coming all up... My legs were going stiff on me. That was the stage I got to. And I fought it and I abused Keith for bucking around, of course. And I said,
- 30:00 "We've got to get this barb off us or we'll both be killed." There couldn't have been much barbed wire on us because it only took a couple of seconds to get the barbed off. And I looked... and I thought, "Now what the hell am I going to do? I can't carry him." And then one of the tanks come lumbering up alongside us and stopped. And a British bloke put his head out of the tank and I... I suppose I was right around the bend or something... I yelled out to him. I said, "Help me pick this man up and take him back."
- 30:30 Because there was a bit of a gully further back where we'd started from I thought, "If they get back there he's okay." "No." And you know what? And Keith and I talked about this afterwards, back at home after the war. I had a grenade in my hand and I don't... I had it in my hand. And he must've thought I was going to throw it at him or something. I said, "I think you'd better help me and I think you shot him anyhow." He said, "Righto, righto." And he got down from the tank and he helped me and we put Keith up behind the turret.
- 31:00 And I looked around and everyone else had gone so I jumped up on the turret behind him. Behind the tank. And the bullets were coming on the other side and bouncing off and sparks were flying. And bust me, the tank turned around. Instead of backing out - he only had to go about a hundred yards - he turned around, which meant that Keith and I were on the wrong side of the turret. So he went around one side and I was around the other. And I said, "My God! For a man with one leg you move pretty fast!" And he took
- 31:30 us back and he jumped off, and "Is this okay? I've got to go back." I said, "Righto thanks." And pulled him off. And just then a truck came lumbering past and it was loaded up with barbed wire and pickets and one thing and another, it must've been an engineer's truck. And he stopped and another chap came

wandering out of the dust too. Rastmaster [?], I forget his first name. And he had a bullet through him, through the shoulder here. And I loaded... this driver and I loaded him onto the back of the truck and

- 32:00 I said to Keith, "If you ever meet anybody in Weethalle, when you get there..." I thought he was out, finished you see. But anyhow he didn't, he come back into it. And away they went and I'm there and I'm looking and there was nobody and I couldn't see anybody. And it's all dust and it was dust and smoke and the tanks were firing and there was bullets flying everywhere. And I thought, "Oh my God..." And then out of the dust I saw somebody coming. And
- 32:30 there was a bit of a breeze blowing and the smoke was going sort of up and down and swirling. And this figure looked like he was about ten foot tall and then he looked about this high. And I thought, "Jesus! I've gone off my head!" And bugger me, it was Tom Duncan! He come wandering out of the dust, dragging his rifle. And I said, "Oh my God, Tom I thought I was the only one left alive!" He said, "I thought I was." So we went back a little way and found the hole... No, it wasn't a hole. We were still on top of the ground.
- 33:00 And I said, "We'd better see if we can find our company. There must be a few of them left." He said, "Oh I don't think there's many, so and so got hit, so and so and..." I said, "That's right, I remember seeing Ron Blackwell and the rest of them hit." I said, "And Bowles and Davidson." And I said, "I've got a tin of bully beef in my haversack." And I pulled the haversack off and went and got the bully beef and the bullet had gone through the top of my haversack, through the bully beef, blown the feet out of a pair of socks that I had
- 33:30 and out the bottom. So that must've been the one that missed me when it got the other fellows. So I said, "Oh God, Tom, you can have it all. I don't feel hungry now." And we lay there and then we saw our planes coming. And, "Oh, you little beauty!" And there was nine of them. And they dropped their bombs and they fluttered down and looked like leaflets and then they sort of gathered power and they... Tom said, "Joe, these aren't going to miss us by much." And I said, "They're not going to miss us at all." And
- 34:00 we right down, and we rolled over, fingers in the ears and the mouth open like you're supposed to do. And I swear I bounced about fourteen foot high. Must've been about a foot or two. Tom bounced up and down, we rolled over, and covered in dirt. And our ears were full of dirt and our eyes and blood was running out of my ears and out of my nose, and Tom, he had blood running out of the corner of his eyes even. Well he started to curse them. The Yankee planes they were. He
- 34:30 cursed them and he used language that I've never ever heard before, old Tom. I started off with a hysterical sort of laugh and I thought, "Oh my God, after everything else we've been through now we get blown up by our own flaming planes!" But they didn't, it got only one of our platoons and two or three of our chaps got killed in that little lot. But Tom and I we were awfully lucky. And then a chap came out... by that time of course the sun was up and it was getting on. They said some of A Company they were
- 35:00 reforming back over in a certain area so Tom and I wandered over there. And they amalgamated two companies to make one. A Company and Don Company. And I got a couple more fellows in my... I think I had three fellows left in my section out of the nine we started with. And I said, "Well we'd better dig in because they're sure to counter attack." So we all dug in and the fellows were that weary... we'd been going for so long. And then when it got dark
- 35:30 I got a call back to our company headquarters. So I went back there and they were going to attack again. Because ours were the only area where we hadn't taken our objective. The 17th Battalion were up on our right and the 51st Highlanders were up on our left but our little patch it still hadn't... so we had to take... And I thought, "Oh my God, how am I going to tell the fellows they've got to attack again?" And I got back to the section and every one of them was asleep. And they're sleeping all different... they'd just collapsed. One chap
- 36:00 still had a sandbag... they were filling sandbags to put around in case of a counter attack the next morning. And another chap had dirt on his shovel and one fellow had put his sandbag on and he'd just fallen over it. And I thought, "How in the name of fortune will I wake them up?" The worst I've ever had. I had to abuse them all and I kicked some and shooed some and said, "Come on get your gear." Anyhow we got all our gear together and we got on the start line. And I looked at my watch and it was just ten o'clock. So I thought, "My God, it's only twenty-four hours
- 36:30 since we started." And all those things had happened in those twenty-four hours. And that I think is about the worse twenty... I reckoned I lived three life times in that twenty-four hours. The worse in my life it was, absolutely shocking! But anyhow away we went again and we took our area fairly easily that night. We got on to the start line and away we went and we fired a few shots and there were a bit fired at us and there was a little bit of a battle going on among the
- 37:00 tanks and what have you. But we caught up with the others and dug in. And we were dug in by morning, just in time for a battle out in front of the tanks. And one of our chaps... one of our sections of anti-tank guns had moved up near us and they knocked out three or four German tanks. And we had quite a good victory that morning. And the infantry that were coming behind, we opened up on them and they scooted. And I can remember later that morning and our colonel,
- 37:30 who was our 2IC [Second in Command] actually, George Colvin. He wasn't a colonel. He dropped in the hole alongside me and I thought, "What the heck's he doing here right up in the front line?" He said,

"Colonel Turner's been killed." Oh at the battle of Eduda, our colonel, Colonel Bull Burridge I told you about, he got hit in the head and he never came back to us after that. And we got Colonel Turner who was a 2IC. Colonel Turner was with us then until Alamein and he got killed on the first night of the

38:00 battle. So George Colvin, who was his 2IC, he said, "I've been promoted to colonel. I'm in charge of the battalion." I said, "Christ, sir, you won't be in charge long if you don't get your head down." And he was our colonel then right through till the finish of the war. George Colvin. I got to know him well. I was on the mat that many times. He knew my first name as soon as I turned up. But... then each

38:30 night then we were attacking somewhere or other... sometimes in different directions. Sometimes we were even back the way we'd come. Like where the Germans had broken through and we had to attack and chase that lot out or it might've been an artillery post that had been by passed and we had to go and spike those. So it went on night after night so... and that's when you say, did I ever see anybody... I saw one or two crack up there by the finish.

How did that manifest itself, that cracking up?

39:00 Well we attacked one night and we took some prisoners. But we were still attacking but we took these prisoners. If you couldn't take prisoners you've got to send them out behind you. Well this chap said, "I'm taking them back." I said, "But..." "I'm taking them here." And he escorted the prisoners back but there was no need. We didn't see him again for three or four days and they told me, "Oh so and so's disappeared." And another chap didn't get out... we attacked and he still stayed in the hole. But he came...

39:30 And I can remember we got a new lieutenant then and he said, "Where's so and so?" And I said, "Oh he's got something wrong in the stomach, he'll catch up to us." And a couple of days later he came back again and I think the officer woke up too. He said, "I see so and so's rejoined us. That's very good." He had a bit of a grin on his face. I said, "Yes he's a good soldier." And things like that. But I never saw anybody turn and actually run.

40:00 **You never saw anybody run but from the way you describe that first battle with your mate there with the Bren gun, it sounds like men on the contrary also went a bit berserk?**

Oh yes. Tom Duncan went right off his head. And he was a very good soldier. A great big tall red-haired chap he was. But he was, he was right around the bend. If I hadn't have pulled him out he'd have stayed there. No way he wouldn't have known. I pulled him out.

40:30 And then, him again when he went berserk when the planes bombed us too. I can tell you he was right around the twist. It was him that come out of the dust that morning, but by God I was pleased to see him. Anyhow two or three nights we attacked. We attacked over to the... then we were relieved by the 17th Battalion and we weren't very far back and there was a battle going on in front of us and there was one of our carriers, Bren carrier, went out to pick up some

41:00 wounded... then they went out. He was game to go out in the carrier because there was anti-tank guns and everything firing. It was bedlam really. And out he went. And he just about got there and it was so severe he turned and headed back towards us. And a shell hit him in the back of the carrier and he jumped out over the front... he was wounded... and he jumped out over the front of the carrier and he was running towards us. And we were in the hole yelling, "Run! Run! Keep coming!"

41:30 Keep running, Frank! Keep running!" And he collapsed oh about ten or fifteen yards from the holes we were in. And this Leo Cunningham and I jumped out and grabbed him. And just as we did an ambulance turned up. Where from or how it got there I don't know, but an 8th Field Ambulance. They were a good mob. And we got the stretcher and put him on it and we threw him into the stretcher and we were in such a hell of a hurry he slid straight backwards off the stretcher. And the stretcher went in but he landed up on the ground. So we grabbed him and threw him onto the stretcher and away

42:00 they went.

Tape 6

00:31 **Joe, you were telling us about having been in battle for about twenty-four hours and felt like it was three years. What was the scenery, what did you see after those twenty-four hours of battle of Alamein?**

Well after the twenty-four hours there was a tank battle going on. There was tanks everywhere and our anti-tank guns were shooting them up and their tanks. And our tanks and there must've been

01:00 oh twenty on a ridge just in front of us. And quite a lot of them were hit and set on fire. It's marvellous how long they'll burn, big palls of black smoke come out. And they'll burn for days. And we were close enough to see when a tank got hit and the chaps trying to scramble out of it. Sometimes they'd get out and sometimes they'd get about halfway out and all alight and it was a shocking scene it was. It was terrible to see.

- 01:30 There was one German tank got hit right near us and the first chap got out all right. He was all alight. His clothes were all alight and he was running towards us with his clothes alight and collapsed of course and he spun around burning. And another chap got... just got out of the turret and fell and the third chap was about half out and just hanging over the side of the turret. It was absolutely shocking and I always thought that... "No way I'd ever go into battle in a tank."
- 02:00 If you got hit you only got out one at a time. And the smell was... oh it'd nearly choke you the smell of the burning clothes and bodies and oil and tar and tyres and what have you. It was dreadful. But one of the lads always mentioned to me years after... I called out and... we had... a truck had
- 02:30 come up the night before and brought us up some water. And we had an old... we always carried an old billy can with us and I filled it three parts full of water and I crawled out and put it onto it. I boiled the billy on the tank. That was the most expensive fire that I've ever boiled a billy on. And crawled back again. And there was so much going on at the same time, not only just then. There was planes coming over dropping shells, and mortar shells and
- 03:00 bursting around. And anti-tank tracers and bouncing here and there. And when it was all over the carnage. It had knocked out tanks and trucks and guns and anti-tank guns. All the equipment that was lying around, it's a terrible sight. That was the second day and then of course it went on like that each day we'd attack
- 03:30 somewhere or took something. We relieved the 17th Battalion and then one time we had a bit of a rest for a day but then that following night we had to attack another little point that was holding us up. But never nearly as bad as the first night of course. It was only short and sharp and it was finished. And it was around about the oh, 7th, 8th, 9th I suppose... I had a chap with me, an Irishman,
- 04:00 George Bleakley, he's broad Irish. And I can remember as we were going through another company, we were taking over the front line, and this chap... a fat chap he was. He came from Weethalle, a Mervin Lees. We always used to call him Old Rolly. But why we called him Old Rolly was we were in camp when Old Rolly won the Melbourne Cup at a hundred to one. And Merv Lees backed him. So he was always called Old Rolly after that. And this night as we were going in he said, "Keep your head down George, there's plenty of bullets flying around." And old
- 04:30 George of course being an Irishman said, "I'm right Rolly. If you get hit you won't get hit in the head, you've got a much bigger spot you'll get hit in. You want to keep that down." That was his stern end of course. Well that night, or during the afternoon when the shells came over, poor old George he was on top of the ground doing something. He come charging and he said, "I'm hit Joe." I said, "Where are you hit, George?" He said, "I'm hit in the so and so stern end."
- 05:00 And he said, "Oh, won't Old Rolly laugh," when he hears that he was the one that got hit. That was old George Bleakley. But we attacked oh around the seventh or eighth night and where we stopped, we drove the Germans out but they left a lot of booby traps. Barbed wire all around and you weren't game to touch the barbed wire because they'd have something tied to it. So as soon as the wire shook off'd go... And we got a terrific amount hit with just
- 05:30 these little boobies... little bombs or little hand grenades. Tied, there was wire and as soon as you touched them, off they'd go. So we got quite a lot hit in that area. And we got a lot of men badly hit. And I remember another fellow Dick Burrell he was another great friend of mine, he came from up our direction. And he was on top when the shells... and he was running trying to find a hole and we were all our holes. And every hole he went to there was somebody in it. And I thought of
- 06:00 once again my mind went back to catching rabbits. We used to... and I'd always fill their burrows in first and when the dog was chasing the rabbits he'd go to one hole and it'd be closed and he'd be trying, looking for a hole to dive into. And Dick Burrell reminded me exactly of the same thing. And I knew Dick, worked with him for years after the war. But I struck him again when I got hit and I got back to hospital. He was hit in the leg, all up the back of his legs. And he couldn't
- 06:30 bend over. And that was another funny one. At the hospital in the ward he'd been out for something or rather and he was coming back in again and his pyjamas slipped down and there he was standing and he couldn't bend to pull his pyjamas up. And of course we laughed, we thought it was a heck of a joke. When the nurse was coming there was poor old Dick standing there all bare from the waist down because he couldn't bend to pull his pyjamas up. We told him that story many times too. But this night he... we got the stretcher
- 07:00 bearers and cleaned them all up. And another great friend of mine, who's still alive... he's been back with me on a few trips to Tobruk, Curly Morecombe. He was on the list and he got posted out into the mine field and he got hit and there were so many hit at the same time they were racing here there and everywhere. And bandaged him up and this voice came out, "Son, when you're not busy will you come out and get me?" So I went out and got him and he'd
- 07:30 been hit. But he sat out there and waited till there was a little bit of quiet so as he could get someone to come and bring him in. By the end of that evening there was only me left in my section, everybody had been hit barring me. And this Tom Duncan and I went out to get the rations. It was oh about one o'clock in the morning I suppose and we heard the ration truck had turned up. So Tom and I and another chap named Charlie Nimmo.

- 08:00 And as we were coming back with the rations, over came a shell and got the three of us, hit us in the legs. But prior to that a strange thing happened there too. We had a Billy Ratten, he was our stretcher bearer. And a shell come up and we all dived into the hole and Bill was the last one and he dived in and he was on top of me. And when the shelling had eased a bit I said, "Come on Bill out
- 08:30 you pop." And he was still lying there. And I said, "I think you've been hit." And I had... Leo Cunningham was in the hole with me and we pushed him up on top and he was dead. But he didn't have a mark on him, not one single mark. It must've been concussion or something that killed him. We called for the stretcher bearers and they came and looked him over and... it was a moonlight night. And he never had a mark.
- 09:00 He was just... and yet when the write up was in the paper I saw 'died of wounds' which was quite wrong. He didn't die of wounds, he got killed straight out. But when I got hit, I didn't know I was hit. I went to take another step forward and fell head over heels. I got shot... a piece of shrapnel went through my leg. And my boot was full of blood.
- 09:30 And I thought, "I'm hit." And Tom Duncan was hit as well. He was the same Tom Duncan. He was alongside me. He got hit in the legs as well and Charlie Nimmo. We got bandaged up and that made my section... that was the finish of my section. I was the last one hit.

How did it feel for you, sorry to interrupt, how did it feel being the last man hit. You said you were the only one from your section, how did that affect you?

- 10:00 It was a bit of a... it was a strange feeling. At that stage I thought, "Well I can't get hit, I'm right, I'm, okay." I knocked off worrying a bit. I thought, "Well I've survived all that." And by that time we had the Jerries on the run a bit. They wouldn't last much longer, we were very confident at the last night we attacked. And I felt very... I was still a little bit
- 10:30 shaky... like we'd been going for so many days. But I wasn't really frightened. I was quite confident I was going to get through without getting hit. And then when I got hit in the legs which I suppose was as good as you could get. But then the problem was... they brought us out and put us into an ambulance. The three of us, Tom Duncan and Charlie Nimmo and myself, I was in the bottom and there was a chap across from me. He died on the way coming up in the ambulance.
- 11:00 And of course there were no lights or anything and there's still shells going on. And I thought, "My God, we're going to get hit or we'll run over a mine and I'll be killed here." And here's me on my way out of this. I was sure we were going to get hit. And Tom Duncan once again, I think he abused every jolly German in the army and Hitler and Rommel and he kept on going for the whole half hour or so we were in the ambulance, old Tom.
- 11:30 And I had to laugh again, even though the condition we were under and the thought that we were going to get blown up, I still couldn't help laughing. Old Tom was still going on. He cursed everybody. And we finished up... went to a casualty clearing station, a New Zealand one. And they bandaged us up and put us onto another ambulance and we went back to an English
- 12:00 hospital. But they took us off and found we were Australians so they put us back in the ambulance and sent us to the Australian 7th AGH which was at Sidi Bishr just out of Alexandria. And so within oh eight or ten hours we were back at the hospital and you can't believe, you can't explain to anyone the feeling it was to get back to the peace and quiet. And we got sheets
- 12:30 and pillows and sheets and in bed. And washed and cleaned and there was nurses wandering after all. That was the biggest shock of anything, like you'd sort of forgotten that those sort of things were still occurring. And we were back there and out of the battle and everything. And in the ward I went into I remember it was number nine ward, half of my section were all in there. I caught up with them again,
- 13:00 those that hadn't been killed. Only what, a couple killed and the rest were all wounded. And I joined them again in the hospital bed, they were all in bed as well. And Tom Duncan was in the bed alongside me. The chap that I'd been right through with. And they promoted us both to corporals, we were lance corporals up to then so they made us corporals both on the same day. So we were lance corporals on the same day and we were corporals on the same day. Old Tom.
- 13:30 **Speaking of being in the hospital and with nurses around, prior to that how did you handle life without women in it?**
- Well ... I think we went all right I suppose. You had your friends to talk to and everything. But it was nothing like you read and see about nowadays. I shared holes with chaps, dugouts, side by side. In fact
- 14:00 Jack White he was a big man and we dug a hole once and we had to stand up to get down into it side by side. And if one of us wanted to turn over we both had to stand up so you could turn over. And through all those years I was in the army nobody ever run their hands over me. And it's hard to believe but... and we all showered together and we washed together and the toilets used to be side by side. Might be seven or eight of you sitting on the little thingamabobs, side by side. And those
- 14:30 sort of things... I don't know. But nowadays all the things you hear about, it's hard to believe that there could be such a change. And during the army... it was talked about occasionally but only as a sort of a

joke. Yeah.

Homosexuality?

Yeah. Homosexuality. And I never struck it. And in the infantry you were in together all the time.

15:00 No never at any stage.

Did you have girlfriends that you wrote to back in Australia?

Oh yes, I had lots of girlfriends that I wrote to. Different ones. Not just girlfriends. Girls I knew. They wrote to me. They wrote to me from all different areas from Wagga camp where I got to know a couple. And people from my home town used to write to me. And ones

15:30 I knew... a couple I knew in Sydney wrote to me. They used to live up in the bush and moved to Sydney. A girl there used to write to me. And another little township near Weethalle where I lived, I knew the family very well. Their daughter always wrote to me or sometimes the mother wrote to me. And sent little parcels and things. But there was no-one in particular... in fact only... the one I suppose the most

16:00 interested in... her name was Sally. I always remember Sally because we were both about the same age and she lived on a farm and I lived on a farm. I met her at dances but I'd never ever been to the pictures with her or taken her out or anything. And we went to different cricket matches together and she was a good friend of my sister's. She used to write me. But by the time I got back... she was married by the time I got back from the Middle East and had a family.

16:30 It didn't worry me because I wasn't really closely tied up with any girls at that stage. And so the female part didn't sort of worry me. Even like... a lot of the chaps took advantage of all the... in the Middle East there was plenty of places. I've been on picket duty there but that was all.

17:00 I suppose I shouldn't say... they always used to say, "Be proud of the fact that..." and a lot of other fellows too. What was it? I was a salt sea virgin. That means you've travelled overseas and back. Which I suppose was just one of those things. Some people are different to others.

17:30 I used to stand... I've always said, "I used to stand outside and hold the soldiers' hats so nobody'd pinch them." Don't you believe me?

I believe you, I think. What did the brothels look like on the outside?

I've been inside. I've gone inside. Beautiful rooms all silks and what have you hanging around and girls sort of half dressed and draped with things.

18:00 And what have you. But well possibly I was frightened. Like we'd been told what could happen and would happen and what'd kill you. And it always got to me, and Keith Bowls was the same. We couldn't understand, we always tried to talk the fellows out of it. But it was a waste of time. But I've been to a few of them. Having them sit on your knee and all that sort of business.

18:30 Were they young girls?

Yes. Yes some of them were quite nice looking girls. And the places were very nice and very clean and very up to date. But actually to be quite truthful I was never ever tempted. Probably I was too frightened to be tempted. We'll put it down to that anyhow.

19:00 Back to what we were talking about before, what were the circumstances under which you were hit with that shrapnel, what was going on?

Just a shell came over. We'd been out, as I say, bringing in the rations about one o'clock in the morning. We were on top of the ground walking along with these... I was in front and Tom Duncan and Charlie Nimmo were behind me. Because how I come to be on it, it wasn't my job but we knew there was mines and booby traps all around as I was explaining to you in this area. And the engineers had come up at

19:30 oh about midnight clearing an area of tracks back to company headquarters and battalion headquarters. And I happened to be on picket duty just at that stage so I knew just where the tracks were. So when the ration truck came up about one, I just got to sleep too. So they woke me up and said, "Joe you know your way, you were there when the engineers cleared the mine field. Would you take a party back to get the rations?" I said, "Oh yeah righto." So that's how

20:00 I came to go out and then a shell came over while we were on top of the ground. Oh not far away from us. And the three of us got hit in the legs.

What does that feel like?

Well as I say I didn't even realise it. I felt a sting but I didn't realise I was hit until I went to step forward and went head over heels. And then it began to burn, a terrible burn in my leg. But it wasn't that...

20:30 it wasn't so terribly bad. No. And when I did get back and found out it was only just a hit... and lucky it didn't hit any bones just in the back and out the front, incidentally. It wasn't in the front and out the back. But shrapnel must have shot... but it didn't hit a bone. It was what you call a good sort of a

wound, it got me out of the battle fields. Although by that time, it was only a couple of days later we only ever attacked again once after that. Our chaps and it was all over.

- 21:00 Rommel was on his way. They'd chased him right back past Tobruk and right back out of Egypt and out of Libya and Az Zawiyah and right back out of North Africa. And they didn't stop till he was right out of the place. But of course I was still back in hospital. And I was in hospital for, oh a week or two. Then we went to a convalescence camp.
- 21:30 While... just after I got out of bed... on my crutches, I was able to walk around a bit. Another chap out of the 48th Battalion and I, Sergeant Richardson, we... the hospital wasn't far from the Nile. And we were dressed in white shirt and blue trousers which meant hospital patients. And we were walking along the Nile and all of a sudden a couple of Arabs... both had reaping hooks and they wanted
- 22:00 cigarettes for starters. Well I didn't have any cigarettes. Then they wanted our money and the next thing we were surrounded by all these jolly Arabs and they all had some sort of a weapon. And I thought, "Oh, dear Lord!" And a chap had me around the head, and I thought I was going to get my throat cut. Anyhow I finally got a whack and I've still got a big bump on the back of my head. And they took all our money and everything we had on us. My belts, my boots and they're pulling my trousers off. And I was kicking and
- 22:30 some other Arabs come racing up screaming their heads off and these chaps who were around us all took off. So we got back to the... oh incidentally it was all black sort of soil alongside the Nile. And I thought they were going to throw us in. But anyhow they didn't. We got back to the camp and oh it caused a hullabaloo and we had the Egyptian police there and everything and that night they... about nine or ten o'clock I suppose the police came and got us two, Richardson and myself. And they took us
- 23:00 in a van down some Egyptian village and they'd set up a court room there. And they had the chaps and I got back my money, I got my belt back. I even got a telegram back that I had received that day from Dad. They found the people. It was a rough old court case. They'd ask him something... they'd give him a slap over that side of the face and if he didn't say what they wanted him to, another slap and knock him down. And up he got again. And I had to say, well they asked me if that was one of them. Well they look all alike to me.
- 23:30 I said, "I couldn't be sure." They all looked like... all Arabs looked alike.

What were they wearing?

They were wearing the usual Arab dress like trousers with big jodhpurs sort of thing, tied at the legs and wired at the bottom with a piece hanging down in the middle away down here. And a thing around their head. They didn't wear masks or anything.

- 24:00 But they did get them and we got most of our gear back again. But the nurses wouldn't let us go to bed till all hours. We got back about, oh three or four o'clock in the morning back to the hospital. And the night nurses were all waiting there, we had to tell them all our story, what had happened and who we'd seen. How many there were. Sat around talking till the blinking sun came up. Just to hear our story. But
- 24:30 I still have the bump on the back of my head but it didn't do me any harm. I had a bit of blood run down the back and my white shirt was covered in black, where they'd rolled me over in the dirt and so on. And as I say, only about two or three days later we left... they packed the hospital up because the battle had finished. And we went to a staging camp just out of Alexandria. And I got leave into Alex too with Keith Bowles
- 25:00 who by that time, he was back on his feet again too. And had a look around Alexandria which I'd missed out of then back to different staging camps. Then back to join the battalion who were back in Palestine then. And we rejoined the battalion. And of course, people were gradually coming back from the hospitals and what have you and I had three or four of my old team there. And quite a few of... a lot of new
- 25:30 reinforcements arrived by then. And build up my section. We knew then... well we'd heard we were coming home. So they had us training for a big parade at Gaza airstrip. Just getting close to Christmas too. No I didn't get any leave at that stage because
- 26:00 it was too soon to coming home. And we had Christmas... No, we had this big parade at Gaza airport. All the 9th Division were there, we all marched around. We had General Alexander, who was the Commander-in-Chief of the forces in the Middle East. We all marched past him and he told us what good fellows we were and I can always remember, in fact I've got it there, his full speech. And I always remember officer, warrant officers and non commissioned officers and men and
- 26:30 so forth. And I remember his last little bit he said, "No matter in what field of battle he ever was, he'd always remember that under his command brought the 9th Australian Division." That was his finish. And then we marched back to the camp and it was Christmas... that was on the 22nd December. And then Christmas day... oh we had a wonderful Christmas dinner. We had roast turkey and plum pudding and the officers all waited on the men. And Morshead,
- 27:00 General Morshead came around and saw us all and spoke to us. And there's a photo there, sitting at a

table at that Christmas dinner and General Morshead drinking a 'Lady Blamey' as we called them, what we used to drink out of. It was an ordinary beer bottle cut off around half way up it. So we didn't have the top on, you just had the bottom half of the beer bottle. And that was all filed off nice and smooth and that's what you used to drink out of. We called them 'Lady Blameys'. Well

27:30 there's a photo there somewhere of General Morshead drinking out of one of these Lady Blameys at our Christmas dinner. Congratulated us all on the job we'd done.

How long were you in hospital for?

Well I got hit on the... actually it was the morning of the 31st October and I must've been in hospital about six weeks I suppose, five weeks.

28:00 But I was very, very well looked after. They were wonderful those nurses. And the VADs, that's the Voluntary Aid Detachments, they were all very good. Treated us well. Another chap named Ronnie Bladwell and I, we were at this staging camp. And they had a dance... before they closed the hospital down they had a dance to sort of celebrate. And we hitchhiked a ride on an Arab truck back to the hospital and went to the dance that night. We weren't supposed to be out of

28:30 course. And stayed the night. One of the nurses opened one of the tents that was all locked up. She said, "There's a bed in there, you can sleep there." So we slept there that night. And she said, "You've got to be out before six o'clock tomorrow morning when the colonel goes on her rounds." So we did that, out, and we got on another Arab bus. And it was all loaded up with people going to the market or something. They were on there with fowls and goats and carrying pigs and everything else, all on the bus.

29:00 And Ronnie Bladwell and I are as well. Anyhow we jumped off and got another ride to the Sidi Bishr. And that was our last day in Sidi Bishr. We gradually got back to Palestine. I was in a camp near Gaza there. Just stayed at Gaza for two or three days and then back to the battalion.

How did your leg heal?

It healed well. I carried on for the rest of the war and had no problems with it. Yet in

29:30 1950, about '56, I was working in Melbourne of course in the car industry. And my leg used to play up and I was... I took a young lady to the pictures one night and I'm moving it around and she said, "What's wrong with your leg?" And I said, "I don't know. But it's just where I was wounded. It's sort of a nerve coming around. It keeps aching. I've got to keep moving it." So the doctor... we had a doctor where I work and he said to me, "Who's your repat [repatriation] doctor?" And I said, "Oh I

30:00 didn't even think about repatriation. I haven't got a repat doctor, I haven't been to a doctor." I was living at St Kilda and he gave me the name of a doctor and I went and saw him and he said, "Oh you'll have to go into hospital." And they found a little bit of shrapnel still in and it had worked its way till it was touching the bone. And that started to play up and I was in Heidelberg [Repatriation] Hospital in Melbourne for about a month while it was all fixed up for me. And he said, "Oh the

30:30 repatriation'll pay for that." And I knew nothing about repatriation. He said, "Well I'm the repatriation doctor. Where do you live?" I said, "St Kilda." He said, "I'll be your doctor." I said, "Righto." So I had to nominate him and fill this form in that he was my repatriation doctor. So I used to go and see him, that's the first I knew about it. I didn't get a pension for my leg but they accepted all medical responsibilities for it so I never had to pay anything, it was always free.

31:00 So that's the only problem I had with it. And I was in Concord Hospital too for a few months with it, oh quite a few years now. But I played football and everything and it didn't seem to worry me greatly.

As it was healing in hospital, how did you pass the time?

Talking. That's about all I can say. And we played cards. The more mobile ones'd come and sit along in front of the bed and

31:30 we'd play... like solo was a great game. Everybody seemed to know how to play solo or bridge was another game or crib. And that was about it. Read a book. I did a lot of reading, I always was a bit of a bookworm so I did a lot of reading. And writing letters. I wrote a terrific amount of letters from the hospital. I think I wrote to everybody I knew back in Australia. And I had to write and let Dad know how I was of

32:00 course. He told me afterwards when he got the telegram to say I was wounded, to say they were sorry they had to inform you that your son so and so and so had been wounded in action. And the department offers its deepest sympathy. That was on the telegram. And Dad thought, "Deepest sympathy." He thought I must've been badly wounded. So he rang Mrs Bowles... Keith had got hit before me of course.

32:30 About a week before. When she got the telegram, what was on it? And she read it to Dad and it was exactly the same as my telegram and by then they knew that Keith had only been hit in the legs you see or the foot. But then I sent him... you could send a telegram but it was numbered. Number one was, "I am okay," and number two was, "Sore leg," number three, "In hospital," number four, "Well looked after," or something like that. So I sent...

33:00 What did I put? "In hospital." You couldn't put wounded. "Sore leg," "doing okay," "Joe." That's all you

could put. So he got these three numbers... or it was deciphered for them and that was on the telegram I sent him to let him know I was going on okay. Which I was.

33:30 **What was it like receiving letters from friends and family over there?**

It was wonderful. It's one of the things that sort of kept you going. To know that people home back here were still thinking about you and worried about you. Mail was everything. When the mail came there was a great rush hoping you'd get letters. It was. To anybody that's got anybody

34:00 or knows anyone that's serving overseas, keep in touch with them. Because it's a wonderful booster. It makes life worth living. Life worth living. Mm.

So after Christmas in Gaza you were told you were going home?

Yes we'd had the big parade so... and I was able to...

34:30 Well they still kept us training of course and packing up all the gear and cleaning things and you know having us all ready. And then we... on trucks and I couldn't tell you the date we left Gaza by trucks and we came across the Sinai Desert. I know we stopped at one stage about the middle of the Sinai... nothing but desert, sand. And had a dinner there. No we slept the night out in the sand hills.

35:00 And next day we crossed the Suez Canal and into a camping area. And there was a big picture theatre there and I remember going to the pictures. First time I'd gone to the pictures since before we'd gone up to Alamein and there was a terrific amount of camps around there. Like artillery camps and there was... the first time I'd seen women that weren't

35:30 nurses or sisters in other uniforms. Like AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service] I suppose they were. Never seen them before and it seemed quite strange. And we were there I think overnight... it might've been two days and then we were on trucks and we came down to Port Tewfik, which is at the end of the Suez Canal. And unloaded off the trucks and marched onto the

36:00 Aquitania - it was there waiting for us. And that was great. And it was absolutely packed, there were no cabins or anything so they had stretchers, bunk beds, one, two, three. A top one, a middle one and a bottom one on the decks, the outside decks. The promenade deck. So I came home out on the promenade deck and there were so many men on board there was no room for parades or anything like that.

36:30 Which suited us nicely of course. No parades. But you still had to have picket duty and aircraft spotters and some of the chaps volunteered and went onto the anti-aircraft guns for something to do. And the food was reasonably good too. No complaints about the food, but we wouldn't - we were on our way home. It was quite a big convoy of us coming home, nearly the same as what went over. We had the Ile de France and the Mauritania.

37:00 We were the Aquitania. And one of our queens, Queen Elizabeth or Queen Mary was with us too.

What did you know about the Japanese involvement in the war?

Well we didn't know for instance that they'd bombed Sydney Harbour. We knew that they'd dropped a few bombs at Darwin but that's all we knew. Had no

37:30 idea it was as extensive as it was. We knew they were fighting up in New Guinea. Cause I've got a diary there and I've written up that I was wondering how my old mate Vince Ralph was going. I knew he was up in New Guinea. But we didn't know that... We'd heard about Pearl Harbor of course and of course gave a bit of a cheer and said, "Well that serves them right. They should've come into

38:00 the war twelve months ago." Whether we meant it or not I don't know. But then we got back to... and we met a few of the Yanks of course over in the Middle East but not very many. But our knowledge of our war up there was very, very little. Not until we got back to Fremantle and we anchored just outside Fremantle and we got newspapers

38:30 and things like that. And we saw that there really was a war going on. People were getting... our chaps were getting killed.

Did you get newspapers in the Middle East?

Oh yes, occasionally we'd get a bundle of papers. Only very occasionally. But I don't know whether they were censored but we never got papers to read how bad things were. Like on the home front for instance. We knew

39:00 they were doing it a bit tough and they had to have coupons to buy things, but we didn't realise how tough things were. And so it was quite an eye opener when we did get back and I got back out on the farm to see what they were putting up with. But when we saw the first outline of the Western Australian coast, that was a wonderful sight.

39:30 Yeah. And we didn't get ashore of course until we got back around to Sydney. And we came in just breaking day so they circled the boat around so we came in through the Heads just as the sun was coming up behind us. And the greatest moment of my life I think, coming down Sydney Harbour with all

the outcrops of rock and all the houses. They were waving flags and towels and sheets and right down Sydney Harbour and little

40:00 boats following us along and blowing their hooters. It was a great experience. That was on the 27th February '43 we came down the harbour. My birthday was the next day. I got off on my birthday off the Aquitania. Then we pulled into Woolloomooloo and there was all the people there and the bands playing. It was a wonderful experience that coming home. And to think that some of us were fit and well enough to get

40:30 home and enjoy it.

Tape 7

00:32 **Kirsty [interviewer] just asked you about newspapers coming from home. Did you ever read the Tobruk Truth when you were there?**

Oh yes, I've got copies of the Tobruk Truth I kept. Yes they came out all the time...

Sorry, you were saying, the Tobruk Truth...

Yes they kept sending that out every week of every fortnight. Sometimes you got it, sometimes you didn't. We didn't get very many when you was up in the front line. It very rarely

01:00 got to us. But even that... you'd read in it where the news from home where... a patrol had been out from Tobruk and made contact with the enemy and returned... and we might have been out and out for a couple of days or something and been through a battle but they never ever really told the truth of what happened. But at least it kept us in touch with

01:30 different things that were happening over in England and how the war was going in Europe. And who was fighting who and all those sort of things. And a few little jokes. It was, it was a marvellous thing and how they managed to keep it going, goodness only knows. A little old machine they used to wind the handle I believe.

When you were being driven up to the start line before the Battle of Alamein, who was driving you up?

02:00 We weren't driven up to the start line. They dropped us off the night before. We walked up and they had a gun firing a tracer straight up the middle so it kept us straight, we followed the full line of that. We walked, we must've walked miles and miles that night. To get to the start line we had to walk a couple of miles or very

02:30 close to it anyhow. Or we thought we did, it seemed like it.

As a frontline infantryman what did you think about all the service corps guys down the back that never really saw anything...

Oh they were the base wallahs. We realised that if you didn't have them you couldn't have kept going anyhow. And it always amazed us especially at Alamein how they ever found us... they tried to get a hot meal up to us every night and we were changing all the time. Sometimes where the enemy was last night

03:00 we might be the next night and vice versa. And yet they managed to get there. Sometimes it might be three or four o'clock in the morning. But they made it, they did a wonderful job. So did those that were getting the ammunition up to us and those... all of them. But of course to us, they were all base wallahs. Once you got back behind the front line they were base wallahs. They were support troops and we still tell them that. "Oh it's all right for you support

03:30 troops."

What souvenir hunting did you do from enemy soldiers?

Oh not such a great... some more than others. I didn't do such a great lot of souvenir hunting. I've got a watch there I took off a German chap. And then I had a cap and then I got a little badge off a German's

04:00 cap. And I've got... I have a little diary off one fellow too. But later on in years when I was running Mercedes Benz cars in Melbourne I had to go back to Germany, I took the little diary back with me. And gave it to my boss's people to see if they could find out the owner. There was a photo

04:30 in it too. But never really was big on the souvenirs at all. No.

You've mentioned a couple of times that you had a lot of scraps with the military justice system. Why was that?

I don't know. I just seemed to have a habit of getting into trouble and if I saw something that I wanted to do or something that needed doing I just used to go ahead and do it.

05:00 I was looking through... I've got a diary there and I was looking through it and there's things there that I'd forgotten about, troubles I got into. Like going on a church parade once and I had organised to do something else and it was in the evening so I kept slipping back and back and dived behind a bit of a bunker and let them go on without me and I went back. And I got caught on that. Not going on a swimming parade, I got caught one time.

05:30 And then in that ration dump episode I got caught. I don't know whether it was I just got caught. And another time... I was up before the old colonel... What was that? Oh, I abused one of the officers or something because I thought what he was doing was wrong and I was right and so forth. So I fronted for that. But then the old colonel he was... he said, "Oh God, Madeley, you're always in trouble."

06:00 "Just as well we're going into action again," he said, "I'd have to send you back."

What were your impressions at the time of General Alexander?

Well he was... not so much Allie... We didn't know much about Alexander, he was way back, back in Palestine or Cairo or somewhere. He was in charge of the whole forces.

06:30 Our bloke was Montgomery. But Alexander, I'd only heard of him.

So what did you think of Monty [Montgomery], then?

Oh we admired... not when he first turned up. A little skinny bloke and he tried to put an Australian hat on and it looked stupid on his head and his white legs and his white knees... he'd just come from England. And he didn't look... if you ever saw anyone that least looked a soldier it was Montgomery. But at least he came right up into the front and he was straight to the point

07:00 and he'd talk to the chaps and he told you what was going to happen. And he insisted that... before we used to be kept in the dark a lot... you only just knew what your little bit was doing. "Righto, we're going to attack that post." You didn't know that you were doing it because this was doing that or something. But after he came we knew exactly more of the overall set up of what was going on. And we admired him for that. And he made sure that our officers had to let us know, tell us in detail.

07:30 And he also, he wouldn't... we were supposed to attack a lot before... it was the 23rd October but he refused until we had a build up of artillery and guns and ammunitions and stores and everything else that's necessary, before he would attack. He was the only one that refused... Churchill bullied the others into attacking when they were only half ready. That's what happened to the 8th Army the first time up when they

08:00 came up the first time to relieve Tobruk and they only got about as far as a bit past Mersa Matruh, didn't even get to Bardia. And Rommel and his mob chased them all back cause they were only half ready. But Churchill insisted that they attack. Well Montgomery wouldn't do that. He had to be sure that everything was all ready. See we had overwhelming amount of everything. Artillery, guns,

08:30 jolly trucks, troops, ammunition stores. More than the Jerries had at Alamein. So he built up a lot of confidence in us. We were sure that with what we had we could... we were on the right side, we were on the winning side.

That first night of the battle of El Alamein when you were really getting knocked about,

09:00 **I'm sure that it's quite different from in the movies, the way that it sounds and looks like. What does it sound like when bullets are coming that close to you?**

Well, as I say, the time when the chaps were all getting hit and the bullets were heading straight for us and every tracer that was coming was coming straight, trying to hit me straight between the eyes and then zip, past your ear. And it was hitting the ground in front and gravel was rattling

09:30 up against me tin hat, same with the other fellows. And it's a bit of an unnerving experience. You're tense, expecting any second that... it must be because tracers were coming like right up against one another and when you work it out there's nine more bullets in between each tracer, there's a heck of a lot of lead flying around. Plus all the other that was going on... it wasn't just the bullets, all the other too. The anti-tank guns, the German anti-tank... they also had tracers with them.

10:00 And we used to call them 'flaming onions'. You'd see them come and they'd sort of come in slow at the start of them. Sometimes they'd bounce, they'd hit the ground and bounce. It just looked quite amazing and then all of a sudden when they got close to you, whiz past and I used to think, "Goodness me if one of those hit me in the head, my head'd land back in battalion headquarters somewhere." But with everything else going on at the same time and when you're attacking you didn't have time to stop and worry about bullets. Like after Keith Bowls

10:30 and Chris got hit and I jumped to my feet, I forgot all about bullets and they were still flying around I suppose. And I was on my feet and I still didn't get hit. So there's a lot of places, you fire a lot of shots before you hit... a battle one night they attacked us and we fired... so our sergeant major told us, thirty six thousand rounds we fired. And I think we found one dead Jerry out front and one wounded one.

11:00 So there was a heck of a lot of bullets fired into open space. But it's not the best of feelings but as I say when you've got to go, you've got to go and you've got to put it out of your mind. And get there as quick as you can and get it over with.

So what sort of sounds could you hear from all the different things around you?

All you could hear was just bedlam. Bursts of shelling and the zips of bullets

11:30 and where they were hitting the ground. Explosions of the mortar bombs. They kicked up a heck of a din when they landed. It was... you couldn't explain it, there's no way you could explain the different sound, it was all one big roar from start to finish. You couldn't hear yourself speak, you had to yell to the fellow just alongside you.

We'd better move on.

12:00 **When you got back to Weethalle, what was the reunion like back there with the Bowl family?**

Oh it was very good. Mrs Bowls she was very nice. Keith had told her about me trying to pick him up and about me getting him on the back of a tank and getting him out of the place. She was very nice,

12:30 she was wonderful. And by that time Keith he was limping a bit but he was still getting around all right. Like he was okay. And Mrs Bowls I don't think she ever stopped thanking me for looking after him. But I said, "There was only just that once." I thought of all the times that Keith had helped me and I told her all about going over on the boat when I was seasick and Keith used to bring all of my rations to me, up on the top deck.

13:00 And blankets and come up the next morning and take the blankets all down again so that nobody'd know that I had been sleeping up there. And lots of things.

And what did your dad... Now that you yourself were a combat veteran, what did your dad have to say to you?

Well he said not a great deal. He just said something about, "You're doing a great job, son. Been a bit tough."

13:30 Things like that. And he was very proud of the fact that I was a corporal of course. Two stripes. No he wasn't in the ADC [?] when I got back from the Middle East, he was still working on the farm waiting for Roy to grow up a bit to drive the horses. But he never stopped talking so they tell me... in having a beer in the hotel with some of the other

14:00 farmers around the place about what sort of a job Bowlsie and I and old Scotty Baxter were doing. Scotty was the other, there was the three of us... in my platoon from Weethalle. And oh yes it was, I couldn't do any wrong. The old car... he had an old Chev [Chevrolet] car then. If I wanted to go anywhere I could take the car you know. Never worried if I was a bit late coming home.

14:30 Well all the town people were, not just my Dad.

But given that you'd been so proud of him when you were a boy his pride in you must've been a big thing.

Yeah around about the same or was a big thing I suppose to think that I'd carried on.

All right, now we're back in Australia and you guys are going to start heading up to the jungle. You must've needed some training before you went up.

We had leave,

15:00 I think it was three weeks' leave or something like that. And then we went back into camp. We had a march through Sydney. The division marched through Sydney and that was a very proud moment too. We didn't have much training but we marched through. And then of course we... we went to Wallgrove camp for a while and had a bit of leave into Sydney... night leave

15:30 if you were lucky. And then away we went up on to the Tablelands, that's up in Queensland. For training. For jungle training. And I was up there. I only did a little bit of jungle training and they sent me to a small arms school down near Brisbane at a place called Redbank. With two others - Tom Roberts and Jack Fitzpatrick and myself. And with members of 2/48th Battalion

16:00 and 2/43rd Battalion, all different battalion in this small arms corps. I suppose there'd be a couple of hundred of us there. And we arrived down from Queensland and we got out to Redbank Camp and we weren't supposed to get there till four o'clock. And we got there around about twelve. And they wouldn't let us in. They said, "Oh no, you're not supposed to be here. No, no, no. Not until four o'clock." Well that didn't worry us. We thought, "Oh right, fair enough." So off into... Ipswich

16:30 was the big town of course. We arrived at the school under police escort of course. Our usual performance. Provos [Provosts - Military Police] brought us in. Jack, not Jack Fitzpatrick, he was waiting there to do the right thing, but Tom and I. Tom's still going; he's got both legs off. Lives down Mystery Bay. And we got into Ipswich and we got into a bit of a problem there with some of the Yanks. Like we'd met the Yanks by then and had quite a few fights.

17:00 Provos grabbed us and the chaps from the 48th Battalion. Herb Ashby, he was with us too. He's still going at Mount Gambier in Victoria [actually South Australia], old Herb is. And they brought us in straight in before the camp commander, and who should it be but a Captain Walker who was a 13th Battalion chap. Been with us in Tobruk and Alamein and so forth. And when the Provos marched us in. And he looked up and he saw us.

17:30 And he said, "Righto..." Corporals they were. No, sergeants they were. "Righto sergeants, I'll handle this." And they said, "But, but..." "Never mind, I'll handle it. I know what the charge is", he said. And the Provos walked out and he said, "Now what the bloody hell have you fellows been up to?" Like although he was an officer we were all sort of in together in battle. And he gave us a bit of a dressing down and he said, "Righto, as of

18:00 now, behave or you're in trouble. I'll let you off this time." So we got off scot free that time. Still didn't get a red mark in my pay book. So I was at that school and the school lasted for three or four months. Three months I think it was.

What were you learning there?

All small arms. Rifle, Bren gun, the Vickers gun, the pistol.

18:30 Bayonet drill. And even artillery. They put us onto an anti-tank gun and we had to fire it and so on.

What was there left to teach you guys about using Bren guns and rifles?

Well that's what Tom and I wanted to know; we couldn't see any value in it. But we did all right. I ran about fourth in the school. Which was pretty good with all those there. And there were officers there as well. I was still only just a corporal, yes I was I was a

19:00 corporal at that stage. But I didn't get into any more trouble while I was there although I just sneaked in under the back of the tent just before parade of a morning on a couple of times. And while I was there I met a lass there that I married after the war. That's Margaret who is... I married her in '46. I

19:30 met her at Redbank.

What was she doing there?

She was working in the post office; at Redbank Post Office. The army post office, that's right. She wasn't in the one, she was up in ... And I met her at a dance. We used to be able to go to the dances and I met her there.

Why were you at loggerheads with the Americans?

Well they had... they were better dressed than we were.

20:00 They had more money than we had and they had all the girls. And they were arrogant sort of and big-noting. We got to know them afterwards up in the [Pacific] Islands - we got along well with them. But when you first meet you it's like as if they knew everything. They were running the show. And we were pretty rugged sort of, we weren't gentlemen by any chance. But they always seemed to be,

20:30 you know, assist a girl into the taxis. They always seemed to have enough money to go and eat out whereas we couldn't. I suppose that had a lot to do with it. We had quite a lot of... Mind you, there were others too that we had drinks with just the same. But we did have a big fight up, not that we were in it, up in Brisbane. The Battle of Brisbane. That was

21:00 between the Yanks and the Australians but that was before we arrived home.

So in the case of you having a punch-up in a pub or something like that, would all the Aussies and all the Americans immediately join in even if they hadn't been initially involved?

Oh yes, yes, you always got plenty of back up, that was the problem. No matter where it was, you always got a back up. Anybody that happened to be around at that time.

21:30 Nothing like some of these fights they have nowadays where they start pulling guns and knives and that. It was always a fisticuffs things. Wrestling and sometimes we'd finish up having drinks or something. We'd sort ourselves out first.

What were your thoughts about the Provos?

I never had a great deal of time for them but they did a good job. You had

22:00 to have Provos as well I suppose. Someone had to direct the traffic and someone had to keep things in order otherwise it would have been an absolute shemozzle. It was something you had to have. But I never did have much time for them at all.

I'd say on the contrary you spent a lot of time with them.

Oh I did, I got to know some of them rather well. Especially up in Cairns, goodness me.

22:30 But after all if you don't go and have a look you're never going to see are you. Like we were going to leave Cairns, well you had to go in and have a look at what the town was like.

So after the small arms school what happened then?

We went back up onto the Tablelands and arrived back there just in time... for a couple of days and then we left from Townsville. Left to go over to New Guinea. But we only got

23:00 up as far... the crowd from the small arms school only got as far as Townsville. And at Orroroo, just out of Townsville, we stopped there because the battalion was coming down. We met them at Townsville and we joined and went on to Milne Bay. We were in Townsville for about three days before they arrived down and we looked over the town. We never got into any problems in Townsville.

23:30 But I could've done because the boat was there waiting to take us and they sent an advance party on board the boat. And I'd put a phone call through to... I knew we were going... to Margaret, that's the lass I knew at Redbank for her to ring me that night at this post office at Orroroo. And during the afternoon

24:00 they whacked me on board as advance guard onto the boat and of course you weren't allowed to leave. Oh cripes, no. You couldn't get leave. And I thought, "What the hell am I going to do?" I said to another chap, "I've got to get ashore somehow." And I got talking to a Yank and I suddenly had a brain wave. I said, "Would you change me clothes for tonight?" See the Yanks were going ashore. I said, "I've got to get ashore. Us Aussies can't go off but the Yanks can." And he said, "All right."

24:30 So I dressed up as a Yank, all the Yank's clothing. It was just on dusk when I was going off and you go down the gangway. And bust me, our officer Captain Barrett, he was standing at the top of the gangway to make sure none of us went off. And there was two of us. Stan Tumack was with me. He just said, "Goodnight," and we walked on down the gangway. And when we got to the

25:00 bottom this Yankee officer was there and he said, "Now remember guys, liberty finishes at twelve o'clock." "Yes, sir." And away we went. Anyway I got my phone call through and everything else and then we decided to have a look around Townsville, which wasn't a real good idea. Dressed as Yanks. We went into a little coffee shop where I had been before... see we'd been there for a couple of days and I'd be around Townsville and I got to know a lot of people.

25:30 Sat down and she came over to serve the coffee. And she dropped the cup. Recognised me you see and I'm dressed as a Yank and I'd been there as an Aussie the day before. "What are you doing? You'll get into trouble." She said, "Look my sister's just coming to pick me up in the car. Now you two best get in the car. We'll drive you down to the wharf and you'd better get back on board again before they find out you're missing." So that's what they did. These two girls got us in the car. We had a cup of coffee mind you, hopped in the car

26:00 and she drove us back. We had had a good look around town before that. Hopped in the car and drove us to the wharf and we marched up the gangway. The Yanks at the bottom of the gangway nodded to us and saluted and we saluted. We worked out their salute. We saluted and up we went. So I was an American in Townsville. Mightn't have been in Paris, but I was in Townsville. Yeah.

26:30 **And so then where did the ship set sail for?**

We headed to Milne Bay. Went ashore at Milne Bay. Mind you, Milne Bay, at that stage the 7th Divvy had taken Milne Bay. It was the 7th with the 6th. So it was under our control and we were in camp there for a few weeks doing... We started to do amphibious training and jungle training and all that. And it rained every night in Milne Bay. My God, it was a wet place! And I can always remember the old

27:00 Catholic... Father Burns, that's right. And he came into the tent where we were and two or three of the lads were Catholic, the rest were all Church of England. And they were Catholic and they heard him coming, the old father. And they hadn't been onto church parade or something or rather. And he came to find them you see. And these three went out the back of the tent as he came in the front. And he said... I can always remember him... He said, "Oh," he said... he talked very Irish. "I'm afraid I've got a lot of black sheep in my

27:30 flock," he said. A lot of black sheep! But anyhow we trained there and... oh for weeks, on and off boats and what have you and we'd done a lot of that beforehand mind you in Cairns, while we were up on the Tablelands, we had done jungle training and so forth. But we did it again there, up ropes and down ladders and so on. And I can't tell you what date it was and they told us we were going to land at Lae.

28:00 The Japs were in Lae so they took us on board these landing craft infantry... LCIs - landing craft infantry.

You must've been sick on those, Joe.

I was. I was. I was. We went on board and to get on the LCIs there's a ladder comes out, one that side of the boat and one that side of the boat and you've got to run off. Well you can only run one behind the other. A terrible way to get you off. Because it took so long, one behind the other. But anyhow we got out and I was

- 28:30 sick, geees I was sick. And I remember before we come in they gave it a bit of a pounding. The boats gave it a bit of a pounding with their artillery off the ships and the air force gave it a pounding. Cut down all palm trees and anyhow we ran off and I wouldn't have given a hoot who was there, I wanted to get ashore. Of course as soon as you hit the shore it's a bit different. But at Lae we didn't have any opposition.
- 29:00 We all raced ashore of course and we were in water up to here because the thing didn't come in far enough and we had to step off into the water. And one chap got drowned there. He had a base plate of a mortar on his back and he went down and didn't come up again. Right near me, his hat... I can always remember his hat floating away past me. We went ashore and got off... went down just at the edge of the trees and I think we might have one shot or two shots fired that was all. And that was all we saw then for days.
- 29:30 We sent patrols out here, there and everywhere and then we headed straight for Lae. Marching and doing sort of forward scouts and what have you up towards Lae. By the time we got to Lae the 7th Divvy had come in from the other direction so they were first into Lae which was a bit of a disappointment for us. We wanted to be, so we never got into the town of Lae. We turned around and come back, marched back. I can always remember just as we started coming back from Lae I can remember my platoon
- 30:00 and we had to march... the Yanks had a big ration dump there. And they had tins of pineapple and tins of condensed milk and tins of this and sausages and all the different foods and that. And my mob are marching straight through. My section. Well by the time we got out the other end, past their rations people were bulged out like this, they were loaded up with everything. Pineapple and tins.
- 30:30 But the Yankees knew too but they didn't say anything, they took it in good part. So we ate very well for a few days on American rations. And we got back to... near Lae and it was marvellous. We'd only been... about eight to ten days I suppose and by the time we'd got back there the Yanks had all moved in and there was roads made, there was huts and that.

31:00 And there was ammunition stores and everything you could think of there. At Lae where we'd landed where there was nothing just a few days beforehand. My God, they were quick and expert at the job. And they sent us down, my section to unload... a barge had come in, a Yankee barge loaded with ammunition. I had to take my section and unload the barge. Well once again of course we unloaded more than the ammunition and lived well again for a few

31:30 days. That caused me a bit of trouble because it was my section so I was in charge of it. So I had to front about that but I didn't see anything happen. It must've fallen overboard before it got to us.

That's probably the case, Joe.

It wouldn't be my chaps; they wouldn't do that. Well we weren't long there at Lae, patrolling and so forth. The Japs had gone further on back that they decided to land at Finschhafen.

32:00 That's a little bit further up the coast. So we went back on board and at Finschhafen we were on board different sort of boats. The front of the boat, landing... it opened the front and we came straight out... no we didn't... later on that was at Borneo. We went down the straight rope and into barges with the thing up the front. And it came into shore and the front dropped down and you raced straight out the front. But you could go out in... you know you could be firing as

32:30 you come running out. And I didn't get sick on that... it wasn't far enough and it was calm. But even there the ships bombardment and the air force... blew them to blazes. But where we landed was where we shouldn't have been. We landed at Scarlet Beach and we should've landed at some other beach. And they got stuck into us pretty well and I can always remember we stepped ashore and Tom Duncan... Tom was with me... and he had got his section next

33:00 to me. And it was all swamp. Swamp up to about here. And Tom stood on the end of a log and of course the other end come up out of the water and we thought it was an alligator or something. Well didn't we go! Anyhow we fought our way off the beach and they had quite a lot of blockhouses there and they were firing from them. But we threw a few grenades and they didn't hang about for long.

So when you hit the beach how much fire was coming at you?

Oh there was quite a lot. A lot of

33:30 machine gun fire. I can't recall any artillery fire because it was hard to get artillery up into the jungle. But there was a lot of machine gun fire where a few chaps got hit. Nothing like Alamein of course. Nothing like the firepower. But once we got off the beach into the timber we were pretty right.

What's the drill then for dealing with the blockhouse or a

34:00 **bunker?**

Somebody keeps firing at it to keep the holes clear that they look through while somebody else circles around and throws grenades in. So that's what we did.

What were those blockhouses made of?

Oh only just timber things that's all. They weren't a permanent fixture. They were only just timber and leaves and what have you. They were quite easy to blow to bits. Later on we come across some that had cement but very few of those in that area.

Did you have any

34:30 armoured support on the beach?

Not when we ashore, they'd come in later. But you see tanks weren't much good there. They'd get them in the swamp and they'd all bog down and everything. It was a hell of a mess. They tried it but we didn't have tank support till later on... we went up the Sattelberg Road... that was one of the last battles there, we had tanks there. But they could only come up one behind the blinking other. And if one happened to slip off the road

35:00 well it jammed the whole works. But we... after little bits of skirmishes here and there and then we went further on up into the hills. And getting up the hills it was... you know you'd take two steps up and slide a couple of steps back. It was shocking, hanging on, trying to get up the jolly hills. Slippery and wet and muddy and smell... the smell was terrible. Even yourself you smelt... of course perspiration and everything was black and it was shocking.

35:30 I can remember that right through. One thing I can always remember about New Guinea, that's the jolly smell. Your whole body. Worse than in Tobruk where we didn't have any water. And there was plenty of water there. Anyhow we finally got up off the ridge and up onto, more into the hilly country. But some of the Japs did circle us and attack those back on the beach and they had a big problem. They had to get... from another brigade to come in and help out because our brigade

36:00 was all up on the hills. And then we had... our object was a place call Kakagog. It was quite a big... well defended place up on the hill. And we... after a couple of days we attacked that but they were too good for us and they chased us back again. We had quite a lot knocked there too. And they decided that, right we'd... before we went... we had to cross

36:30 a creek and one of the other companies had the job of crossing this creek but they got held up by machine gun fire so... as it happened my platoon, 8 Platoon, we were the nearest so they sent us down. Had to go down the side of a hill to help them out. And by the time we got down the side of the hill chaps were going wounded and coming back up the jolly hill. And my section, we got to the bottom to give them covering fire and there was two of them got killed. Poor old little Ronnie Walters and Jim Henry. And crossing

37:00 the creek... I raced across first and Jim Henry was the Bren gunner. And instead of him waiting until... and giving covering fire while all the rest got across and then waiting for us to give him covering fire, he followed me across and he got hit, just as he was crossing the creek and he fell on top of me and his whole Bren gun was red hot and it landed on my arm and I burnt my arm. What did he say? He said, "They've got me, Joe." And I said, "Where are you hit?" He said, "Through the back." And the bullet, just a little hole

37:30 in his shoulder. He was coming across and the bullet hit and got on his shoulder, and no sign of where it'd come up. But it must've been an explosive or something and that's all he said. And he just gave a couple of shakes. I yelled for a stretcher bearer because we had to keep on going. And he was dead within... before we'd gone really. The stretcher bearer was close at hand, he come and grabbed him. Yeah, poor old Jim. He was the black sheep that the

38:00 old Father Burns he said he had in his flock. His sisters were nuns and one of them wrote to me. Well I wrote and said how sorry I was and that sort of thing. And I didn't get a letter back but I never ever saw the family afterwards.

You mentioned that... Well it sounds like you were getting quite a bit of stick from the Japanese?

We were.

It must've been... You said that you actually got pushed back

38:30 at one point just before that. It must've been an unusual experience for you guys?

It was. It was nothing like the fighting up in the desert, there was no set area. Like ambushes. Like playing cowboys and Indians. You know shoot a few up here and then all of a sudden you shoot one and you race over in that direction. But Kakagog was a set

39:00 area that we had to take. And then we went down and we got across the creek and we tried to get at Kakagog from up that way. We had this grenade discharger, it's a rifle with a thing on the top and you drop grenades in it and fire a blank bullet and it shoots it. See you can only throw a grenade so far but this thing could shoot it a couple of hundred yards. And we'd carry this and we'd never ever used it. And Jackie Craig... I said, "Jack here's a good

39:30 chance to use this gun." And we could see the Japs, they were... it was a concrete blockhouse that one. So we fired this... Every one of the grenades we had we fired just before we attacked and then we threw

the gun out. I thought, "I'm getting rid of this." So I picked the gun up with the barrel and I threw it and I said, "That'll do." And I always tell my family that I fired the last round and then I threw the gun at them. Of course they were a couple of hundred yards away, the gun went that far from here to the end of the kitchen.

40:00 Then we... but by the time we got down the side of the hill they'd... Jeff Crawford and his team had got rid of... had killed the Japs. Jeff got a DCM [Distinguished Conduct Medal] for that. Afterwards he became the Minister for Agricultural in the New South Wales government, Jeff Crawford.

What did you think of the Japs as fighters?

Well I wrote a letter home from there. And I said,

40:30 Dad... and he kept the letter till I got home. "The Japs aren't nearly the fighters that the Germans are. They don't stick and they don't fight, they're not as game. And they attack in numbers and you can shoot them down easily." Dad sent the letter into the local newspaper so it was published in the West Wyalong Advocate the fact that I'd written about the Japs not being good fighters. You get them into a corner and they'll fight and they'll shoot just as much. But they fought different. In heaps.

41:00 There had to be a great heap of them. And yelling and screaming, not like the Germans. Which do it spread out and get covering fire, the Japanese were all straight from the front. They were a bit like shooting rabbits really. Terrible for the poor old Japs. Well I say poor old Japs, I never thought so then.

Tape 8

00:33 **Joe you were telling us about Kakagog.**

Yes after the battle, Aitape Creek was the name of the creek that we had to cross, where the Japs held us up. And Jeff Crawford and his platoon managed to wipe out the Japs there. We went back and prepared then for the next morning to attack Kakagog, the final attack. And

01:00 we raced up the hill and there wasn't a Jap left, they'd all disappeared overnight. And weren't we pleased. There was nobody there for us to have a shot at and we weren't being shot at. And we arrived up there and there was an old church, it was only made out of leaves and palm fronds and that. And there was an old organ in it. And we had a chap with us, Phil Jenkins - he's my twin actually, we're both born on the same day -

01:30 and he still lives at Umina. I'll be seeing him on Wednesday. And he always plays the organ in the church, still does, still plays the organ in the church. And this organ... so we brushed all the dirt off it and made him sit down and play us a tune and he played 'The Road to Gundagai' on the organ. And that was at Kakagog when we got up there. And they gave me the job of, my section to... there was one of their

02:00 hospitals there, a Jap hospital. No wounded in it but there were three or four dead chaps and they'd been dead for a long time. All blown up and the smell was something shocking. And this was all the hospital was only a wooden hospital and fronds for the... palm trees for the roof and all that sort of thing. So we... the four dead chaps we put them on the ground and we covered them all over with mattresses

02:30 and anything else, furniture and piled it all on. And then one of the chaps... happened to light a match and up she went. So at least they did get a funeral even if it was a... like there was no way we could bury them, oh goodness me our stomachs couldn't stand it. Of course I had to front over to that one to find out why,

03:00 what had happened, how the hospital went up in flames. Probably one of the chaps struck a match or something happened and away she went. But that was all overlooked. So they were cremated. And then we moved on from there back down to the coast again and then up... there was a main road that went up inland, Sattelberg Road.

03:30 And that's where most of the main fighting went on in Finschhafen, along Sattelberg Road. We were in quite a bit of it and a couple of the fellows got killed. But the 2/48th Battalion did the most fighting there in Sattelberg Road and took Sattelberg Hill. And Diver Derek he was one of the sergeants, he got a VC there at Sattelberg. And I know I was on the carrying party for them and also one of our platoons had been out,

04:00 a different company to me. You know he was giving them a bit of covering fire and one of the fellows had got wounded and they sent me on a carrying party. To help carry them back in and the first chap I helped to carry in was one of the chaps that I'd been at the small arms school at Redbank with Jack Fitzpatrick. And it was a terrible job getting up this hell of a ravine, nearly straight up. You had to strap them onto the stretcher and you'd push them up so far and then somebody'd take them from there and pull them up a bit further. It was a

04:30 shocking job but we got them all up. And they cleaned out the Sattelberg part of it and then they sent

patrols out here, there and everywhere and I took a patrol out one stage or other. And I took... oh a platoon went out. We had a platoon... an officer with us. And we had to make contact with the Japanese to see how much further they'd gone back up the coast. And we've

- 05:00 stayed overnight and we kept on going next day and we finally... you could always smell the Japanese, knew we were getting close. And I had a forward scout. On patrols the jungle was too thick you could only go up a little path. And you had to have a forward scout out in front and I had Arthur Skye... he's alive too, lives up in Nambucca Heads. I'll be seeing him in a few weeks, Arthur. He was a great fellow out of my section. And
- 05:30 he was the forward scout. And I followed along behind and there was a big bomb crater and he was sneaking around the side of the bomb crater. And Bob McKenzie who was next to me said, "Joe, that's a Jap on the other side." And I looked and there was a Japanese fellow all crouched down. And my forward scout was walking around straight towards him. And I thought, "Now, if I yell out, Arthur's likely to look around." So I just
- 06:00 ordered the fellows down and fired a shot and shot the Jap anyhow. And as soon as I did, they opened up on us with... oh they had two or three machine guns there and so forth. But a funny thing. Arthur of course, he came scrambling back. And all the shots were going over our heads. And I thought, "That's funny." None were coming near us. But another one of our sections was crossing over some open area and they got right onto them
- 06:30 and a few of them got badly wounded. But we had made contact and that's all we had to do so we pulled back. And we had to carry these fellows with us and all of them... two or three miles back and by gosh they were heavy. But one of our other sections, Ken Crutchett, an old mate of mine from Caloundra... he got his section and heard that I was in trouble and came racing out. And met us and carried the fellows in for us and our stretcher bearer who had been out
- 07:00 when we had our little armistice in Tobruk he came out as well and sewed these chaps up. One chap was bubbling out through his back and we bent him over and he was all... like he'd lost that much blood he was all white. And all the cotton that Doc Goodworth had was black. And I said, "God Doc, you could have at least sewed him up with white cotton." He said, "That's all..." Anyhow he survived the chap did, and we got back out of that. And then we followed the... that was the
- 07:30 last battle we did there and then we chased the Japs on up along the coast from there on. From Finschhafen we pushed them all up and they kept dropping back and dropping back. And we contacted them every so often and there'd be a bit of a shoot up and away they'd go again. And we came to a river I can always remember that and my section happened to be the forward section that time too. And we hadn't struck anyone but we'd struck a... there was a lot of blood and then we came to a
- 08:00 bandage lying down and another bandage. I said, "There must be one of them wounded and he won't ... real soon, we'll catch up him." And we got to a river and there's a little single man bridge across it. And I said, "Righto fellows we've got to cross that bridge." The river was flowing too fast to cross the river. I said, "I'll go across first. Give me covering fire." They said, "Right." In case there was somebody on the other side but I didn't think there would be. And I got half way across and there was a Jap crouched down behind a bush.
- 08:30 And saw he had his rifle up. Well I didn't know what to do. It was no good me running back because I was over half way so I charged straight at him and he was dead. The relief. Once again I broke out again and started to laugh, sort of this hysterical laughter because the tension that I was under. Just, only a few steps before I was off the bridge. And I gave a yell of course and the other fellows, they started firing all around me.
- 09:00 So must've been the fellow that we'd been following that had been losing his blood and then his bandages and then he'd finally given up and he'd died. But he was crouched just as if he was going to shoot. And that was the last one we struck for a few days. We had to get back over the river that night and Jackie Perry, he was only a little fellow, he got washed away and I heard him yell as he went down and he hit me in the legs. And I grabbed him. I was lucky enough to just
- 09:30 grab his haversack and pulled him up out of the water and he was still hanging onto his rifle. So you could've got killed, there were other ways than just getting shot at. Little Jackie. And we followed them right up to a place called Bloocha Point and that's as far as we went. And I got Dengue there very bad. And I went back... they sent me back into Lae Hospital. And I was in Lae Hospital for some time with dengue fever. Went back out of Lae Hospital into a
- 10:00 little coastal steamer thing which took me back up to where they were. The battalion were, and they were all preparing then to come home. And we boarded a boat there... we got a lot of new reinforcements incidentally. That was funny, we got reinforcements just before we came home. And boarded the boat on my birthday, the 28th February. Came back down to Brisbane, unloaded in Brisbane then back to Sydney and got a little bit
- 10:30 more leave. And then back up onto the Tablelands again for more training. But that was our last we did in New Guinea.

In New Guinea how did you handle the complete change in terrain that you were working on?

Well we had, as you say it was completely different to

- 11:00 what we'd known and the fighting was different. They always say Alamein and Tobruk was a clean war. See there was no civilians, there was no towns, there was nothing like that. We were fighting out in the desert, it was just... all that were doing any fighting or getting wounded were people that were trained for that. Whereas when you got... you came across villages and things like that in the jungle. Plus you were wet through all the
- 11:30 time and even though you dived into... crossing a creek and you'd wash yourself as you were going, by the time ten minutes had gone you were dry and the smell was shocking. Oh a shocking smell from perspiration and rotting leaves and all that sort of business. And mud that stank. The smell was terrible. And it was very hard. A lot of chaps... I think we had a lot more casualties there from sickness
- 12:00 than we did from actual war wounds or anything like that. Like, oh when I say a lot more I mean seventy five percent more I suppose. Just malaria, dengue, foot rot and a dozen and one other things. It was like completely different.

How did the humidity affect the weapons you were using?

Oh we got a new weapon

- 12:30 there too, it was a thing called an Owen gun. And that was very good, that could fire under any conditions. Like if you dropped it in the mud you could pick it up and it'd still fire. It was a little light one. It wasn't very accurate for any distance but where you were face to face it was a marvellous little weapon. And it did fire well. The Bren gun was pretty good too. The one we'd had right through. It fired under most conditions. As long as you kept something over the little bits of its works. But like we didn't have the Thompson
- 13:00 submachine gun. It was no good at all in that area. It wouldn't have been. And we didn't have very little artillery back up because they couldn't get it through the mud and the sludge. And I remember we were there at Christmas... we were still in New Guinea at Christmas and we were going up the coast. And Christmas eve the Japs shelled us very heavily. That was Christmas Eve. And on Christmas Day we came back down to the coast, across a bit of a river and they...
- 13:30 Transport managed to turn up with a Christmas dinner for us. We had turkey and everything else, oh miles more than we could eat. And we had to leave again the next morning and you couldn't carry it with you. So we just dumped it onto... there was a chap there I knew had come from Temora. On one of the tanks and I just dumped it onto his tank. I said, "If you catch up with us you can dump it off. If you don't, you can eat it yourself." Well they never caught up with us again.
- 14:00 Although one village we attacked just before that. The only time we did go in with the tanks really. Apart from the Sattelberg Road. When we got into this village, I've never seen so many dead people. They hadn't been buried and they were all Japanese. There must have been, oh thirty or forty Japanese dead, lying there all in little heaps and scattered around in the little
- 14:30 wooden houses. When I say a village, it's only a native village, not like a house or anything, just little villages. And they were lying everywhere. Whether the air force had got onto them and bombed them and then the tanks had strafed them and shot them up. And when we got there there was no-one left alive at all. They were all dead so we just marched straight through it. I can't think of the name of the village, I have got it written down somewhere. But it was a
- 15:00 horrible sight to see. It sort of turned your stomach over just to see them.

Are there certain images that you have that you've kept with you that have been difficult to lose from your mind, your war experiences?

One that always... when I think about it always sort of affects me is what I've told you about Alamein with Jackie Low. When I asked him to get up and take the ammunition to Tom Duncan and he got shot and killed.

- 15:30 But I suppose he had all the spare ammunition, he had to do it. But it was me that told him to get up and do it. And that village with all those dead people there too that was horrifying. I can always think of that. That was terrible. But there are a few from Alamein with the fellows getting killed and so on. They carried a fellow past us and a bullet or something, a piece of shrapnel
- 16:00 had cut him right across there and his stomach and everything was ... and he was a chap that we knew, one of our sergeants, he was. And that was pretty awful too.

Facing that kind of devastation, how did you cope with it?

Well you just sort of had to. You had to sort of keep on going and one thing about it, there was something else happening. It wasn't as if you could sit down and worry about it for two or three days.

- 16:30 The next day there'd be something else happening and some other tragedy or some other battle or some other fight or somebody else had to get shot. So that was over and done with. You just had to keep going. You couldn't stop otherwise you'd have been a nervous wreck I suppose. I don't know. But that's what it was like in war, You don't have time to stop and worry.

17:00 It wasn't till afterwards that you think about these things and different fellows. Like Jim Henry when he fell over me and he said, "They've got me, Joe. I'm finished." Hard to believe that you could get up, which you had to do cause you were going on. I called the stretcher and then I had to get up and leave him there and keep on firing. Those sort of things. But

17:30 you did it. You were trained to do that and you were past worrying greatly I suppose.

What quality do you think your training was?

Well when we first went into the battle in the Middle East it wasn't real good. We hadn't had a great deal of training. I'd only been... only ever seen a Bren gun once and that was our main automatic weapon. I hadn't even fired one. We'd had the old

18:00 Lewis gun to train with. The old First War thing. I could always fire a rifle, I knew how to fire a rifle when I was a little boy. That was okay but as far as an automatic, I had not the slightest idea. So that part wasn't good. In fact I suppose we weren't really well trained but you learnt very quickly, you learnt quickly. And like

18:30 at times like that you've got to learn quickly. And I suppose it was pretty simple, it wasn't like I was trying to fly an aeroplane or steer a ship. Or steer a tank. It was you and you were just on the ground with yourself. So I was really simple I suppose as long as you kept your head down

19:00 that was the first main thing. And learn from there. Mm. But it was a great homecoming too from New Guinea. But we didn't get as long leave then. We went back then to... up onto the Tablelands and that was an absolute waste on the Tablelands. You were up there for twelve months training on the Tablelands. A lot of chaps went AWL [Absent Without Leave] and we had more AWL there than... that's Away Without Leave.

19:30 Some of them never came back.

From boredom?

Boredom. They tried to do the best they could and had us out training and up you know, camping out and attacking this hill and that hill. And we had amphibious training down at Trinity Beach just out of Cairns. But we kept doing the same things over and over again and it seemed such a waste of time up there.

20:00 I know I got leave once and went to the races. And people... we were at Atherton... they would... some people offered to take us for the night you see you could stay the night there. And Atherton Races was on so we had three days off another chap and I. And we were staying at some people's place, put us up for that time.

20:30 And there was a lass there that I got to know and she worked in the butcher's shop. We went to a dance, that's right, and I met her at the dance. And I wanted to take her to the races and she said, "Oh well, I'm working in the butcher's shop. But I think I'll be able to get off to come to the races. Come in and ask me and if the boss'll give me the time off... But if you come in and the boss is in

21:00 the shop, whatever you do don't speak to me because he doesn't like me talking to soldiers." I said, "Righto. Wait a bit. What about I come in in the shop? I've got to do something." She said, "Oh well it's a Saturday, so order sausages because we don't make sausages on a Saturday." I said, "Right." So I came in and the boss was behind the counter and the lass was on the typewriter. And he said, "What can I do for you, sir?" I said, "I'll have ten pound of sausages." And he said, "My God, you're lucky. We don't

21:30 usually make sausages on Saturday, but we made them this morning and I think we've got about ten pound left." I got all these bleeding sausages and I looked at the girl out the corner of my eye as I walked out. And she had her head down typing. Yeah, I took them back to the camp. And it was the joke of the company. Joe Madeley and his sausages. But we did get to the races, not with the girl of course. I met her again afterwards.

22:00 Yeah. That was a great weekend. But then we... on the Anzac Day we boarded the boat again at Townsville. We came down from the Tablelands after all that useless... it wasn't useless it was good training I suppose, hard training. We came down to Townsville once again and boarded the boat. And away we went over to Morotai.

22:30 Well Morotai was... half of it was still in Japanese hands. And the Americans had... we landed there and they took us right up past the Americans right up to where the front line was. And we did patrolling but we spent most of our time clearing the timber and scrub and the jungle away to build our camps and so forth. And we didn't... that was all we did... training there. We knew we were

23:00 going to do an amphibious landing somewhere, we didn't know where. We knew it was one of the islands. and while we were there too I got a letter from a lass that I knew who had joined the army. Joined the... well actually she was a nurse. No a VAD. And she was at 5th AGH. And I found out the 5th AGH were on this island of Morotai. But of course nobody could get any leave so I went and saw my officer

- 23:30 who had been with us for quite some time. And I said, "What's the chance of getting...?" He said, "No, couldn't even think of it." I said, "Well I've got a cousin. With the 5th AGH. It's not so far away." He finally gave me a leave pass. So I managed to duck off down to the 5th AGH and met my cousin. And that was very nice. Before we went over to Borneo.
- 24:00 And spent the day there under the eye of course of the matron all the time. To make sure we didn't sneak off anywhere. And one of the American Negroes drove me back. They could only drive me so far, they weren't allowed past a certain line, only the Australians on the other side up where the Japs were at that stage. And hitchhiked a ride back to the camp and then a couple of days later we boarded a boat for,
- 24:30 they told us we were going to land in Borneo, on the mainland in Borneo. That wasn't a real bad landing, we were the second wave. The 17th Battalion landed before us. And they... the few Japs that were there the 17th got them, so when we landed all there were was a
- 25:00 couple of wounded Japanese and that was all. So we pushed on up into the hills and took the village of Brunei. Little old grass huts and what have you, there was nothing much there. And a few days later they decided we'd have to go back on board and go back around to a place called Lutong, that's where all the oil wells were. And make another landing there. Well as we were coming in
- 25:30 there the Japs had lit all the oil wells up. And the oil well was one of those artesian wells where oil shoots straight up in the air and they'd turn on all the taps and oil was shooting up and all alight. And it was such pressure coming out that you couldn't see any flame or anything up for about thirty or forty feet and then the flame was up on top all alight. And the whole lot, all the thirty or forty of them were all aflame. The most spectacular sight it was with all this oil burning. And anyhow we landed there
- 26:00 and we took the town of Lutong and by that night we had the... our flag flying over the refinery at Lutong. And the engineers and what have you came and it took them days before... one at a time they put these oil... they finished up bringing an old Wirraway aeroplane in and they've got a lot of... what do they call it when they... the propeller they get steam up and it's got so much back blast that it blew all the flames away so they could get close enough to
- 26:30 sort of douse the flame and that's how they put them out. But by that time we'd got on to a town called Miri. And we had to take this town and we were on one side of the river and the township of Miri was on the other. We hadn't met many Japs at that stage. And we stayed a couple of nights on this side of the river getting all organised before we took the town. Well that wasn't a good idea either because there was all little canoes tied up on our side.
- 27:00 And I had some very adventurous fellows in my section. And we hadn't been there long and a lot of these boats were missing and so were some of my blokes. And two days later when we went into the town, we were marching and the Japs had gone and an officer said to me, "My word, Joe, these natives seem very friendly!" "Hello Bill. Hello Jack. Hey Jack, how are you?" The chaps had been all over... well I hadn't
- 27:30 because I was in charge of them. But they'd all been in... rowed across and met all the girls in the town and had a great old town. All my section, we knew that there was nobody in there, there was no Japs left there but we had to attack... we couldn't say, "No it's quite all right, there's nobody there." So when we walked we walked straight through the place. No wonder the natives were friendly, they knew all of my blokes. They'd met them over a period of a couple of days. So we took the township of Miri
- 28:00 and then went up onto Canada Ridge which is at the back of Miri. And that was actually as far as we went. And we did patrols there along... what was the name of that road? The Reim Road I think it was called. Yes Reim Road. We did patrols out along that and occasionally you'd strike some Japanese holding you up and have a bit of a gun battle with them but not very much. We only lost two or three or four chaps I suppose during that period.
- 28:30 But we had deep patrolling to make sure that they were well back. And I had a funny experience there too. I had a... we got mosquito nets. Mosquitoes were very, very bad. And you'd hang them up in a tree with the middle of it and then tuck it underneath your blanket to sleep at night. And this night I'd been on picket duty and I came in and I remember it was a bright moon light night too.
- 29:00 And I crawled in under my mosquito net and there was a snake who had crawled in before me. A green tree snake. And I came in one side under the mosquito net and he went straight up the other side. He was inside up the mosquito net. Till he was right on the tip of his tail and his nose was up touching the top of... And of course I'm trying to get out and of course in me excitement I got all tangled up in the mosquito net. Anyhow finally the snake he managed to get out and away he went. I kicked up such a din that everybody stood to. They thought the Japs were attacking us.
- 29:30 Yeah. A green tree snake. That was about the biggest fright I got while I was in Borneo I think.

You mentioned earlier today that towards the end of the war your nerves were beginning to get the better of you.

Well that was at Borneo it was. I'd take patrols out and I was... not like before I could take patrols out

and I never used to sort of worry... only just the ordinary worry. But this I knew it was getting me down, I wasn't as good as I used to be. Like I'd be very, very

- 30:00 cautious about going into any village or if there was a hut there, I'd go in in case there was booby traps or something like that. Well I was never ever like that. And I'd always make sure everything was pretty safe before we went into any place. Well prior to that well you didn't have time for all that. So I think the officer realised it too because he didn't send me out on many patrols.
- 30:30 And I realised it was time... my nerves were getting the better of me. And I felt terrible about it but there was nothing I could do. Even when I was on picket duty or something I was so jumpy. The least little noise and I'd sort of, I'd jump, there always seemed to be somebody at my shoulder. And it was starting to get me worried. But we didn't have a great deal of fighting at all
- 31:00 in Borneo. The other battalions, one landed on Labuan... brigade I should say, not divvy, landed on Labuan and they got a terrific amount of fighting there. They lost a lot of men killed. And also on the other island, Labuan and... can't think of the other island. There was a lot of fighting there. But on the mainland where we landed we thought most troops were supposed to be because they had all the oil there and everything, they were very little.
- 31:30 So we sort of finished without a great deal of fighting. Mind you we still lost some good men just the same. And that's where we were when they dropped the atom bomb. Up on Canada Ridge and a few days later they... the war finished. But
- 32:00 prior to that... a lot of POWs. We got a lot of Japanese... we never got many but this time we did get quite a lot. And we bought them to a POW cage in Miri, township of Miri. And we had them in there. And then one night there was a boat... they let us know there was a boat load coming down so we got this boat load and they were all women, all Japanese women.
- 32:30 But we heard afterwards they had all... used to travel with the troops. There was prostitutes and what have you. And about fourteen children. But we weren't prepared for them. By that time we'd come down off Canada Ridge and then our company was looking after the POW cage. And so we had showers and everything with Hessian around it, just as high as the showers were but we had no rooves on them.
- 33:00 They were all inside a barbed wire cage which covered about a couple of hundred yards that way and so and so. And we had a machine gun planted on one corner up on a big stand right up in the corner so they could look down on the POWs in case they attacked, or mutinied. Or played up. And I could never make out why it was that I always got volunteers to man the machine gun up there. And I thought, "That's a bit different."
- 33:30 And then it suddenly struck me. There was no roof on the showers and that's where the women had their shower. Yes they were all sitting up there, they had a birds-eye view and the women had to shower and everything, that's all they had. So anyhow one of them could speak a tiny bit of English. And when the rations came I used to go in with the rations and see everybody was lined up and feeding them. And this girl said, "No roof, bad soldiers look." "Gawd blimey!"
- 34:00 So we had to get the hessian and put a roof over the top of them. But and that was when the armistice, around about that stage it was the armistice of course but they were still POWs. They had to be repatriated back to wherever they sent them, I don't know where. And as I say there wasn't a great deal of hip hip, hoorays and cheering at that stage. But there was more
- 34:30 when we got news there wouldn't be any more censoring. Our letters didn't have to be censored, you could write what you like. And I think there was more of a cheer and hooray then. But we had a lot of collaborators, they were Borneo people, Sarawak and so on. And we had quite a lot of those in a cage on their own. And they were all playing this game, it looked like... oh what would you call it? Dominoes.
- 35:00 But it wasn't it was a different thing. And I always loved playing any games at all. And they were playing mahjong, have you ever heard of the Chinese game mah-jong? So I watched them and I finally got them to teach me it. So I was sitting there with them playing mah-jong.

How do you play mah-jong?

Well it's after the style of dominoes. Only there's all Chinese characters on and you've got to have one character match up with another character that's there and you plonk it down. And then there's north

- 35:30 winds and south winds and all the other... it's a strange sort of a game but it is a good game. It's a marvellous game really and there's about ninety pieces in it. You put them all in a heap on the... and you pull them, you get so many and they get so many and you've got them all sitting up in front of you and the first fellow plays and somebody's got to have something that'll join onto that and this chap's got something to join onto that. And then it comes your turn and if you can't find anything to put yours onto... and it's the one who gets rid of all his
- 36:00 what's his names first. All his playing... all made... they usually made of ivory. I bought a set of them and took them home with me after we finished there. And I'd sit there, came time for them to relieve me on picket and I'd say, "It's all right I'll keep on the picket for the next couple of hours." And I'd sit there playing mahjong with these chaps. So I learnt that game. But then of course they...

- 36:30 by that time chaps were getting out on five year plan, which meant you had to have five years in the army and at least, I think it was four years or something, overseas service. You got so many points for time in the army and so many points for overseas service and so many points if you were married. And so many points for children and things like that. So chaps were coming on that but of course I was single and I was only young.
- 37:00 And I'd had all the service up. And at that stage they were recruiting people to go over to Japan in the 60th Battalion which was the occupation forces in Japan. And our colonel was going in charge of the battalion and he was picking out fellows to go with him and he wanted me to go. But I said, no I'd been long enough, I was a war time soldier. I didn't want to soldier on. I'm a bit sorry afterwards that I never ever did go because it would've
- 37:30 been quite interesting. I've never been to Japan. But after a certain time of course there was only about seven of us left in the battalion that had the service, the overseas service and enough points to get home on the five year plan so we came home. We started out on a truck and the road was all washed away so they put us onto one of these army ducks, that's one of those that can go on land or in the sea.
- 38:00 Went right out into the sea where it was very rough and the water was lapping over the side and I thought we were going to drown. I'd taken me boots off and all me gear and I thought, "I'll have to swim for it for sure." But anyhow we got back to the land again, came back to Labuan, stayed overnight in Labuan. And then got on board one of those victory ships that we bought off the Yank. First night we stopped, we stopped at Morotai. So I wheedled
- 38:30 me way off the boat and went back to the hospital to find the hospital was all packed up and they were coming home. And there was nobody there only fellows packing up. So they said, "But some of the nurses are still at the staging camp, they're getting a plane in the morning." So I went to the staging camp, hitchhiked. And bust me, the one that I'd seen, she was still there. She was leaving the next morning. On a plane to come home. So I was able to see her so we had a bit of a natter and told her I'd see her when I got back to Sydney.
- 39:00 Well I didn't, I saw her about ten years later. And got back on board the boat and we left Morotai on the day that Rain Bird won the Melbourne Cup on the 5th November to come home on the victory ship, the American victory ship. And we arrived in Sydney, oh about the 10th or the 12th November I suppose it was.
- 39:30 Arrived into Sydney. We came straight into... did we come straight into Sydney Harbour that time? Gee... no we didn't, we came into Brisbane again. Had to stop there and I got leave again and went and saw a lass that I met, Margaret who used to write to me. We got married later on. And then I got back on the train and we came by train to Sydney and out to a staging camp. And we were there for three or four days before we
- 40:00 got our discharge. And I got discharged on the 5th December.

What was it like knowing that the war was over?

It was a great feeling to think you'd been through all that and it was all finished and you've got off sort of scot free. I felt as fit as I'd ever been and been through all that and thinking of all I could do when I got home. I'd be able to do this, that and the other. And I wouldn't have somebody standing there giving me orders. And I'd have

- 40:30 a bed to sleep in always. And be able to sit up to a table to a meal and see all the family. It was a wonderful feeling really.

What were you looking forward to most about coming back?

Getting back to Weethalle. Yeah getting back to Weethalle. And yet when I got back to Weethalle it wasn't the same then. It was too quiet and sitting on a tractor going up and down a paddock was...

- 41:00 Nobody to talk to all day. It was no good. So I went back to Sydney.

Tape 9

- 00:31 **I just want to talk to Joe a little bit more about fighting in the jungle. How did you cope with the heat and the mud and the stench?**

Oh I coped fairly well I suppose, although I was never as healthy as what I was in the desert even though possibly the food was better.

- 01:00 Because you get the food to you. And there was malaria, once you had malaria it caught up with you every so often. But otherwise not too bad. I suppose from our bringing up, we'd been brought up pretty tough, we could sleep anywhere, we never had the best of

01:30 beds or houses or rooms or that. So living a bit rough it wasn't so hard possibly on us as some of the city people. And even in the jungle... although I hadn't been in the jungle before of course. But you learn to cope, you learn to cope with it.

What could you do to relieve the problems of heat and wet?

Well it rained

02:00 nearly every evening. So you cooled off. And we were forever crossing creeks and rivers. That was one way of washing your clothes, sit down and it and let it wash... give you a bit of a clean up. But you had to let your clothes dry on you of course. Well to be quite truthful I'm not quite sure how we really coped.

02:30 What we did as you say to cope. But we had to so you just put your head down and tried to get it out of your mind I suppose. How bad conditions were.

Did you ever feel any sympathy for the Japs who were in the same conditions?

None whatsoever, none whatsoever. It was completely different to fighting against the Germans and the poor old Italians. You did feel sympathy for them,

03:00 just that little bit barring when you were right in action, you didn't give a hoot then. But you see them getting shelled and you think the poor devils they're getting a bit of a hiding tonight or something. But not with the Japanese never.

Why do you think that was?

Well possibly because they were so close to our homeland and possibly because of what they'd done... we came across some POWs

03:30 when we landed in... that was in Borneo of course. And just skin and bone. And we'd heard all of it happen and to us they didn't seem human and we'd heard so much about their atrocities... it still stuck in your mind. I suppose that's one of the reasons why we didn't have any sympathy for them

04:00 whatsoever. Even when you saw lots of them dead you still didn't have any sympathy. Although there was one little bloke we took as prisoner somewhere when we were going along the coast. Poor little bloke he didn't look any more than about fourteen or fifteen And the poor miserable underfed dirty looking fellow sitting there. I thought, "I wonder if his mother knows where he is." Just for a fraction I did feel a

04:30 bit of sympathy for him. But he'd be the only one out of all of them... even when we had them in the POW cage. They were hopeless.

The Japs that you encountered either alive or dead, what sort of condition were they in?

They weren't in real bad condition, all fairly good when we struck. But a lot of them were...

05:00 didn't seemed to be clothed for the conditions. A lot of them just had a bit of a lap-lap thing on. Well goodness me, with mosquitoes and leeches in some of those creeks. You'd wonder how in the heavens they survived. But they were all right, they looked like they were... mind you they lived mainly on a heck of a lot of rice, and a lot of dried fish was another thing that they used to eat a lot of. And they could survive on that

05:30 where we couldn't. Like they'd go out on a patrol and they wouldn't take a great heap of rations like we would because they could live off practically nothing. So they were sort of, we felt a little bit as if they weren't human, sort of inhuman. Seeing the Japanese didn't worry me at all.

Do you think that ability to live on you know such minimal amount of logistic support made them good jungle

06:00 **fighters?**

I'm sure that's what made them good jungle fighters. Because they could go for days with just a handful of rice. And just keep on going whereas there was no way our chaps could do that sort of thing. And they probably lived off the land a lot better than us. Plus if they came to any villages well they just ransacked the village and take whatever there was to eat and keep going. Whereas we didn't do those sort of things.

06:30 And I think that's how they travelled so quickly. It was amazing how quickly they could get from way up north and the next day they'd be out in front of you. And you'd wonder how in heaven's name they'd made it. Because you could go on patrol and go out miles and strike nothing. And that evening they'd attack and you'd think, "Where in the hell did they come from?" They were very quick. But when they attacked, they attacked in sort of a mass. The more there were.

07:00 And you could hear them coming, they'd be blowing trumpets and yelling and making terrific noises blowing whistles. And waving, an old bloke in front waving a sword or something. And they just kept coming, they could pile them up one on top of the other and it made no difference. They didn't seem to have any... to us no idea of fighting. Mind you the Americans fought a bit that

07:30 way too up in the jungle. The more the merrier. As long as you had plenty of men, no matter how many fell there was more to fill the boots you were okay.

Did you ever fight with Americans?

Not alongside them no. Not up in the Islands or anywhere there. No we were all... we had to

08:00 rely on one another so it was quite good. And they did a good job too.

Some of our veterans have talked about coming across evidence of cannibalism amongst the Japanese. Did you ever see that?

No. No I never did. I had heard of it but I've never ever seen it. No.

How do you think your clothing and equipment was suited for the jungle?

Well

08:30 it stood up to it rather well, even our boots. You'd have thought the boots would've rotted away but they didn't last as long as they did up in the desert of course. But they were reasonably good and the clothing we had... no matter what clothing you had you were going to get sopping wet and smelly. But it was... I don't think the Yanks had any better. Because

09:00 we got a change of clothing every so often but it... I never had anything fall off me, rotted away or something like that. But if you wore it too long they'd rot away because of the perspiration and wet all the time. They just must do. Yes but the clothing was all right I think.

If you were out on patrol in the jungle there in New Guinea against the Japanese,

09:30 **describe to us what going on a patrol is like there when you just don't know what's behind the next bunch of leaves?**

Well your nerves are on edge for a start off. And you're trying to look everywhere at once. The least strange sound or a bush or something. Or birds fly up, all those sort of things you look for. And the nerves are on edge because you never know, as you say you never know, especially the poor old forward scout. I've been a forward scout

10:00 myself, I shouldn't have been but I did do once or twice for our fellows when we were a bit short. And when you're the forward scout you think every bush has got somebody behind it. And your nerves are absolutely on edge. Like the time I was a forward when I ran across that bridge and the dead Jap was on the other side. It's much harder on your nerves. Like in that way

10:30 when you don't know what's going to happen next, different to how it affects your nerves when you're under shell fire and gun fire and you're marching and the bullets are coming towards you, that affects your nerves too. But not to the same affect, at least you knew what was coming and what was happening and what was going on. But in the jungle you didn't so I think that affected your nerves more. Harder on you than it was on the other patrols we went on in the jungle where there was only a single

11:00 track or something. It was very hard on the nerves. And like when you finished your turn as a forward scout or whatever it was you'd be exhausted. As if sucked right out.

Any incidences then of men who couldn't take that any more?

Well maybe we did have one or two that weren't the best but you sort of...

11:30 Well I always did in my section - you wouldn't send them out as a forward scout. There were lots of other jobs just as dangerous... dangerous, not as dangerous as a forward scout. It was a job that had to have somebody with a very keen eye and a very good sense of hearing and a quick shot. And ready in a split second to do something, dive or duck into off the side of the road or fire or something like that.

12:00 And some chaps just weren't cut out for that sort of work. Some chaps couldn't cope. But I've never had anyone I've asked to go forward that's ever said no they couldn't do it. Nobody. They were all there to do a job and they did it. As I say there were those

12:30 you knew that just weren't up to it. So if you sent them out anyhow what's the good of them being out as a forward scout? It's a waste of time. They wouldn't be able to see a Jap if he stood up in front of them. And they'd be too nervous to warn you or to give you the correct signals or anything like that. So you couldn't rely on them. Not many.

It must be hard though

13:00 **ordering men to go up front.**

Yes it is, it is. And yet you had fellows that said, "I'll go in his place." We had chaps like that. Like this chap I mentioned, Arthur Skye, he was marvellous. The only thing is, if you had a good forward scout he got overworked a little bit. He's often said to us... Arthur's a little old man now, the same as the rest of

us. And we've talked to him about it.

13:30 And I've said to him, "You did more than your share you know." And he said, "Yeah, I often used to think that, crikey, it can't be my turn again!" I said, "I knew that, Arthur, but you were the best we had."

That unbearable tension of being out on patrol there, how did you blow it off back when you were safe again?

Like all the other patrols. Once you got back, where it was a little bit safe

14:00 and the tension was lifted, you felt like... oh as if you'd had half a dozen scotches or something. Everything was light and everything was going well and... talk too loud and laugh too laugh. And that what's it was like, once the tension was lifted and you were safe back again. But I can assure you nobody liked going on

14:30 these patrols where you could only go up the single track I'm sure of that. And nobody was very keen on forward scout.

If nobody was very keen on being a forward scout to what do you attribute the fact that nobody ever said no to it. What sort of spirit was there?

Well what shall we say, training. And mateship comes into it too I suppose.

15:00 And taking your turn, not letting somebody else have to do the lot. That came into it. You did get the odd one that if he could get out of it he could get out of any jolly thing. But you always find them even in ordinary life. But most of them they knew it was their turn had come around and that's what they were there for. Bill had been out for the last three or four hours or something or other and like you could only be at

15:30 top pitch for a certain amount of time. Well that's goes with the forward scout more so than anything. He can only be absolutely right alert to the utmost for a certain time then it's got an effect on him. Where he's not going to see quite as well or he's going to see somebody everywhere and he's not as alert so you couldn't keep him there too long. But no-one ever said no. Of course there were some that never ever

16:00 were forward scouts.

You talked about in North Africa how ambulances could sometimes drive nearly all the way up to the fighting. What about in New Guinea?

Well ambulances couldn't get to us most times. It was stretchers. Stretch them for miles back to where you could get them down to where an ambulance was down on the lower ground. They couldn't get to you, no way at all.

16:30 I can't recall ever... they came up a fair well when we were on the Sattelberg Track but of course if you had an ambulance on the track and there was tanks trying to get up and others trying to get down, well it was only just a narrow track, they were more of a hindrance than a help.

So who did the stretcher bearing?

Oh we had stretcher bearers. The first aid chaps. Regimental Aid Post. We all had

17:00 stretcher bearers. They did a marvellous job too because sometimes they'd be out in front, in between where the fighting was to pick people up. Wrap them up. That wasn't so bad against the Germans because I can't ever recall any stretcher bearer, they had the red cross... ever getting deliberately shot.

How did you celebrate that Christmas in New Guinea?

17:30 Eating. That was about all you could say about celebrating. Like on the Christmas Eve we were getting blown to bits. And next morning we came down off the mountain by the side of the hill where we were, and we crossed this little river and caught up with the company and we couldn't all sit together but our different sections were there. We sent carrying parties down to where the rations were and there was no singing or

18:00 celebrating really. It wasn't like we got a bottle of beer or anything like that to celebrate with. But there was plenty of food. And just that one day we didn't go anywhere or do anything. We just sat. Some of us had a swim in the creek and washed clothes and hung them out. So we could get into dry clothes for a bit of a change. And others played cards but no great celebrations. So

18:30 there was no time for that really.

The actions that you were involved in in New Guinea and later on in other parts of Asia there, did you take any prisoners?

No. No prisoners. I have seen some prisoners sitting on the beach there when we came along one time, with some fellows guarding them. Where they come from I don't know. But right at the finish

19:00 in Borneo... but I think the war was over at that stage. War had been declared over. When we went out

and collected a great heap of prisoners but they were sort of waiting for us to come and pick them up. And we bought them in and put them in the war cage. But not prisoners in actual fighting.

Why do you think that was?

Well the Japanese

19:30 were a different type. They'd commit hara-kiri before they'd jolly well become prisoners. It was against all of their bringing up and religion, whatever it may be. To be taken prisoner that was shaming their families and that to be prisoners. The only time you'd ever get a prisoner was somebody that was wounded or something or he couldn't move. We'd come across... walked over a lot of wounded blokes but I never ever saw one with his hands up.

20:00 Never. In both campaigns... or the two campaigns in New Guinea and the one in Borneo. Other battalions may have done. And I can't recall us taking any prisoners at all. Like in the fighting. More in the cage at the finish. They'd come in after we were finished or around about when we finished. They still fought on for a little bit

20:30 afterwards. Like you couldn't go for a walk down Reim Road or you'd get your head shot off. And we had one chap shot, although that was just at the finish. Bill Hipley was an original. He got wounded before Tobruk and he shouldn't have come back to us but he did. And he got killed... oh just about the day the war finished he got killed up on Canada Ridge.

So in the fighting there was obviously no quarter?

No. No you

21:00 didn't even think about that. I suppose there would have been many or more killed with a bayonet up in the highlands than there were in the desert.

The fighting in and around Borneo that you guys took part in, it wasn't heavy but nevertheless you lost men. Was it worth it do you think?

No.

21:30 I thought it was absolutely ridiculous for us to be there in the first place for going to Borneo. Like the war was practically over and the Americans were taking all the islands, here there and everywhere and they'd won the Battle of the Coral Sea and the battle of here. And they were all clearing out and heading off back to wherever they could get... Manila, all those places... so what the heck was the good of us landing in Borneo?

22:00 It was only a matter of time and they could've starved them out anyway. And there was only a few left there. And they'd all sort of got back onto the one island, Labuan Island. They might as well just by passed it. I never thought we should have been there. I thought it was an absolute waste. We had a lot of men killed there who shouldn't have been. But of course, probably our Government too. We'd been twelve months

22:30 and hadn't done anything. And we'd have gone anywhere jus to get away from all the training and the minority of being on the Tablelands. But as far as it being necessary, and I don't know what good it did. It'd have been different if we'd cleared passageway for this, that and the other but we didn't. They'd gone on past us. There was planes and ships and battleships heading off further up north, heading towards Japan and those islands up that way.

23:00 Though goodness knows what the good of us being there. It was all just bypassed us. I never thought Borneo was necessary or one of those islands. They were little nondescript things. Cripes, the Yanks could've blown them off the face of the earth if their full forces attacked them. I think it was just

23:30 getting us there to keep our government quiet. But that's only my opinion.

It's a fairly common opinion. Speaking of opinions, your opinion of General Blamey?

Do I have to have an opinion?

No you don't, you might have some thoughts on him.

Not the best, not the best at all. No. In fact

24:00 very few soldiers... front line soldiers had a great deal of time for General Blamey. When he was in the Middle East we never saw him. Only back in Palestine or somewhere. He lived a life of ease. Even had his wife over with him with him... over there... she was supposed to be head of the nursing fraternity but they never saw her either.

24:30 Had quite a mansion there just out of Cairo. But I suppose they could have got shelled and bombed. And the same up in the Islands, he sort of didn't stand up for us enough. Like just to go into jolly Borneo for start off. And even in, even when we landed at Finschhafen

25:00 sort of the Yanks more or less took over. No he wasn't well thought of. That's all I'll say.

At the end of the war how many were left in your battalion from Tobruk days?

Oh goodness now you have me. Candidly I wouldn't know. If I was to read up the book which I've got of the history, The Bayonets Abroad, it would probably tell me.

25:30 But there was still quite a lot because those that were wounded and came back to the battalion and those that went out early and came back to the battalion. But not by the end of the war, there wouldn't be very many because a terrific lot of our fellows, a lot of them never went to Borneo, went into New Guinea. And then there was a terrific amount of the original that never went up to Borneo.

26:00 By then we had all reinforcements. We'd got reinforcements in the Middle East. We got more on the Tablelands before we went to New Guinea and then for the twelve months we were up in the Tablelands before Borneo, oh I didn't have one... who did I have in my section? I wouldn't have one in my section that was with me in Tobruk. They were all new chums.

How did you cope with those new chums?

One man, Jackie Perry, was still there. He came

26:30 to us in Tobruk just as we left. Mm?

How did you cope with integrating those new ones in?

Quite okay. Some of them were very good. Some of them were flat out wanting to go and win the war themselves. Some of them had been training at what's up in Queensland? A very hard place where they... it's still well known as a hard training base. Great on a patrol. "It's not as hard as at so and so," this training camp - that sort of thing.

27:00 But they were all right. They were keen as mustard a lot of them. They'd been in camp here and they'd been keen to get away for donkey's ages and they'd been shifted here, there and everywhere and didn't get the chance. And they were sort of glad to finally become a real soldier. And they were very good... we had some very, very good recruits. Very good. I would say as, well possibly as good... well they were still

27:30 Australian anyhow and if they'd have been old enough and had been with us in the Middle East they'd have been just as good as the fellows that were there I suppose. I can't see why not.

Did you ever fight alongside any militia formations?

Yes we had a big help from those in New Guinea. They came and took over from us and went through us and pushed on up the... inland there just after Finschhafen. 36 something or rather mob they were.

28:00 And they did a good job too. An excellent job. When we stopped at Blucher Point that's away up in New Guinea away up the coast, some of their battalions took over from us. And kept on going. They took... right up to... went as far... what was it?... I think was where the Australians finally stopped and came back again.

28:30 But the Militia were there. Oh yes they had some good troops in those. And a lot of them were well led too because they had a lot of old, a lot of ex-army fellows that had been in action in the Middle East, army officers and a few like that... hosed them into their lot. So they were well led. And they were good.

So you didn't observe friction?

No we never had any problem

29:00 with them. We did when we came to the Middle East... like to us they were chockos... Why don't the chockos go and do something? But when they got the opportunity they did their job. Maybe they were a bit late getting there but I wouldn't hold it against them.

At the end of the war when you had all those Japs in the cage in Borneo, how did the Aussie soldiers treat the

29:30 Japanese POWs?

We treated them quite well. We had one chap that didn't. We had them lined up for doing something and he went along and was knocking them head over heels. But he was the one only and we soon stopped him. It's all right hitting an unarmed man who can't fight back, what a hero you are, sort of thing. And all us fellows got stuck into him. Just the one fellow. Why?

30:00 Goodness only knows. He wasn't with us at Tobruk but he was with us at Alamein. And he was quite a good soldier too really. But he just took it out on them. And poor devils, they're defenceless and they couldn't fight back. They weren't allowed... that'd be the end of them. And he just ... And he was big man too. But outside of that, the chaps treated them well. And

30:30 I got extra food for them and especially the women, some of them had little kiddies. And I went out and scrounged around in the town and managed to get a lot of condensed milk. And I bought that back and

gave it to them for the kiddies, cause the kids are still the same whether they're our or whose there are. And they were laughing and playing games and all that sort of thing - they didn't know what was going on. And I got extra rations

31:00 for them. And a funny thing happened too. We had the POWs... the men behind one fence and the women were where the men should have been. And they had long huts. And one evening it was... and I forget what I had to take, something to the head of these girls to tell them that you had to this that or the other. And as I was walking out I heard a rustling in the grass and I thought it was a snake or something. And

31:30 it was one of the chaps, he'd crawled out under the wire from his side and he was crawling over to where the women were you see. And I didn't yell out loud, I just said, "Hey." And he stopped and sat up and then one of the women came running out of the hut. And it was her husband. And she couldn't tell me but I gathered it was something like this and this other little girl could speak a little English. I say little girl, she was a big woman.

32:00 She come along and tell me, "Husband, husband." I said, "Oh. Well I'll be back here in..." I showed them the time. "About ten minutes, back." And away I went. And I came back in about ten or fifteen. Well you'd have thought I was the blinking... the what's a name of Japan. Because I'd done this for them

32:30 you see. But the war was over and the poor devils. And I actually, then I was feeling a little sorry for the ones that we had. Mm. Yeah.

For me listening to that sixty years later it seemed extraordinary that a few months before you hated them, you gave them no quarter, you were fighting ferociously.

Yes. I know. I know.

And now you're saying that you had mercy and felt sorry for them.

That's right. Well I let that chap and his

33:00 wife... I don't know where they went... but I did, I thought, "Oh crikey!" And for the womenfolk and so forth we got extra rations and not only me but others did the same too. But there were some that didn't. But I never ever really have forgiven them for some of the things that they've done to our chaps, never could. It's never the same as with the Germans... now I meet the Germans and we're all good friends.

33:30 Never have I been able to with the... mind you, I've never been to Japan. Although I have met Japanese people of chaps who have married some Japanese women or something. And I get along all right with them, I don't look down on them or anything like that. They're very smart. Very smart indeed. When I was working with a motor company in later years we were making a Japanese car... which was it?

34:00 Oh something or rather. And we had a chap come out from Japan and I had to show him around and show what we do. And he was quite the gentleman. But of course he's a younger generation. He could have been one of those little boys that were in the POW camp you never know. But I... oh now I suppose it's all died down after all these years. But never the same as with the Germans.

34:30 Like it was a dirty sort of war against the Japs. You never knew when they were going to sneak up on you and stab you in the back. Whereas at least the German'd give you warning before he did it. But that's just my opinion of course.

When you came back to Australia what were your movements then?

Well I got this...

35:00 Before I got discharged I was in camp... had to stay in Sydney for about... I could have gone home on leave. But I met one of my old mates that I'd shared a dug out in Tobruk, Jack White and he wanted me to be his best man. So I stayed on in Sydney until I was discharged. I was his best man. Then I got discharged the 5th December. And that was... there was another one of my army mates... Teddy Days. We always knew him as Bobby Summers. He was only sixteen in

35:30 Tobruk. And they discovered him in Tobruk and his mother saw his photo in the paper or something or one of the chaps put him in. So they dragged him out of Tobruk and sent him home. And he came back to us afterwards and he was with me in New Guinea and he was one of the young ones, really young ones, so we got discharged the same day. We come home on one of the seven. And we were sitting there, we were filling

36:00 all our papers and all that... at the showground we were. And they're calling them out. "Mr so and so," and, "Mr..." And he always had a hot temper and he jumped to his feet and he yelled, "It's just the same as it's always been. The officers always come first. They're not officers any longer so why should they be first?" And the next call was, "Mr Edwin Days." And he stopped dead. He said, "Christ! That's right! We're all misters!" And you couldn't believe it when they called

36:30 "Mr Joseph Madeley." And I was 'mister'. And to go up and get my discharge. And he walked through there because he was a different letter to me. We walked through both together, we picked up our discharge papers and so forth. But before that we had to go and be interviewed as to what we were

going to do and whether we wanted to do a course on anything. And I said, "No I don't want any bosses. I'm going straight back to the farm. I don't need any courses. I

- 37:00 know enough." And Teddy was the same. But he did a course on plastering afterwards. And we had a few drinks and I put him on the train for Melbourne and he said, "Joe, if you ever come to Melbourne, come to Flinders Street Station, Number 7 platform. Get a train to... oh what's the name train... and get off at Yarraville. And ask for me. If you ever come to Melbourne." Well it was years later, 1950,
- 37:30 that I did go to Melbourne and I did exactly that and I met his mother and his father and his sisters and so forth. And he was living in St Kilda only around the corner from where I was living. So we got together again after the war. But I went... then I went straight back to the farm and worked for Dad. It was getting just about the end of the stripping and I stripped a little bit of wheat for him. But he had a tractor by then of course. We didn't
- 38:00 have the horses. He'd gone up in the world. And carted in some wheat and some hay and so on. And came around about January... I stayed there over Christmas. And driving up and down the paddocks on the tractor and nobody to talk to and you come home of a night, and wash and clean up and into bed. And it was getting me down and I think my father realised that too. Because I said to him, "Dad, I think I'll duck off, have a little bit of a break and go back to
- 38:30 Sydney." He said, "Yes I think that might be a good idea." And I never ever came back to the farm. They gave us a great reunion, welcome home and all that sort of business but I never came back onto the farm to live barring coming back to help Dad strip a crop of... sew some wheat if he wasn't capable, and one of the brothers weren't able to get there. But I didn't, I got back to Sydney and after oh a few days, a week
- 39:00 I bumped into an old mate, Bobby Baines and he wanted to know what I was doing. I said, "Well I suppose I'd better get a job." And he said, "Well look there's an easy job on the trams, as a tram conductor. They give you a uniform and you can take that on while you're looking for a job." I said, "Well that'll do me." So I got a job as a tram conductor going out to The Gap and back in Sydney. On those corridor trams. And also I worked on the
- 39:30 running board when you had to go on the outside of the tram on the running board. Go out to the races and things like that. And I did that for three or four months I suppose. But once again you had a boss and everybody... all the passengers are your boss. "I want this." "Stop the tram I want to get off here." And all that, and that sort of got me down a bit too. So I met my old mate, this old Vince, the chap that'd I'd been trapping rabbits with and so forth. And he was a POW and he'd got home by then.
- 40:00 And he was working for Austral Bronze as an inspector. And I met him at the hotel on the Saturday and I said, "I've had this. What say we toss it in and do some hard work." He said, "What do you suggest?" I said, "They're looking for cane cutters up in North Queensland. What say we go up and do a season of cane cutting?" And he said, "Righto. I'll come too." So we gave our notice on the Monday morning and the following Monday we were on our way back up to Queensland. That was,
- 40:30 oh, around about June I suppose it was. June, July, heading up to Queensland. And we went up to Tully near Cairns and we did a season of cane cutting. We went there as a new chum gang of course, they put us in a new chum gang. Started us straight away. And they took us out in a truck and as we were getting off the truck a couple of fellows were throwing their bags back on and they said, "Take our advice, don't even take your bags off.
- 41:00 This is the worse job under the sun." But we stayed the season and we got into a full proper gang and earned good money at the cane cutting. So that was my first year really after I was out of the army. I'd been a trammie and then I'd been a cane cutter.

Tape 10

00:32 **You said you found it difficult to settle down.**

Yes well as I said I had a cane cutting job and on the way back I... Queensland of course was where Margaret was, the lass that I knew. And we got married up in Brisbane. That was late in 1946. And came back to Sydney and I thought, "Well I'd better get a job which is a bit stable now. I've got a wife."

- 01:00 Incidentally the first thing I took her to was the cricket to watch Don Bradman batting. He got two hundred and thirty-four I think it was at the Sydney Cricket Ground in the Second Test. So we went up to Weethalle and I introduced her around to family - they'd never ever met her. And my brother was working at Glen Davis in the mines, the shale oil mine at Glen Davis. And he said, "This is a good job, good money and it's permanent." So we went there and I bought a little house there. And we lived there and

- 01:30 then I moved into a better class house and I worked in the mines for two and a half years. It was a shale oil mine but it was costing... petrol was produced there at that mine on the site. But it was costing about five shillings a gallon to produce and petrol was only about two shillings a gallon. But there was talk they were going to close it down of course so I thought. "I'd better get out of this

- 02:00 and find something different." By that time Leon was born, that was my son, he was born in 1949. At Glen Davis. I was took on as the SP [starting price] bookie [bookmaker] there in the hotel on the Saturdays. And the day that Hiraji won the Melbourne Cup the 21 Flying Squad came around and I got pinched. And a chap named Billy something or other and I.
- 02:30 And that's one of my only times I've ever been inside looking out. Only for a few hours while they took all our particulars and I can remember Margaret arriving outside. And we knew the policeman well. The local policeman wasn't bothered, it was the flying squad up from Sydney grabbed us. So I can remember the policeman saying, "Christ, now you'll be in trouble when you get home." He said, "It'll be cold bum and hot tongue for you tonight." Those were his actual words. But anyhow we had to face court of course
- 03:00 and they fined us twelve... but the worse was they confiscated all our money. Well when you're consolidated revenue we owed quite a lot of bets. Anyhow we managed to pay them off. And just about when the place was about to close down we decided to move back up to Queensland, Margaret and I, because there was family. She didn't have a mother and father but she had been living with her grandmother and grandfather had brought her up and she had a sister. So we went back up to Queensland and I worked there for a while. I played football
- 03:30 with the Wynnum Football... I was playing football, rugby league that was in Glen Davis. And they gave me a job there as long as I played football with Wynnum. And when the season finished we came back again to Leeton in New South, back home where all the family was and so on. And I worked in many jobs around there. I was a plumber and then I worked for a carpenter and I worked in a general store. And I worked in the cannery of the big factory there.
- 04:00 And they kept me there as long as I played football with one of the teams. But when the season was over we weren't sort of getting along real well. Although we were still good friends we were right through to the finish, we were still good friends. But she wanted to go to Queensland and I didn't want to go to Queensland. And although we didn't argue or fight or swear at one another or anything like that, we decided it was time for the parting of the ways. So Margaret went back up to
- 04:30 Queensland and I got a job selling vacuum cleaners which took me to Deniliquin and from Deniliquin I hitch hiked down to Melbourne. And Leon was being looked after by some very, very good friends of ours. Dave and Mrs Chanter and their daughter Roma. Roma was only about fourteen or fifteen. And got to Melbourne and the chap... there
- 05:00 was a couple of us in a car and he dropped us off and he said, "Where are you staying?" We didn't know so he dropped us off at the Salvation Army People's Palace. We stayed there the night and they gave us a meal... we were always broke in those days. And they said, "There's a job going at the motor industry, looking for assemblers. You can start tomorrow morning. And they will find accommodation for you and organise
- 05:30 your meals till you get your first pay day." So I thought, "That's all right, that'll do me for a couple of weeks." So Johnny and I, Cookie and I went down and we got the job. And they were just starting up and the employment officer said, "Now what job do you want?" And I said, "What's the best paid one?" He said, "Ever been, done any...?" I said, "No. I've worked on a farm, I can handle all tools. That doesn't worry me. Hammers and chisels and screwdrivers and all that, I know a lot about machinery." He said,
- 06:00 "Righto, you can start as a motor trimmer and you get a shilling a day extra." And so we started there and they found us accommodation out at St Kilda. And the night... we got to St Kilda about four, we'd finished work about half past three, four o'clock and we had a bus down to St Kilda and we went around and found out where our accommodation was. But that didn't include dinner that night. So we went into a little coffee shop and we had enough money for one slice of toast and two
- 06:30 cups of coffee and that was our dinner for the night. But from then on we had all our meals at this place, they supplied all the meals. And that night Luna Park was starting up and they wanted operators. So I said, "Well we might as well go in here and we'll get a job here. We can work that at night and we can work." So we went in there and they started us straight away. And Johnny Cook, he got a job on the Big Dipper and I was working on the clowns that wobble their heads back and forwards. He wanted somebody that could
- 07:00 speak and speak. He said, "You should be able to talk all right." So I said, "Righto, I'll take it." So I became then, Mr Clown I was, looking after the clowns. And really we sort of got back onto our feet because I'd just started the job and I was looking at a lot of overtime at night-time and working all the time I didn't have time to spend any. I did have a lady friend, but only one night a week I got off and that was the Thursday. So I'd sometimes see her
- 07:30 on a Thursday night and give... I used to give her all of my wages and live on what I earned at Luna Park and she was putting it in a bank for me. So I built up pretty quickly and we had a lot of fun at Luna Park. One thing I must tell you. This Johnny Cook, he was a bit of a larrikin, and he come to me and he said, "Joe, it's amazing the amount of girls together on the Big Dipper." He was looking after the second ride. If you wanted a second ride he took the money off you. He said, "Would you
- 08:00 come along and look after, take the other one?" And I said, "Righto Johnny, but I've got to see what she looks like first." I was just around the corner from him. I said, "Send her around and ask me would I like

a cup of coffee or something and if I don't like the look of her I'll say no, I'm too busy tonight. I can't go out for a cup of coffee." So this first night a lovely girl, red haired girl, oh she was beautiful. She said, "Johnny on the clown wants to know if you'd like to go for coffee afterwards?" I said, "Oh yes, tell him yes, oh marvellous." I look around

- 08:30 the corner and Johnny was standing up at the Big Dipper and I went, "Beautiful yeah." Well when the show was over of course we paid in all our money, walking out and of course there's the red haired one and another big tall girl and I'm heading off and he says, "Hang on mate, the red-haired one's mine, yours is the one on the left." But she was a very nice girl. She didn't have any teeth. She'd been to the dentist and had all her teeth extracted and I said, "For God's sake, Johnny! She was a lovely girl, but next time get me one with teeth, will you?"
- 09:00 The following night I'm there working and a dark girl... I don't know whether she was Samoan or whether she was South African... as black as the Ace... about that big. But she was all... she smiled and lovely eyes. She said, "Johnny on the dipper wants to know if you'd like to go for coffee." I said, "No I'm a bit busy tonight." And I look around the corner and there's Cookie and all his mates all laughing their heads off. They were all in the joke. And I said to him afterwards, "Oh Christ, Cookie." He said, "Oh at
- 09:30 least she had teeth." Well I stayed with that motor company then. Cookie came back to Sydney but I stayed on. They made me leading hand and then I became foreman in charge of the production line. And then they got the franchise for building Mercedes Benz cars. And they put me in charge of building Mercedes Benz and I got a trip back to... over to...
- 10:00 At that stage we had a pilgrimage back to Tobruk. And I was going on that one and I got time off I think. Oh about two months, three months. And they got me to go to Germany while I was over there to have a look... this was just as we were about to start you see... as to how they were made. So the car was all made in Germany and all broken down and packed in boxes and came out to Australia and we re-assembled them was what it was. And to find
- 10:30 out how it was done and who I had to get in touch with if I needed spare parts and all that. And I was there for a couple of... two or three weeks in Stuttgart in Germany and they treated me very, very well. Each day at lunch time I had to sit at a different table with the engineers this time, with the trimmers this time, with the assemblers the next time and so on. And I'd walk in and there'd be an Australian flag sitting on the table and I knew that's where I had to sit. They were very good. Anyway I came back... afterwards I came back to
- 11:00 Sydney... to Melbourne and I was with them... I was there just on twelve years. The franchise cut out on the Mercedes Benz and they'd closed the plant down there, the assembly plant but they moved to some other spot and I could've stayed on, but Dad by that time had gone blind with glaucoma and he'd sold the farm. And I said, "No, I want to get back."
- 11:30 Plus the fact that I never ever got to any reunions and I used to get their journal from the 13th Battalion and they had a reunion and dinners and Anzac Day they all marched. And I didn't know anybody down in Melbourne. There was no 13th Battalion... only this Teddy Days. So Anzac Day was just like any other day. We'd have a few... Teddy and I'd have a few drinks but I always wanted to get back and I thought this was a good opportunity. So I left there and they gave me long service leave.
- 12:00 And they gave me... paid me my superannuation and I arrived back in Sydney. And once again I thought, I had a little old car... I had a new car but I sold it before I went back over to Tobruk. And I had just a little old bomb. And I'm driving along Cosgrove Road, Enfield and there was a sign up there, 'Assemblers wanted'. And I thought, "Well if I can't get anything else at least I can always start
- 12:30 as an assembler. That'll do me for a while anyhow." And I was living in Ashburn in a boarding house. So I went there and they said, "Yes you can start straight away. Ever done...?" I never told them I'd become the production supervisor. I thought, "No they'll want me to take over something and I don't want to because I don't want this as a permanent job." So I started on the assembly line just assembling, I was putting in the dashboard. But they were...
- 13:00 And they were just sort of beginning too. And they had everything all upside down. I was trying to work while somebody else was putting in glass ware or putting the trim up. And I couldn't control myself. I said, "Listen fellows, how about I put the dash in?" One fellow wanted to put the seats in, the front seats in before you put the dash in. Well that made it very awkward because there wasn't enough room because to put the dash in and put it in easily you lay on your back underneath and you stuck it all... if the seat was there you couldn't do it.
- 13:30 And all those sort of little things. And I was gradually shifting fellows around and getting storemen to put the... like the fellows doing doors... a chap'd do a door on this side then he'd get all his gear, and his bolts and his nuts and scramble over the other side and do it all on the other side. Same with the back door. I said, "Well why don't you do the front door and the back door and just have everything on this side. And Bill can do the front door and the back door on that side and it'll save all that time."
- 14:00 And the boss come to me and he said, "Joe, you weren't just an assembler were you?" And I said, "No I wasn't, but I wasn't thinking of staying here and I thought I'd sooner just be an assembler." Anyhow they finished up and I was there for ten years. I once again became a leading hand and they put me in charge of the production of the Land Rovers. And I had a very good time; it was marvellous.

14:30 For the first time I had problems with unions there a little bit because I couldn't avoid helping fellows. I'd see chaps... like it's a moving line and the line broke down. And we had to push the cars and I could see two or three fellows struggling pushing it and I couldn't resist it... I had to get in and give them a bit of a help, give them a bit of a push. Or a chap was trying to pick up a door to put it on or something and I'd go over and give him a hand, or hand him a screwdriver. And I got into a lot of trouble for doing that.

15:00 They'd say, "Do us a favour and keep your hands in your pockets." And that sort of thing.

Would you tell us about your reunions when you started attending them.

By then of course I was back in Sydney and I went along to a 13th Battalion meeting, the first time I'd been to a meeting. And I had been back to Tobruk and back while I was in Melbourne. And of course

15:30 it was great to meet all the fellows that I hadn't seen since the war finished. And after the meetings we used to have a get together, a bit of a reunion and it was... I thought it was like being home again it was. And they formed a Rats of Tobruk Association which they had formed in Melbourne and I joined them there but I never ever went to their meetings or anything. I sort of wasn't interested because the chaps I didn't know and units I didn't

16:00 know. I'd heard of them but I didn't know them. They were all good chaps mind you. But when I got back to Sydney of course they were people that I knew and I joined the Rats of Tobruk Association as well. That was in '62 I came back. And I went along to a Rats of Tobruk meeting and the night I got there was an AGM, Annual General Meeting. And everybody was working of course and it was hard to get enough

16:30 to go on the committee. So the night I went there they put me on the committee. That was in 1962 and I've been on it ever since. And those reunions were good too. We'd have an Anzac Day... the first Anzac Day was the first Anzac Day I'd marched and I marched with my own battalion and it felt absolutely wonderful to be marching with them again and a big reunion afterwards. A reunion dinner up at

17:00 the town hall at... Paddington Town Hall... we used to have our reunions there. And they were great.

What about the reunion you attended in Germany?

Well that was quite a few years later of course. The Afrika Korps reunion and they had one in 1972, which I couldn't

17:30 get to that one, I was in... '74... at that stage... Actually in 1968 I got married again - I married Jessie. And there was a trip on back to England, a tour back to Tobruk and Alamein... no to England and we were going on. But this Afrika Korps

18:00 reunion got an invitation, the Rats of Tobruk. So we went to go by way of Stuttgart and we went to the Afrika Korps reunion. And it was great to... they were so much like us. They all had their steins of beer and we had a sing song and what have you. And Manfred Rommel was there. And he welcomed

18:30 us of course. They put a table for the Australians right at the stage, right at the front. And we were surrounded all the time... if it wasn't the Italians, it was the Germans. And that was really the first time I'd sort of got to know them and one chap in particular. He was a prisoner of the Africa Corp. Heinz Bock... Karl-Heinz Bock. And he was a tank commander and was taken POW at Alamein. And he was in charge

19:00 and he come and sat at our table and he spoke perfect English and we had a great time plus the fact that at that stage I was the... had become the President of the Rats of Tobruk Association. And I represented the Rats of Tobruk. And another chap who was a colonel was the president of the 9th Division. So Manfred Rommel was the Lord Mayor of Stuttgart so we got invited along to morning tea with Manfred Rommel before the reunion started.

19:30 And we had to go there afterwards to the hall. And of course not only me, there was people from everywhere. And they introduced us and when I got to meet him I got introduced as, "This is Mr Madeley from Sydney from Australia, he's President of the Rats of Tobruk Association, representing the Rats of Tobruk." He said, "Ah, Tobruk." I wrote it down straight afterwards so I know it off by heart I've told it so many times. He said, "Welcome to Stuttgart, Mr Madeley. My

20:00 father always said the Australian soldiers had the best fighting infantry in the world." And I said, "Thank you. And by the same token, your father frightened the hell out of us a few times too." And he had a great grin and he said, "Welcome to Stuttgart." And that's where I first met him. He spoke pretty good English. So we had morning tea with him, plus Montgomery's son was there too. And he was there

20:30 side by side they were so I met Montgomery's son as well. And then we went to the reunion, the Afrika Korps reunion. And every time you turned around there was somebody there with a stein of beer for you. And they made us so very very welcome and they supplied us with a... we were staying at a place just out of Sindelfingen, where I'd been at the Mercedes Benz factory. And

21:00 Jessie and I had Rommel's bedroom at this place we were staying. What do they call it? It was lovely too. A marble bathroom, we had a waltz in the bathroom as big as this. And we had a waltz around and

it was great. And they supplied us with a bus to cart us all around and an interpreter. She was a woman the interpreter and a driver. And they took us everywhere

- 21:30 and they'd be there to pick us up and take us to different functions and a different castle we went through. Then we had a wreath laying ceremony and we were there... Rommel laid a wreath and I laid a wreath and two or three others laid wreaths. And they really treated us well because as I say, they had this woman interpreter. And we had a big party the last night we were there. And of course there was only one place to have it.
- 22:00 In our room because it was the biggest... in Rommel's room. And the lass came in there too and he was black the driver and of course he wasn't allowed into a lot of things. But I talked this lass who was a PR [public relations] lady to let him come in. I said, "He's the driver, he can't sit out in the bus all night." She said, "Righto." So he came in and he sat in a corner and we came him a couple of drinks. And in the finish he just slid down the wall and went to sleep in the corner. And that was our
- 22:30 final night in Stuttgart and it was great. And we did have a wonderful time. We went on one trip... we went to one of their wine cellars where there was a big party on. And they put us all up into the front seats and they had all people there singing songs and all those German songs. And there was one song I liked very much was what's it called? 'Sailor'.
- 23:00 That's what we call it, 'Sailor'. And it's a rollicking sort of a one and of course I'd had quite a few wines by then. And trying to get them to sing that they couldn't understand, so I got up and I sort of... I sang it in the tune I know. I gave them the start of the tune and then one lass caught on and then she started and finally we had them all... everybody in this wine cellar we were in... everybody was singing. Well we all as one, we mixed with them and arms around one another and drinking and you know. And that's what it was like.
- 23:30 It was really marvellous in that reunion. And we went from there over to England. And the Rats of Tobruk there had organised a function for us there too. Jessie and I. Over near Liverpool. I can't think of the name of the town. And the chap wrote to me from there, he knew where I was staying in London with the secretary of the Rats of Tobruk. And the Victory Services Club we were staying then.
- 24:00 And I called in there because Jessie came from Scotland so we hired a mini and we went up to Scotland and all around Scotland and all that sort of business. And we came back, we had to come back through Liverpool and he said, "Stay the night at Liverpool I've got a few here... not like Australia. A few rats here would like to meet you." He said, "And I've booked you into so and so." I said, "Righto." So we stayed in that hotel and we arrived there and it was dark and we
- 24:30 booked in and he was there waiting at the door and he said, "Righto Joe, I've got them, there's only a few there. A big hall. It's part and parcel of the hotel. And we're booked in... we're all booked in as your guests because you're booked in here." I said, "Thanks very much." And we walked in and it was dark, pitch dark when we walked into the room. And I can remember it so well. Then all of a sudden a spotlight came on us and then dim lights opened and the place was packed.
- 25:00 There was not only Rats of Tobruk but there was 8th Army chaps and there was and there was all army people, veterans and their wives and so on. There must've been two or three hundred in there. And there was Jessie and I. It was great. I had to make a speech and so on. And I got through it pretty well I think. According to Jessie I did a good job. Oh we had a wonderful night we did, absolutely marvellous.
- 25:30 And they were all supposed to get out by twelve o'clock. Well about a dozen of them came back up to our room of course as my guests. And I saw the bell boy or whoever was in charge around about eleven. They all had to get out by eleven, they all went barring this crowd and I said, "I'm having a few quiet... could we have some...?" "Oh yes, certainly." So they sent us up sandwiches and we got a bottle of champagne. And it was great. And that was really our first meeting
- 26:00 of a crowd of the English Rats of Tobruk. So we've kept in close touch ever since. But they were only branches; the head was from Australia. We ran the whole show.

We have to jump forward quite a long way now. How was it for you when your son was drafted in Vietnam?

Well I always thought that Vietnam wasn't

- 26:30 such a... I thought, "Oh goodness me, there's no fighting and that going on up in Vietnam. It's only a funny sort of a war - nothing doing." Until my son joined. He wanted to get married at nineteen and I wouldn't let him get married. I said, "Cripes, you haven't..." He came to live with me as soon as he left school. We always arranged that his mother, Margaret, came and got him from these people and she brought him up. And took him to school till he was about twelve.
- 27:00 I said, "As soon as he leaves school he's got to know that I'm his father." I was his uncle at that stage, he was always calling me uncle, but we got along real well. And he left school and I went around to the house and they said, "Righto." So I told him I was his Dad. And he insisted then... a week or two later I got word from Margaret to say, "Can Leon come and live with you? We can't handle him since he found out you're his father." So he come and live with me. And he wanted to get married when he was nineteen and I said, "No, you're too young."

- 27:30 And the girl was nineteen. I said, "She's very nice. You haven't got a permanent job." I'd got him a job as an apprentice with me but he didn't stick to it. Anyhow a few days later he turned up with all the papers to join the army. He said, "Is this permanent enough for you?" So I said, "Right." He joined up and he got married, he married this lass. Very nice girl. And they're still together and they're still all over one another and that's thirty-odd years ago. Still as much in love
- 28:00 as they ever were. But when he joined up, that was all right and then he went to Vietnam. And then all of a sudden Vietnam became a terrible war then. And I hated getting the thought of the mailman coming or a telegram to come for fear that something had happened to him. But he got through all right and he got promoted. He became a corporal and later on became an RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] ... like a warrant officer. As he always said
- 28:30 he outranked me. And he did the one term, twelve months in Vietnam. And he was in the engineers. He stayed in the army then for twenty years. And sort of made a life of it. But after twenty years he was in the engineers and they'd put him through a civilian course of engineering, and for the last six months all he was doing was going into the army to get his pay. He was up in Queensland.
- 29:00 And when he finished he got out of the army. Went into the engineering and set up his own engineering business and he did very well indeed as an engineer. But he's sold that now and he's retired, although he's only fifty-five or fifty-six. Well he's semi-retired... he's still got all his equipment on a big trailer and if anybody breaks down on a farm he'll dash out there and weld something and mend a gate or a ramp
- 29:30 and the show committee's always got him going there mending sheep yards. Or if the school... if something's broken... he does most of it buck cheap but he loves doing it.

Did you feel there was an Anzac tradition in your family?

I'm sure there was. Like Anzac Day was always a great day for Dad. We'd always know he'd come home singing. I can remember Anzac Day in Weethalle and then he, in later years

- 30:00 when we were grown up a bit he came to Sydney for Anzac Day. To join the 15th Field Company Engineers. And as they died out a bit they amalgamated with the two lots of engineers but he still came down on Anzac Day. And it was great... and I always thought it was wonderful to have a Dad that was a soldier. There was something about it, it always sort of got to me, must've been marvellous to be a soldier. So when the war started
- 30:30 I couldn't join quick enough.

You helped to win the war in North Africa and New Guinea. Do you think that Australia has won the peace since?

In Australia yes. We thought we had, we thought it was the war that would finish all wars. We thought there definitely wouldn't be another war. And there was only about twenty years between the First War and the Second War. And ours went on for so long

- 31:00 that we thought... but then there was Korea bobbed up of course. And there's been still fighting. Korea never seemed to be much of a war but still we had men went there and fellows got killed and taken POWs and so on. But then we realise now that wars never ever solved anything. It might solve something just for the time being but underneath wars never solved anything. There's still... they've been
- 31:30 fighting the year 1. Since the world came into being. There's always been wars and I really think there always will be wars. Either religious wars. Like in the early days all those clans up in Scotland they all fought one another and they had civil wars in England. And the different... these have fought those... and William the Conqueror and the Huns and the Romans, they've always been fighting. And I'm afraid that as people get
- 32:00 better weapons and they want more... more populated they want more land and they've always got some reason to attack some where or other, because somebody is not doing the right thing. And I'm afraid I can't see an end to it. It's wrong I know but I can't see an end to it.

Did returning to Tobruk some years after you'd been there and wounded in North Africa.

It was a wonderful feeling to step ashore and they made such a fuss of us. We were the first to

- 32:30 go back, the first pilgrimage to go back to Tobruk. And we went by boat... a P & O [Peninsular and Oriental] liner and what's his name was the head of the P & O line... Morshead. But he died unfortunately but we got cheap rates. Orontes, it pulled right into Tobruk harbour. And they took us... just us... on board the ship going over we had diner with the captain and everybody made much of us. And we had Anzac Day while we were
- 33:00 going over or Anzac Day celebrations, it wasn't Anzac... And we had coffee with the captain and drinks and all that sort of business. And whatever lounge we went into, we wouldn't be sitting down for five minutes and a waiter'd come around and, "Oh, Mr so and so's father was in Tobruk or husband or something. Would like you to have...? These are on her." And I don't think we brought a jolly drink on the boat going over as far as Tobruk.

33:30 And to step ashore in Tobruk. And at that stage they had a king, King Idris and it was still under British... what do they call it? Anyhow they ruled Libya at that stage. And they took us everywhere. They had a bus there waiting for us and we had morning tea with the King. And he made a great speech in Arabic or whatever it was he spoke in, and then clapped himself, so we gave him a big clap.

34:00 And they took us out... we couldn't go out very far because that was only twenty years after the war had finished and there was still minefields and all those things hadn't been cleared up, so you couldn't get off the main road. But we went out to the cemetery and had a service there which was wonderful. And seeing all that sort of brought tears to the eyes it did. And it was great, a marvellous feeling. To step ashore and to be able to... when we came back out of the front line we were

34:30 back at a place called Palestrina at one stage and the diggings were still there where we'd been. And the memories came flooding back about what it was like when we were there the time before. And it's something that you sort of can't explain what it was like.

Did it put to rest any of the nightmares you'd been experiencing?

No it didn't, it didn't. Not at that stage, no. I was still quite okay up at that stage. No it never affected me at all.

35:00 I looked forward to getting up and seeing things you know. Be able to stand up and see what you couldn't see, what you'd never seen because we'd never been able to stand up on things and look out over the area. And it was a wonderful feeling and by that time they were beginning to build the town up a little bit. But at night-time we came back on board the boat. And we

35:30 had the cocktail... they gave us a cocktail party. We were only ashore for the one day mind you, in Tobruk. And then we sailed on and we sailed on to Naples and then to Rome and then on to London.

Were you tempted to visit New Guinea again?

That's funny, but I have never been. There's been pilgrimages back to New Guinea and Borneo but I, I've never really wanted to go back there. None at all.

36:00 I've been back, different times I've been back to Tobruk again. I went back in... at the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Alamein. We were sponsored then, the government, there was about two hundred and fifty of us went. And I went back again in 2002, which was the 60th anniversary of El Alamein. We went to Tobruk and saw all those places but I've never ever wanted to go back to New Guinea or Borneo. I don't know why. There was a government sponsored one going one time and I put my name.

36:30 Told them the reason I wanted to go and so on but I didn't get selected. But it didn't break my heart because I didn't get there. And I don't know that I ever will. In fact I'm sure I never will. Whether some of the lads get together some time or other, some of them are still younger ones that are still fit and well and want to go, they'll only have to ask me and I suppose I'll go. I wouldn't like to miss out on anything.

What do you think about

37:00 more recent talks of post traumatic shock syndrome?

It's lovely to get a TPI [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated Pension]. Mind you ... that is true for possibly the Vietnam boys because it happened to me and it must've been

37:30 when I was married to Jessie, when I had nightmares and all that sort of thing. I'd wake up in the night and everything seemed to be wrong and my nerves were shocking. And that would be 1968... we got married and that's all those years later. Well that's twenty, nearly thirty years later. I don't know why. But I didn't... never had nightmares or anything. I thought about it sometimes and it got me down about

38:00 different fellows that had died and so on and there were certain little things, killing people'd come back and what you'd done. At the time you didn't even know you were doing it. But never post traumatic stress. But we're not all built the same mind you. Some were nearly off their heads by the time the war finished. Goodness me yes. I've met fellows that were in my battalion and I've seen them after I've come back to Sydney. Wandering around in Belmore Park,

38:30 down and outs and you know just living on scraps and so on. Good fellows. But it had got to them, nerves had got to them. So I can understand it. But not traumatic stress for those that were early in the piece, surely to God.

I've got time for one more question, Joe, before our tape ends. If Australians in the future are watching this interview, what message would you have for them

39:00 about serving one's country.

Yes, if your country's in trouble, it's your duty. Not only your duty, but you should feel that you want to join up and want to fight for your country. Anybody that won't fight for their country, well they shouldn't belong here, that's my opinion. But that's only mine; a lot of people think different. Think it's wrong to fight? Well I suppose it is wrong to fight but if your country's in trouble,

39:30 in danger, that's where you should be.

Any regrets?

I've got no regrets that I joined no. None whatsoever. My only regret I've got is that I married too soon after the war and it wasn't fair to Margaret.

INTERVIEW ENDS