Australians at War Film Archive

Oscar Isaachsen - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:44 **...for joining us this morning, Oscar, and sharing your story with us.**

Cedric, I'm usually known as.

Fine. Thank you, Cedric. Just to start off this morning, we'd like to just get a brief summary of your war experience, starting with where you were born?

01:00 At Manham in South Australia, on the River Murray.

And you joined the militia, at what age was that?

Seventeen. Bear in mind that training was compulsory when you were seventeen.

And what year was that?

That would have been 1928. At school.

01:30 **And then once you completed school?**

I finished at the end of 1928.

And then you went to university?

That's right.

And then when war broke out, when did you join the AIF [Australian Imperial Force]?

In the early May of 1940.

And once you joined the AIF, do you want to just take me through your postings?

02:00 Yes, I joined them as a captain, and then when we were in Palestine in 1941 I was promoted to captain and then, sorry, to major, I beg your pardon, and then it wasn't until August '42 in New Guinea that I was promoted to lieutenant colonel.

Well,

02:30 **just before we move through Palestine we'll just, to Palestine, sorry, where did you do your rookie training when you joined the AIF?**

We didn't do any rookie training. I was responsible for the training of my company.

And whereabouts was that?

Woodside.

And how long were you training in Woodside?

From May until October of 1940.

03:00 **And then you embarked for the Middle East?**

That's right, went to Melbourne for that.

What was the date you went to Melbourne to embark?

19th of October 1940.

And where did you disembark in Palestine?

Well, first of all we disembarked in India and spent a week or so at a British rest

03:30 camp at a place called Deolali, D-E-O-L-A-R-L-I [actually Deolali], about a hundred and twenty miles inland, and then we'd gone to Bombay on the Mauritania, and then to go up the Red Sea we had to get into smaller ships, because the Italians were in the war sitting alongside the Red Sea, and we were on a ship called Takliwa, and we disembarked at Al

04:00 Kantara in Palestine. Went up the Suez Canal and disembarked at Al Kantara.

And what was the date you disembarked in Palestine?

I can't tell you offhand. I'd have to look at our history. But it would be, let me think. It'd be in November '40 sometime.

And once you disembarked in Palestine, where did

04:30 **you go from there?**

In Palestine? We went to a place called Julis, J-U-L-I-S, and we took over a camp from one of the 6th Division battalions there.

And how long were you in Julis?

Until April 1941. We then went down to

05:00 a camp, a rotten camp just outside Alexandria, for a very short time, and then to another place called Maatinbagush for a couple of days, M-A-A-T-I-N-B-A-G-U-S-H for a couple of days, and then onto Mersa Matruh, where we were there for a couple of months. M-E-R-S-A M-A-T-R-U-H.

So by this stage, what date are we looking at?

What do

05:30 you mean?

When you were in Mersa Matruh? Is it, are we looking at mid to late 1941?

No, no, we were there for about two months and then moved back to Palestine, and I'll tell you about that later, and then to marched into Syria to fight the Vichy French.

And when did you march into Syria?

On the, I think it was the 7th of June

06:00 1941. I think 7th or 8th. I can look it up.

And then from Syria?

Well, we were in Syria until early the following January after the Japs came in. We moved down then to Palestine for a few days, and then to Suez to embark again on a ship called the Ile de France,

06:30 which was a big French trans-Atlantic liner, down to Bombay, then onto a smaller ship. Smaller ship called the City of London, and then we wandered round the Indian Ocean. I'll tell you in detail about that, and then back to Australia.

Were you wounded in Syria?

Yes, I was.

07:00 **And once you were. Whereabouts were you wounded in Syria?**

Just outside the town of Sidon, S-I-D-O-N, it's a well-known name.

And when you were wounded, where were you treated?

First of all I was taken by our field ambulance taken down to a British CCS [Casualty Clearing Station] at Haifa,

07:30 H-A-I-F-A, and only there for a couple of days, and then down to Gaza Ridge, to the 2/1st General Hospital.

And how long were you at the 2/1st AGH [Australian General Hospital]?

I would have been about six weeks there.

And did you do any convalescing after?

Yes, they then went to a convalescent depot called Kfar Vitkin, K-F-A-R V-I-T-K-I-N,

08:00 on the edge of the Mediterranean, just south of Jaffa.

And how long were you convalescing for?

I'd suppose it'd be about ten days, and then back to our training battalion, which was just south of our old camp, and there for about

08:30 ten days or a fortnight, then back to the battalion.

And then you embarked to come home?

In January of '42. I should add when I joined the battalion they were in the wild country just outside Tripoli in northern Syria.

09:00 **And once you came back to Australia did you have some leave?**

Couple of weeks.

And once your leave was finished where were you sent then?

We then went, first of all to Glen Innes in northern New South Wales for about ten days, and then to

09:30 Caloundra in southern Queensland as part of the Brisbane Line.

And how long were you in Caloundra?

Until August of '42, when we sailed to Port Moresby,

10:00 and we didn't stay in Port Moresby. We went to a camp up in the hills behind Port Moresby for a very short time.

And where did you go once you…?

Well, while I was there, in fact the very day the battalion moved off on the Kokoda Track, I was ordered to report to

10:30 Major General Allen, informed I'd been promoted to lieutenant colonel and ordered to become the commander of the 36th Battalion.

And where did you join the 36th Battalion?

Just outside Port Moresby.

And

11:00 **once you'd joined the battalion where did you move to from there?**

Well, we were down on the flat at Port Moresby for quite a time near what's known as Murray Barracks, where we had to dig a lot of trenches and so on. And then back to Koitaki

11:30 up in the hills and help with the evacuation of a number of the 21st Brigade troops, including my old 2/27th.

And once you completed the evacuation where did you…?

We went back to Moresby and did

12:00 further digging and unloading ships, and then in December, I can't remember the exact date but about the middle of December, we were ordered to be ready to get on the plane the next morning, which we were, and flew over to Popendetta, and two days later we were in action in a place called Sanananda.

12:30 **So mid-December you were in Sanananda?**

Yeah.

Then you were in action for how long?

We were there until, I'd have to look up the date, but early in January, when we moved to Gona where I took over from my old 2/27th, what was left of them.

13:00 **And how long were you in Gona?**

Well, we moved to a bit north of Gona, to the banks of the Amboga River, and we were there until, can't remember the exact date but some time late in January, and then we moved back to Soputa, S-O-P-U-T-A,

13:30 and then to, after waiting some days we got on the plane and went back to Moresby and then home on leave. I got malaria and I was kept in hospital for a while.

So was that in Australia that you were in hospital?

No, in Moresby.

In Moresby.

Or just outside Moresby.

And how long

14:00 **were you being treated for malaria?**

About ten, fourteen days, and the rest of the battalion had gone home, and I flew down eventually on the mailbags in a Douglas plane.

And how long was the, did you get some leave when you got back to Australia?

Yes, that was the idea. We

14:30 had fourteen days' leave.

And then once your leave was completed?

We went back to the battalion which was then at, where were we then? I know we were then at Townsville, and then from Townsville we went up

15:00 above Cairns to Kurinda, K-U-R-I-N-D-A, or near Kurinda on the Tableland.

And were you training in Kurinda?

Yes, we were there for a short time.

And once your training was completed?

We went back to New Guinea. We went back to New Guinea in

15:30 July of '43, rather, and we were there until about July, I suppose of the following year, '44. We then went up to Lae and up in the mountains to Bulolo,

16:00 B-U-L-O-L-O, and while at Bulolo we then went down eventually in October to Lae for a very short period, and then on a ship to New Britain.

So when you went back to New Guinea where did you land?

That time?

Yeah.

Well, no, we went to,

16:30 as I said, to Townsville and we got onto a ship at Townsville and went to Moresby.

And then New Britain, where did you land in New Britain?

A place called Cape Hoskins, H-O-S-K-I-N-S.

And how long were you in Cape Hoskins?

17:00 We were at Cape Hoskins for, I suppose, two months, and then we moved up the coast further. First of all to a place called Nantambu, N-A-N-T-A-M-B-U, and then a bit further on to a place called Pula-Pula, P-U-L-A P-U-L-A,

17:30 and then from there we had to march over the island, which took us five days, to a place called Tol, that infamous place of the massacre of the 2/22nd Battalion, and then down to Jacquinot Bay, which was then the headquarters of the troops on New Britain. We were there for several weeks and then came home on leave.

18:00 That would have been in June, I think it was, of '45. And then back to Brisbane, just out of Brisbane at a place called Petrie, and we were camped there until we disbanded ourselves and went home.

And

18:30 **you came home to Adelaide?**

Yes.

And this is, the war's now over and...

That's right.

What did you do once the war was over?

When I came back? I resumed my practice as a solicitor.

Great. Thank you.

19:00 **Now that we've gone through that I'll take you right back to the beginning, to your childhood.**

OK, right-o.

Now, you said you were born in Manham on the River Murray?

That's right.

How long were you in Manham?

About two years, and then we moved, my father had married a Manham girl, you see. He worked in the bank there and married my mother,

19:30 and then it was 1913, I think, we moved then to Minlaton on the Yorke Peninsula. And from there, we were there for about five or six years and then moved to Port Pirie, and where my father was managing the bank too, and ultimately I came down. When I say we moved to Port Pirie,

20:00 my father sent me down to stay with his mother and stepfather so that I could go to school at Poultney.

So from Manham to…?

Blythe.

Is that in the Yorke Peninsula, Blythe?

No, it's up in the mid north. Do you know Clare?

Yes.

Well, it's just near Clare.

Well, from these places that you moved around do you have any strong memories from any of…?

Not of Blythe.

20:30 But fairly good memories of Minlaton, because we were there for about five years and we did a lot of camping down at the bottom end of Yorke Peninsula with my family, parents and brother and sister, the whole family, actually.

And what was it like at

21:00 **Minlaton?**

It was a good place. We enjoyed ourselves there, because there was a beach nearby and we went frequently there. My father went fishing there at the bottom end at Corny Point and a place a bit further down on the coast called. Let me think of the name of it.

21:30 Gleeson's Landing it was called.

And what was your home like in Middleton?

The home belonged to the bank, you see, and it was a fair size house. But in those days there was no electricity there and our light was provided by acetylene gas.

And how did that work?

22:00 Very well. My father, there was a big tank out the back he filled with carbide and that made the gas, and all the lights in the house were on acetylene lights.

And were you able to switch these lights on?

Yes, in the ordinary way, yes.

And when the gas ran out?

He'd put a bit more. He'd have to clean the tank out

22:30 and then put more carbide in it and water in it and that made the gas.

And where would he get the carbide from?

He'd buy it somewhere. I don't know where. Get it from the local store.

And how many rooms were in your home in Middleton?

I can't remember exactly, but there would have been six or seven, I guess. It was a fair size house.

23:00 Still there.

And how many brothers and sisters did you have?

I had three brothers and one sister.

So did you share one room with your three brothers?

Yes.

And how did you all fit into that room, did you have single beds or double beds?

No, single beds, yeah. Otherwise one would keep the others

23:30 awake.

You moved around a fair bit in those early years?

Yeah.

Why was that so?

Well, because the bank shifted my father around.

And was there always a home provided?

Yes.

And how would you describe your father?

He was. No, I don't know how quite. A very active

24:00 man. He was very much mixed up with the local affairs at Minlaton and at Blythe and at Pirie. Very active in sporting affairs. He played golf. He was very much mixed up in all sorts of local activities.

And was he strict?

24:30 Fairly, yes.

What were the things that he was strict about?

That's a bit hard to say. Ordinary things where we did the wrong thing.

Well, what kind of mischief did you get up to?

Well, I can't recall, but normal sort of childhood things.

What was the

25:00 **relationship like with your father?**

Very good. Very good. He took us on his camping expeditions and fishing and so on. Yes, some of them.

Were you a keen fisherman as well?

Yes, I was. I still am.

And what about your mother?

Now, she was the daughter of…at Manham she was the daughter of,

25:30 her father had been a local storekeeper, but I think by this time he'd retired from it 'cause he was fairly old, but he lived till he was about ninety and we used to go up and stay with him, one of my brothers and myself at times.

And how would you describe your mother's character?

She was a good mother.

26:00 At Minlaton they had an orchestra there and she joined that and played the violin in the local orchestra and she was mixed up with the church a good deal. She was a typical good mother.

And did you play any instruments growing up?

No, no, no. None of us

26:30 did.

And what about religion? What role did religion play in your home?

Church of England.

And what role did it play in your home?

I don't know. I don't know that they had a Sunday School, but anyway we used to go to church with her in the later years there, and she was a good all-rounder anyway.

27:00 **Now, you were quite young when World War I broke out?**

Well, I was only three years old.

And then it ended, and you were still quite young. Do you have any memories of that time?

No, not really. The whole community, this was at Minlaton, the whole community were very much involved. A lot of the locals enlisted and

27:30 we used to hear about it all and there were badge days and that sort of thing, but that's about all.

What happened on badge days?

Some of the, I think the women used to sell them around the place.

And where did the funds that they raised, where did they go?

To various organisations like,

28:00 I can't remember exactly, but Wattle Day and various organisations that helped the returned men and their dependants.

And did you have any family members who served in World War I?

My mother's brother did. My father's brother enlisted because, he enlisted in, I think in 1918, but he never got away,

28:30 he was relatively young. He was a stepbrother, actually, of my father. 'Cause my grandmother had married twice.

And where did your uncle serve, your mother's brother?

I think he was with the rest of 'em on Gallipoli and then France.

And did he, as you were growing up, tell you anything

29:00 **about the war?**

No, because he remained at Manham, you see. We didn't see very much of him except when we went up there. But he didn't discuss it much with us.

Were you interested growing up in World War I?

I was when I got a bit older. Particularly when I was at school, when we had to undergo military training, and then during the period till the Second War

29:30 broke out I was very interested in it. I've got a set of books which deals with it actually. The various units and one on the nurses and one on the navy and so on. Yes.

What was it about World War I that you found so intriguing or interesting?

Just the general, to know exactly what happened and so on. I can show you the set now.

30:00 **You mentioned that you moved in with your grandparents ?**

Yes.

How old were you when you moved?

I was, I think, eight and the reason for that was my father wanted me to go to Poultney 'cause he'd been to Poultney Street School, leaving in 1900, and he'd been dux of the school and he wanted me to go there, and of course he was still at Minlaton and

30:30 Pirie.

So whereabouts were your grandparents living?

At King William Road, Hyde Park.

And what was their house like?

It was a big old house. It's still there, and as a matter of fact it's up for sale. It's quite a big house.

How many rooms?

I think there were, it's advertised at the moment. There were four bedrooms

31:00 and three or four other rooms. There was quite a lot of rooms, kitchen and so on.

And what was it like living with your grandparents?

It was very good. I went to school, and my grandfather was still working of course, and it was very good.

Now, was this your father's parents?

My father's mother, and as I say she'd remarried. So the half-brother, the one I was

31:30 telling you about, was the son of both my grandparents.

And was he living in that house when you were there?

No, he was working in the Bank of Adelaide, and at that time he was in, can't remember exactly where he was because he was shifted round interstate a lot. Have an idea he was in, I think he was.

32:00 Not sure where he was at that time. One of the interstate offices, anyway.

And was your grandfather working at this time?

Yes, he was, he worked for the railways.

And what did he do with the railways?

He was the livestock officer, responsible for all the movement of livestock.

And you went to Poultney Street?

I went to Poultney when they opened the new school on South Terrace, which was September 1920.

32:30 **So you went there when it first opened?**

There. It had been, see, the repatriation department compulsorily acquired the school and they were, had to get temporary accommodation at various places in the southern end of Adelaide and eventually including the, what were known as the Pepper Pots, the old church

33:00 that the ABC took over. But then when they built the new school on South Terrance, of course we all went to that.

And what was the school like?

We had a very good headmaster, W. P. Nichols was well known, and it was a good school, and I stayed for the rest of my, up to the intermediate stage, because they didn't go further than that at that time.

33:30 **And your father was dux of the school?**

Yes.

Were they fairly big boots to fill?

I became dux too, of the school. The intermediate year.

And then once you completed your intermediate certificate where did you go from there?

I won a scholarship to St Peter's College for three years.

34:00 **And by this stage what were your aspirations? What were your ambitions when you left school?**

Well, I didn't know. Like a lot of others I didn't really know what I wanted to do, and eventually decided I'd do law.

And was Poultney a co-ed school?

No. It's only become a co-ed school recently.

So it even began as an all boys' school?

No, strangely its history, in its early years it's a very old school.

34:30 I don't know whether you knew that. It was founded in 1947, same year as St. Peter's College was, and for some years they had girls in it as well. Quite a few years, and then it became an all boys' school.

St Peter's has got very beautiful grounds…

Yes.

…to it. Were you involved in any sports while you were at St Peter's?

Yes, I played in a,

35:00 one of the football teams and one of the cricket teams, yeah.

And which sport do you think you were best at?

I wasn't wonderful at either football or cricket, but I liked them both.

And outside of school how did you like to spend your spare time?

We didn't have very much spare time.

35:30 Went to the pictures and that sort of thing and, as I say, played football or cricket on the Saturday, so you didn't have very much spare time.

Well, by this stage the Depression was starting to hit?

That's right.

What signs could you see around you that the Depression was taking hold?

36:00 You couldn't see very much sign of it but we all knew, of course, there were a lot a people out of work, particularly in the thirties. Not while I was at school so much, but in the thirties there certainly was. That was after I left school. But in the twenties, no, it didn't really start until 1929.

36:30 **Well, when you completed St Peter's College when did you decide that you wanted to do law?**

I had to decide in the final year, because I won a bursary to the university. There were only twelve for the state in those days. The state government provided those, and those that did best at leaving honours exam got those.

37:00 You had to nominate what you wanted to do if you won one of those.

Well what was the attraction of doing law?

Well I didn't know quite what to do like a lot of boys and because at Saint's I did the what you might call the arts subjects. I never did any science cause I'd never done any at Poultney

37:30 so I was confined to you know history and Latin and French and I did German and so on and decided that was the only thing I could do.

And you began law at Adelaide University?

That's right.

What was the campus like at that time?

It was very good. There's been a lot of buildings added

38:00 since. There was no library for example at that time. But it was very good. We had a good lecturer the professor and it was only very small compared to now and I played Lacross for University. It was very good. They had a lot of dances there and of course a lot of girls went to the university.

38:30 A lot of them never completed their courses but that doesn't matter.

And what was it like to be studying with girls now?

Well we had four girls. When I started there were four girls in the class. It didn't make any difference. One of them lived until last year. She practiced until about two years ago. She never married.

39:00 **And the you said that there wasn't a library at that stage, what library were you using?**

There was a law library but no general library as there is now. Has been for years now.

Well how prominent was studying law at Adelaide University?

It was a well recognised faculty.

39:30 The faculty of law and the only the lecturers they had the Professor Campbell took a lot of the subjects and then they had other people members of the profession who would come and lecture in the other subjects. They'd nearly always lecture at nine or sometimes a little earlier or at the end of the day. Because there was about thirteen subjects in the course.

40:00 **And by this stage you're actually starting to the Depression is starting to hit?**

Oh yes.

Did the Depression hit the campus at all? Did you know changes around the university?

You see I went there in 1929 and it certainly did because it was a question of paying fees and I'm sure that reduced the number considerably. Obviously.

40:30 **You were there on a bursary did you find that quite a few people on campus were in the same situation as yourself?**

No the government issued twelve every year that was all there was for whatever faculty they wanted to do. That was based on my leaving honours exam results.

41:00 **Well how did the Depression affect your home? Did your grandfather have to take a pay cut?**

No it didn't make any difference to him no. He was lucky.

And what meals were appearing on your table at this time?

Just the usual three meals a day. My grandmother was a pretty good cook.

I hear a lot of stories. Actually we've got a tape change at the moment, so we'll just change the tape.

Yeah.

Tape 2

00:31 **Want to just take you back to a moment at St Peters College, were you ever involved in the cadets?**

Yes I was, because in 1929 we had compulsory training and when you were seventeen you had to undergo military training, and at St Peter's College they had, one of the masters was a former officer in the first AIF and he was

01:00 in charge of the cadets there and they had quite a fair-sized unit there. So you had medical exams and went through the whole story of cadets, and then when I left school I had to continue with it because I became seventeen in June so I had six months in the cadets there, and then when I left school I had to go I was transferred automatically

01:30 to the local battalion unit, which was in Thomas Street, Unley, and I was a cadet there until I was eighteen, and then I remained on with the CMF [Citizens' Military Force] unit, the 27th Battalion. Then in late '29, I think it was, they abolished all compulsory training, but I remained on as a voluntarily enlisted fellow with a whole lot of other fellows.

02:00 We remained with the show.

So when you were at St Peter's College and were part of the cadets, how was that built into your curriculum?

The training was done at the end of the day after the ordinary school hours had finished, we remained there for an hour or two doing this training.

And what kind of training were you doing as a cadet?

It was mainly drill, and

02:30 I think we went down to the rifle range, but we were taught how to handle a rifle, things like that.

Did you have any bivouacs?

Not at school, no.

And then you said that you moved onto the CMF and then stayed by your own choice. What was your motivation to stay?

Well, there were a lot of the other fellows did and they were good company

03:00 and I liked the idea of some training, so we stayed on.

So what kind of training were you now doing with the CMF?

Well, we did ordinary training. We did, I remained with the 27th Battalion until the war broke out, or after the war broke out, ordinary training, and we'd go to camp once a year. We went

03:30 originally to O'Halloran Hill, which was the remount depot or farm, as you may know, we camped up there, and in the last two years before the war, I think we only about one or two years went to Woodside Camp.

And at this time at this stage who was the threat to Australia?

Who was the threat? Nobody. But Hitler

04:00 was holding forth and threatening and so was Mussolini and it was obvious there was going to be trouble. Now, I'm talking about late thirties '36-7, about there.

But early on, when you chose to stay with the CMF?

No, nobody was threatening. At least the Japs hadn't threatened anybody, but they were becoming a bit noisy, and wondered about them.

04:30 **And so for quite a few years you were just camping and training, and what was it about the CMF that really appealed to you? What were you enjoying the most about your time with them?**

The camps and the general training. I went, for example, as a corporal, a sergeant rather, and I've got the certificate there on a map reading course. Map reading and

05:00 field sketching over several weekends. We went out, I remember, to what's now, a place out near Tea Tree Gully anyway, this side of, but that was all just vines in those days, and we had to, we had the map, and we had to learn to read the map, and we did field sketching which consisted of, in effect, making maps, that sort of thing.

05:30 And we learned the use of a compass and that sort of thing.

How did you go about sketching a map from scratch?

Well you, I can't remember exactly how we did it. But it would be of a small area, you see, and you'd mark on it the various objects, farms. There'd be buildings and this sort of thing.

06:00 **And then you were with the CMF when war broke out?**

Yes. I'd been promoted to…I should've added I got a commission as lieutenant in 1933, and before the war broke out, in '38 I was promoted to captain. Because, you see, you've got to remember that with all the threats of war

06:30 we'd increased our numbers a lot. We're a purely voluntary show. In fact, in 1937 I think it was, we turned ourself into a Scottish unit. We wore kilts and the usual spats and what not and of course that increased the numbers in the battalion because of the people with Scottish ancestry, they all wanted to join us, not all, but a lot of 'em wanted to join us, we wore our kilts and so on.

07:00 **Why did you turn to a Scottish battalion?**

Largely because of the efforts of the Caledonian Society. They were very keen to have it done and we were quite prepared to, our CO [Commanding Officer] was quite prepared to join in with 'em, and that's how it came about.

Well, how was the transition from pants to kilt?

That was all right. Only problem was we had to pay for the kilts. The government wouldn't pay for them, so we had to pay ourselves

07:30 for them, and they were made by…they were very good kilts, they were made by the Onkaparinga woollen company, and we wore the MacKenzie tartan.

I was about to ask you what tartan it was. What colours are in the MacKenzie tartan?

It's a bit like this one. That's a Robertson, which is my wife's family, a bit like that. They still wear them, you see, the 27th

08:00 people still wear them.

So then you were promoted to captain in light of the influx of volunteers ?

No, it wasn't because of that, but it was…well, there were vacancies occurred when people retired and so on, and you had so many officers in a battalion. You're not allowed to have more, but you had an establishment of so many officers in the various companies,

08:30 and so when vacancies occurred they'd promote you or so on. And at that time we had a brigade commander called Colonel Fowler-Brownsworth, who was not only a 1914-18 war, but he'd served in the British Army in the late 1890s in the Sudan, and he had a Military Cross which he very proudly wore from that war

09:00 Against, in Sudan at that time.

Did he share any stories about his war experiences?

No, he didn't tell us very much. No, he didn't tell us very much. We didn't seek it, but he was quite a good bloke. But the interesting part was, a number of us decided we'd put in for a commission and he had to interview us, each one of

09:30 us, to make sure we were suitable. He wouldn't recommend us for commission until he'd had a good word with each of us.

Do you remember that interview you had?

Yes, I do.

And how did it go?

All right.

What qualities do you think you had to become captain?

I don't know. It's more a matter of what qualities do you have as a lieutenant,

10:00 and you're promoted to captain depending on how you got on with your job as a lieutenant.

Well, then, how would you describe yourself as a lieutenant, then a captain?

Well, you had to be prepared to lead, in the case of a lieutenant, a platoon, in the case of a captain you had to be prepared to act as a company commander,

10:30 and a number of us, well, we thought we could do that, simple as that.

So where were you when you heard the news that Australia was now at war?

It was a very strange thing you should ask that. I'd gone, it was a Sunday night and I'd went into the Law Society's Library in Pirie Street, I wanted to do some work there

11:00 and I did, and I came out and the newsboys round the place were all shouting about the war having broken out. It was pretty obvious from what had happened in the preceding days that it would, because you see the Germans had marched into Poland and Britain told them to pull out or else, and when they just thumbed their nose at England they, England declared war on 'em. Well, Australia, Menzies, the then Prime Minister,

11:30 made a speech on the following day which you may know about, saying that because England was at war so are we.

Did you listen to that speech?

Yes, I did.

What stood out in that speech to you?

That's a bit hard to say. Menzies was a very good speaker, I might say. I really don't know, but it was most important,

12:00 and it was a very good speech, I thought, anyway.

How did you feel about Australia now going to war?

Well, we'd been training for years, and I suppose we all thought at some stage we'd be involved in it and realised that we'd have to train a lot harder, and we'd almost certainly be involved in it,

12:30 and I suppose most of us expected that sooner or later we'd join up with the AIF.

And what was the mood around you, the people around you, how were they reacting to…?

Much the same way.

Now, you joined the AIF in 1940…

13:00 Yes.

…but 1939, I believe you got married for the first time?

That's right. But before we get to that, I should tell you what happened when the war broke out, because the very next day we were all called up for service and we were, our headquarters, which had been at Keswick, was for the occasion transferred to Fort Largs, and we were required to man a

13:30 number of detachments on what they called vulnerable points, and those vulnerable points were the wharves at Outer Harbour, the oil tanks at Birkenhead, the wireless station at Rosewater, the cable station at Grange, the ammunition depot at O'Halloran Hill, Keswick barracks and the Bird-in-Hand Gold Mine at Woodside. You may wonder why that gold mine was so important. But that was the source of water supply for the Woodside camp, which had been established

14:00 two or three years before, and they needed that water, of course. So we had a detachment there, as well as the other places that I mentioned, and periodically we'd, every few days we'd go to them and change the detachments so that everybody had a fair turn at them, and that continued for, I think, a fortnight or so, when other people, one of the other units took over from us,

14:30 and ultimately after we all joined the AIF, these VDC [Volunteer Defence Corps], the returned men from the first war, took over, and when I joined the AIF and was marching round up there we sometimes marched past this old gold mine, and by this time the VDC were in possession, about half a dozen men there, you see, and they had a big sign outside, which said,

15:00 "Isn't it queer that we who love beer and have seen our share of slaughter, should sink so low as to do sentry go on millions of gallons of water."

Why do you think they felt, I mean, how do you think they felt about having to guard all these detachments around the…?

They were quite happy to do it, I mean they were purely voluntary. But a lot of them were in it.

Who was the threat to Australia at this early stage

15:30 **of the war?**

Well, we were very worried about the Japs, although they hadn't done anything. But, you know, they were making noises, but also the…see, they called for volunteers immediately really, or very soon, to form the 6th Division, and a lot of our fellows from the 27th joined the 6th Division, a whole lot of them, and they joined the 2/10th battalion. You may have heard of them.

16:00 They were part of it originally, and they went off to England.

But personally, in your own life, you had a girlfriend and…?

Yes, yes.

Where did you meet?

Where did I meet her? At the local church, or Sunday School to be exact. Because I'd, see when I came from Minlaton

16:30 I joined the local Sunday School and then was persuaded to join the choir, and I was singing in the choir till my voice broke, and then I continued on for a few years as a Sunday School teacher, and that's where I met her. I've got a photo there you might be interested to see. I thought she was a very nice-looking girl.

So war was how,

17:00 **I'm just trying to think that, getting married at the outbreak of war seems…?**

Well, what happened was this. We'd been engaged for a short time and when the war broke out she concluded that ultimately we'd go to the war and we'd better get married. So she said, "Let's get married." So we did.

Well, it seems like a

17:30 **strange reaction in a way, the…?**

No, it wasn't, plenty of girls and men got married for that reason. Many. I mean, if we were killed they'd at least have that, I suppose, I don't know what you'd call it, but have that in mind.

And you joined the AIF in early May?

That's right.

Sorry, early May of 1940…

18:00 That's right.

…and what was your rank when you went into the AIF?

I went in as a captain. We retained our ranks from the militia.

And where did you join the AIF?

Well, at Woodside. I went up there in my kilts and that caused a bit of laughter from the fellows from the other battalions, who were in ordinary uniforms. A number of us went, it wasn't just me.

18:30 **How quickly did you convert over to the normal uniform?**

We had to as soon as they got the uniforms, we had to get in those of course. But they took a while to get them.

And you said that you were training at Woodside, and what was your role in preparing the men?

I was responsible for training the company. See, what happened when the government decided to form the 7th Division, we

19:00 wondered what was going to happen, but the powers that be appointed Lieutenant Colonel Mowton as the commander. He had the job of raising the battalion. His civil occupation was the manager of the mortgage department of the Savings Bank of South Australia, and what he did was to send a note to each of the four militia battalions pointing out that he'd been appointed to command, and if any of the officers

19:30 were willing to go with him would they please submit their names. So a whole lot of fellows from all the four battalions submitted their names. He then proceeded to interview every one of them, and he picked

the ones he wanted and I was lucky enough to be picked, obviously, because of my past training I suppose, and he appointed me OC [Officer Commanding] of Don Company. And I was lucky with Don Company, because the other four

20:00 officers of the company were all fellows from the 27th and I had a complete complement of NCOs [non-commissioned officers], all from the 27th, and quite a few of the privates. So we started off on the right foot. Fellows we knew.

And what kind of training did you do with the...?

All sorts. You got to realise that we then got a lot of fellows enlisting from all over

20:30 the state. Very few of them, almost none of them had had previous military training. So they had to start from scratch, and the first thing, of course, was to have them all inoculated and vaccinated and so on, and of course some of them went down with, particularly with the vaccination, it hits you a bit. I'd been vaccinated as a child. During

21:00 the first war there'd been a bit of a scare and a lot of people including children had been vaccinated.

What had you been vaccinated against?

Vaccinations against smallpox. People were worried at that time about that, and a lot a people had themselves vaccinated. But in addition to that, and the fellows who'd never been vaccinated before, and even I, they gave me one but I didn't have to have one I suppose, but they reckoned we should have it as a

21:30 booster and all the rest. But a lot a fellows had to be in the camp hospital for a short time with it, and they were all inoculated against the three inoculations, three stabs a week apart or something, and that was against typhoid, para-typhoid A and para-typhoid B. 'Cause typhoid during the first war had been a real killer, and that's why everybody

22:00 was inoculated, and every year after that we had another booster of the TAB [Typhoid A and B].

And then what's...?

And then also tetanus. We had a tetanus injection, and that was done every year too.

And once the men had recovered from their inoculations what drills were you taking them through?

Well,

22:30 we did a lot of marching round to get them fit. You see, you've got to realise that a number of the fellows weren't very fit. They'd never had military training before, and we did long marches as well as shorter ones. Gradually increased the length and so on, that sort of thing. But then we had to teach them how to handle a rifle. How to handle, we didn't have Brens in those days, we had Lewis guns. How to handle a machine gun.

23:00 And then later on other things, like how to read a map and that sort of thing. So we started off with the elementary things with them all, and then we got onto, they had to learn drill and that sort of thing, and then we went, ultimately went down to the rifle range and they learnt how to shoot there and fire the machine gun and, well,

23:30 generally learn the game, in effect. They learnt we did a lot of hill climbing to get the men fit, that sort of thing. In fact, I was notorious as one, they used to reckon immediately I saw a hill we'd take 'em up the hill. That was their story. But it had to be done. In fact, the battalion history records this. It says, not

24:00 my part but it says that a lot of the men coming in had never done anything more energetic than throw their cigarette butt into the gutter for twenty years. We had a number of older ones and a lot of very young ones. You see, the age limit was forty years at that time, and the young age limit was eighteen and a lot of fellows enlisted and gave false ages.

24:30 And it wasn't until we got on the ship to go away that the first war fellows put up their colours, and then we had one fellow, for example, in Don Company, he wouldn't tell anyone his age, but once he got on the ship he put up his ribbons and so the fellows asked him, I didn't ask him where did he serve. And he said, "Well, I was in the British Army in the retreat from Mons in 1914." He was fifty-eight.

25:00 And the other end of the scale I had another fellow, who of course gave his age at eighteen, and when we got on the ship he admitted he was only fifteen.

What do you do with these men when you...?

There's nothing I could do about it. They kept, they just stayed on, there's no problem about it. The only thing that happened with the older fellows, we had, actually ten per cent of our number that sailed away had been in the 1914-18

25:30 war, and they were very valuable fellows, as you can imagine. But a lot of 'em, the powers that be realised after a while in Palestine that they were too old for an infantryman anyway and they took them

out and they formed them into guard companies, and they were in the various platoons assigned to act as a guard in the divisional headquarters, brigade headquarters and that sort of thing. And a lot of

26:00 our fellows, I understand, I mean, what happened. The CO, he knew all the fellows and he decided that a number of them were too old. He knew they were, nobody had told him but he could tell, and so he pulled them out and told them they were to go and join it, so they did. But they were out of the frying pan into the fire, because I understand the

26:30 fellows from the 2/27th were sent to Tobruk, of all places, to guard the divisional headquarters. But some of them stayed on. Our RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] and the fellow called Mills who's just, has a little book his daughter sent to me to look at, he'd been in the from 1914 on in the British army and

27:00 he stayed right through the war with us with the battalion.

That's remarkable. Just going back to your training with Don Company. There's a twenty-two year gap between eighteen-year-olds and forty-year-olds, how do you find the medium of training so that they're at the same fitness level?

Well, you treat 'em all the same. You've got to. Make no distinction between them.

And were there any men that weren't quite

27:30 **going to make it?**

Yes, not necessarily because of age. But we had one fellow fairly early in the piece, that it was quite clear to everyone, I think, that because of his mental capacity or incapacity that he wouldn't be suitable. So he was discharged, went home.

28:00 There was only one in the company.

So there was no other place in the army for him, really?

Well, no, obviously the CO didn't think so.

And these other men who had no other military training that came in, aside from drills and marching for fitness, there was also that level of training to take care of themselves?

That's right.

28:30 **And how were they coping with that?**

Well now, what happened, after a while we did a lot of training away from Woodside. We'd march out for, you know, some miles. For example, we went on one or two occasions to Can Man Too [?], which is twenty-odd miles away, that sort of thing. But we did a lot of training at night and they'd have to sleep out. Now, it was a very cold winter, see, it started

29:00 in May and it was a very cold winter, and we'd go out frequently in the mornings, and the puddles on the road would be covered with ice till about ten o'clock, so it was a really cold winter, very cold one, and they had to learn to live and sleep out in the open with only a groundsheet, their greatcoat and a blanket. And they eventually learnt how to

29:30 do it. We were lucky, we had a lot of country fellows. Each company had a lot of country men, a number from the outback. I had one fellow who came from Tibooburra, couple of hundred miles north of Broken Hill, he was a real outbacker and those fellows could look after themselves, you know, were used to that sort of thing. So they were very useful.

And what could you see of the camaraderie that was building amongst the men?

You

30:00 can see it, you can see that or you can feel it, put it that way. But they, that built up fairly quickly and we used to kid ourselves that we were the best company and we still regard it as such. That's why we have Don Company lunch all on our own. We don't admit the other fellows to it.

Well, what made Don Company

30:30 **so special and separate from the others?**

Just the fact that we started off with five officers who'd come from the 27th Militia and a number of very good NCOs, also from the 27th Battalion, and a few troops too, they'd all had previous training and, well, there it was. That's how it was.

31:00 Anyway, the brigade commander, who was Brigadier Stephens and a very good brigade commander, I'm told that he said at one stage that we were the best company in the battalion.

And you were?

Yes, in the brigade actually, yeah.

And why do you think he said that?

I

31:30 don't know.

So you were training until October 1940?

That's right

And then what preparation did you give the men for embarkation?

Well, they'd been wondering for a long while what was going to happen, all sorts of rumours used to go around, as you'd expect, and

32:00 there had to be training with regard to what it was like living on a ship and that sort of thing. You had to tell them all that. I didn't know either, but we were told, and then an advance party went off some days before to allocate cabins and all that sort of thing. But before that we had a

32:30 big day at Woodside for all the relatives to come, and the CO, Colonel Mowton, spoke to all the wives and mothers and sweethearts and so on and got them to form an association to provide comforts for the men while they were away, and they continued that right through the war. And…

33:00 But anyway, everyone was informed that what was likely to happen and we did a march through Adelaide. The battalion marched through King William Street, Adelaide. We came down from Woodside in the train and marched from Keswick up to the parade ground, where the Cheer Up Society

33:30 provided lunch for the whole lot of us, a thousand of us, and then we marched down King William Street. There was a hell of a mob of people watching and they marched, as the battalion history records, not even turning our eyes to the girls, and they marched right to South Terrace, along South Terrace, and back to Keswick, and then back to Woodside on the train. That became the usual thing, or that was the usual thing

34:00 for people about to leave, you see.

That just, all just is so emotive. What was the feeling like marching?

Well, the fellows, they marched well, obviously, and they were very pleased, I think. They didn't say so, but pretty obviously.

And just going back to the women's association, and

34:30 **what were they told about, or how were they prepared for what was about to happen?**

Well, Colonel Mowton spoke to them all. There were a lot of them turned up at Woodside that day, which was a Sunday, and he addressed them and asked them would they help by forming a branch, in effect, of the Comforts Fund and they agreed, and they worked for the rest of the war,

35:00 knitting socks and all sorts of things and scarves. I mean, I got socks sent to me and a scarf sent to me from a total stranger as well as from my own wife and so on. That sort of thing.

And were they prepared for the prospect of their partners not returning?

Well, I think they knew that, and many of them had been returned, of course. And there was one fellow,

35:30 it was rather funny. He'd got married just before we went away and he was a bit of a dimwit, and when we got over to Palestine, we hadn't been there very long and his wife gave birth to a child, and he'd only known this girl for about two or three weeks, and so this

36:00 was announced and the rest of the, I didn't speak to him. It was none of my business but the other fellows did in his platoon and said, "When you got the news of this, what did you say to your wife?" And he said, "I wrote and told her not to do it again."

The march that you took through the city and back to Keswick and back to Woodside, was the crowd

36:30 **cheering or was it…?**

Yes, yes. It was a big crowd.

And how did the men respond to that?

They didn't turn a hair. They didn't look and so on, because they were not supposed to. They just marched straight ahead.

I could imagine, though, it would've been a very proud moment for them?

Of course it was, yes. All out donned with their best, or their only

37:00 uniform, and so on. But no, they marched well. I know that. Of course, being the last company I could see what was going on ahead of me.

And so was there any pre-embarkation leave for the men?

Yes, there was. We had pre-embarkation leave of, I think it was ten days, and the fellows from the far country

37:30 Just, and one or two even for interstate, were given rail passes and so on and they had to be back by appointed time, whatever it was, and one or two were a bit late, but that wasn't surprising. But they all turned up.

So how did you prepare to leave for the Middle East?

Well, I didn't do very much, because all you had was your uniform. I should've added that I was sent by the,

38:00 by Colonel Mowton to a school in Victoria Barracks, Paddington in Sydney in late June of '40, we hadn't been going long, it was called the Command and Staff School. In fact, I've got a photo somewhere of the fellows at the school. That lasted for two or three weeks, and I came back for my second brother's wedding, because he was

38:30 getting married and I came back, I had to catch a plane, that was the first time I'd ever flown in a plane, because it wasn't very common in those days, and I caught the plane back from Sydney for his wedding. I've got his photo. He joined the 2/27th later in the war, but he when he joined he was sent down to Fort Largs, to the garrison

39:00 artillery, and he, after some time he got jack of that so he decided he'd join the 27th. So he had himself transferred to the 2/27th. By this time I'd left them. This was just after our first New Guinea campaigns but he went on with them up on the Ramu Valley.

Well, if it's all right we'd like to talk about your brothers later

39:30 **when we get to New Guinea.**

Yes, certainly.

The Command and Staff School, what were you covering there?

All sorts of things. The officer commanding was a fellow called Major Joe Lee. He'd been here as the brigade major, we'd got to know him very well and I was one of the few that really knew him. But he had a number of…in fact I've got a photo. I'm not sure if it's there, but of the people that attended that.

40:00 It was a good school, covering all sorts of things which, including a number of topics that we'd never considered before, various things and from nature you can get the idea that the staff part of it dealt with organisation and so forth. It was a very good school.

What were some of those topics you'd never thought of before that were…?

Well, for example we knew

40:30 nothing about, or very little about artillery. We knew nothing about tanks. There's just a couple. There were a number of topics that we'd never heard of before but we'd fairly soon, when we got over the other side we saw tanks and we saw, had a lot of artillery support and that sort of thing. Had to know what you do about getting them to do the, you know, doing

41:00 bombardments for you, that sort of thing.

Well, we have to do another tape change now.

OK.

How are you feeling? Do you need to take a break at all?

No, I'm right.

You look very comfortable there in your chair.

Tape 3

00:30 **Well, Cedric, you described a very fantastic picture of the march and your preparation to go overseas. If you're not hearing me properly, I think we need to put the hearing aid back in.**

Yes, we might.

OK. Stop there. (TAPE BREAK) So, Oscar, tell us about the trip over to the Middle East?

Yes, that was interesting. We got on the train at

01:00 Oakbank, in fact we went on several trains, but anyway, and we went to Port Melbourne and we there marched onto the big trans-Atlantic liner, the Mauritania. She was a lovely ship. She's forty thousand tons, and she was built only two or three years before. She was a very nice ship. Anyway, we set sail out of Port Phillip Bay, and we'd barely got outside, and a

01:30 lot of fellows went to their bunks. It was very rough, and we met the rest of the convoy not far from Port Phillip Bay. That is the Queen Mary the Aquitania and the HMAS Perth as our escort. Now, you've got to realise there was a reason for the Perth escorting us, because there was something like thirty-seven merchant ships sunk around the Australian coast, either by mines or by submarines.

02:00 The Germans had a submarine out sinking the ships, so that's what happened. Anyway, we set sail across the Bight, and it was very, very rough, and a lot of the fellows didn't get up from not long after they left Port Phillip Bay till they hit Fremantle. It was really rough, and so we got to Fremantle and we had a day's leave in Perth. Now, I had an uncle in Perth, so I went to see him of course and he took me to lunch,

02:30 and in the late afternoon the Perth branch of our St Peter's old scholars' association, there's a lot of them over in the west, they had a sundowner for the Saint's old scholars on the Mauritania, and there were quite a number of them, actually, and we had a very nice sundowner there, and then we had to get back onto the ship and we sailed the following morning. Now, going across the Indian Ocean was very calm,

03:00 and there was no trouble about that, but King Neptune came aboard, and I've got that, a certificate that I had travelled on the Mauritania there, and you can read it later. It's a funny document. Anyway, we then went onto Bombay where we got off, and we got immediately onto the train, which took us to a place called Deolali, about a hundred and twenty miles

03:30 inland, which was a British Army rest camp, and we were there for a week or ten days, I can't remember exactly, during which time we had a good look round and a lot of the fellows, including myself, bought, I've forgotten what it was, something. I know, ivory elephants, that's right, I've got 'em in there, four or five ivory elephants, and sent home, and a lot of the others did the same thing. It was quite an

04:00 interesting experience there, because for the first time we had to, the troops had to tie their, chain their rifles to the tent poles because the Indians would pinch their weapons if they didn't. That was a bit of a shock to them, that somebody wanted their rifles. So we got to know the people there, the British troops very well there, but all the

04:30 troops had a, what we'd call a batman, a fellow who would clean their boots, shave them, wash their clothes, for the princely sum of one rupee, which was the equivalent of two shillings, a day. So they all took good advantage of that. Some had a uniform made, you know, a lightweight khaki uniform,

05:00 a few people had them made, but it was a pleasant stay there anyway. I, something I was going to tell you and I can't think. Doesn't matter. The uniform situation. Back in Australia we were issued, initially everybody was issued with what were known as giggle suits. Which were simply an ill-fitting jacket and trousers.

05:30 But then for officers the Commonwealth Clothing Factory made suits for each of us which were, you self-measured and we sent them and they were quite good. They were quite good uniforms. But in addition, when I was in Sydney on this school I had myself made a, by a well-known tailor there,

06:00 a very good uniform, and I've still got it there, of barathea, which was lovely material. I'll show it to you later, and so we had two uniforms, most of us, when we went over, or after the period in Deolali. Anyway, we were there for about ten days, then we went back Bombay, onto a ship called the

06:30 Takliwa, which was a British India ship, trading ship, and it was pretty cramped accommodation. The troops slept in hammocks over their mess tables. We were a bit more fortunate, we had some cabins and we had Indian cooks, and we were delighted to find they turn on very nice curries and rice. The

07:00 reason why we got onto the smaller ships was this, that the Italians were in the war and they were sitting in Italian Somaliland, alongside the Suez Canal, alongside the Red Sea, and therefore they wouldn't risk the big ships there. So we were on our own in this ship, except we had four nurses and a few people from the hospital that they belonged to,

07:30 the 2/5th hospital, and they and, I think, one or two others, I can't remember who they were, but that was the complement on the ship. Our thousand men and…incidentally that thousand was made up of our full establishment plus our first reinforcement, which was a hundred and twenty-odd. So there was just a thousand of us. Well, we went up the Red Sea and we went past where the Italians were at night,

08:00 and we'd been told that there was a, they'd had a submarine there which was liable to have a go at anybody's ship there, but they always used to bomb it at nights when a convoy was going up the Red Sea, and as we passed there was a hell of a noise going on there, we could hear the bombs exploding and see the flashes and they'd hit this submarine. Smashed it a bit before it could be repaired, anyway,

that's what happened.

08:30 But while we were there an Italian plane, while we were going up the Red Sea an Italian plane came over and we had a, with us, a British frigate I think it was, but anyway, an anti-aircraft ship designed to fire at the planes. So it came over and the ship let fly with all its guns at this Italian plane

09:00 and drove it off. And another day we saw a dogfight between a British plane and an Italian plane, and the British plane was shot down. Anyway, it didn't attack us anyway, so we were all right. But we went on our way and went as far as Suez and then up the Canal, Suez Canal to Kantara, where we got off.

09:30 **Well, that's quite a trip. And when you saw the signs of war what did you think?**

You mean the planes and so on? Well, that was part of it, so we were very interested what was going on, that was all.

Well, you disembarked at Kantara, but I understand you then moved to

10:00 **Camp Julis?**

That's right.

You took over, you mentioned early on that you took over a camp that the 6th Division had occupied?

That's right, yes. They'd gone off down the Western Desert.

And how did you settle in?

Very well, because all the tents were up, everything was there. They had, we slept in tents, but they had

10:30 galvanised iron buildings constructed for messes, officers' mess and so on, cookhouse and all the rest, but everybody slept in tents. So that was quite good. We just marched in and took over everything as it stood. And they fostered us in. Some of their fellows or another unit fostered us in, got everything ready, including the meal. We had a meal as soon as

11:00 we got there. It was the 2/1st Pioneers fostered us in there. And later on we, our battalion fostered in some other unit, I've forgotten what it was, later, good deal later, fostered them in. Yes, when we were departing, that's right. When we left there we fostered in

11:30 another unit.

And where were you accommodated in relation to the rest of...where were the officers accommodated in relation to the infantry?

The five of us officers of Don Company were all in a big tent called an EPIP [English pattern Indian product] tent, and the other officers were in separate tents and so on, and all the troops were in the smaller tents, which held usually six people.

12:00 **And what were your impressions to begin with?**

Well, the impressions, what interested the fellows was the surrounding people surrounding them, the Arabs. So they wandered round and they had a bit of a look-see round the place, and being inquisitive by nature they all had a good look round and decided it wasn't a bad place, and a lot of them being country fellows

12:30 thought if they came to Palestine they could make a very good go of it as a farmer. That was their impression.

Why did they think that?

Well, because of the nature of the country, and it was very similar to South Australia. Although they didn't grow as many crops as our fellows had been used to, but they did grow some. But they had a number of sheep

13:00 with small flocks, but only perhaps twenty. It was rather different to our way of thinking, and with a shepherd, who was usually a boy, guarding them, and then at night he would put them into a sheepfold sort of place where they'd be safe. There were a number of jackals near round the place and they, of course, would seize the sheep and eat 'em if they weren't careful. They'd howl at nights. We could hear them.

13:30 **And what were your tasks or duties to begin with?**

Well, for the first time we met our brigade commander, Brigadier Stephens. He was a very good brigade commander and he was very good at training and his motto was "You fight as you train," so he trained us hard, very hard. Very

14:00 good training, but we did the usual training exercises. We had exercises in long distance marches. Exercises against the other battalions in the brigade. You see, in the brigade we had a Victorian

battalion, the 2/14th, and a Western Australian one, the 2/16th, and we got to know all their fellows, all their officers

14:30 anyway, and got on well with all of them. There was no trouble. Our fellows were taken to the rifle range to, near Jaffa. One of the officers stayed there while they all did their, did a lot of shooting to make sure they understand how to operate. We got Bren guns for the first time, and they had to learn how to handle

15:00 those, and we were issued with Tommy guns, Thompson machine guns for the first time, and they had to learn how to handle those.

Just gonna stop for a minute. (TAPE BREAK). So, sorry, you were saying you were issued with Bren guns? What was the state of your equipment?

It was fairly good. We had, you see, our equipment consisted of

15:30 rifles and bayonets. Officers and some other fellows, like signallers and so on, they had a revolver on their belts. We had to learn to use those. They were the British Webley, which was the point five ammunition, heavy one, and you, they're a bit difficult to be accurate with. You had to learn how to handle them. And, well,

16:00 we did a lot of, as I said, a lot of exercises at night, including dawn attacks. We had to get used to marching a long way without undue difficulty including going out, say, twenty miles and doing some mock battles with some of the other battalions, that sort of

16:30 thing, and then back each day, the next day and that was fairly tiring but they got used to it. It was very good training, anyway. We reckoned we were pretty well trained there.

And what sort of friendly rivalry was there between the…?

The companies? Well, that happened because we'd be pitted one company against another and Don Company was always pitted against C Company,

17:00 and at times it got a bit heated in some of these night exercises. A few fists were thrown. They took it realistically.

And who won those fisticuffs?

We reckoned we did. The C Company probably thought they did.

17:30 **And did you get around to see the local area yourself?**

Yes, they had race meetings. See, there were a lot a camps in Palestine, Australian camps in Palestine, a whole lot of them, and down at Deir-Saneid I think it was one of the camps, they had a race course and there were regular race meetings, so we'd go to that. Course, we had a lot a fellows who were, you know,

18:00 used to horses. They were quite interested. We were allowed to go on leave at times, and I remember I took half the battalion, four hundred-odd men on leave to Tel Aviv. Now, there wasn't much in Tel Aviv except the pubs, a few brothels. Anyway, I got 'em all back in good form, they all survived all right. But there were regular trips to places like that. I had

18:30 two days, a weekend's leave in Jerusalem, and our quartermaster a fellow called Captain Moylan, a very good bloke, he went with me and we had a very interesting time because we there was a guide there, an Arab a well-educated bloke. He called himself an Arabian, not an Arab. He probably was an Arabian too, but he took us round to all the sights, you know, to the Church

19:00 of the Holy Sepulchre, then we went to Bethlehem, which is some miles away, and went to the old Church of the Nativity there, down into the crypt or whatever they call it and so on, and then we went by car through the hills down to Jericho and had a good look. There was not very much there but it was all desolate hills, we marched through, and as he pointed out they've still got robbers in it as they had in Christ's

19:30 days there. Anyway, and the padre, we had a very good padre, Padre Wherrett, who took a busload of us further north in Palestine. We went to Nazareth and various other well-known towns in the further up and to Mount Carmel and so on, a lot of the places round the place. Mount Carmel is an interesting place. It overlooks Haifa, and

20:00 there was a restaurant where we, the officers…This was an officers' trip only, and we had a meal there and there was a dance and so on, it was quite a good place. And we visited the other camps, as I've said, not only for horse races but to meet friends and so on in the other units.

20:30 **And what?**

One of the interesting things was from our mess room window, we looked east and we could see the place where old Sampson lived, you know biblical strong man, only a few miles away.

And what were the challenges of four hundred infantrymen on leave in Tel Aviv? Were there any problems that you encountered with them?

I didn't have any problems with them. I was in charge of them all, you see.

21:00 But no, obviously a few of them were a bit the worse for wear, but they were all right. They were happy.

Well, I have heard quite a lot about the brothels in the Middle East. As an officer did you have to do any picket duty or…?

Later on. Not then, later. After the campaign, when we were up at Tripoli we had brothel pickets.

Well, maybe we'll

21:30 **come back and talk about that after, so that was after Syria?**

Yeah.

OK. Well, back at Camp Julis, you were there until…?

April of '41.

And what did you, what news or how were you keeping abreast of what was going on?

Well, they had a, the AIF published

22:00 a paper, a weekly newspaper called, what was it called? Anyway, it had a lot of Australian news in, which was quite good, and we got a lot of information through the wireless. Our signallers used to listen into wirelesses. For example, when the Melbourne Cup was on they were they listened into it all. They were able to tell us which horse won and so on. They did, right through the war they did that.

22:30 **And what about news of places like Tobruk and…?**

Well, we used to get regular daily or almost daily news about that. We knew what was happening, and in fact after the AIF had captured both Bardia and Tobruk we were lectured by one of the staff officers who'd been there. He gave us a long lecture on just what happened so we'd know

23:00 the details and how they went about it.

And at this point did you have any particular desires about where you wanted to be sent?

No. We didn't know where we'd go and we went where we were told.

And where were you sent?

Well, we went, sent eventually down to Egypt and to a rotten camp just outside Alexandria,

23:30 where it was a very poor camp, which there was raging dust or sandstorms while we were there, it was pretty unpleasant. Anyway, we were only there a few days, and what happened then was I was ordered by our brigade commander to take a fellow from each of the other battalions and the brigade intelligence officer, and my orders were,

24:00 "You will go to Maatinbagush and report to whoever's in charge." That's all he knew. He had no idea. But he gave me a map and so we gathered together the few fellows in two or three utilities and we drove along and found the place and all I could see there was one man wandering round. I expected to find a camp there but there wasn't. So I spoke to him and he said, "Over there's the British divisional

24:30 headquarters in the dugout." So I go over and go down and found a fellow there, an officer, who was the GSO2. The General Staff Officer Second there, and he said, "The general's on the phone talking to the air force at the moment. Just wait a few minutes." He said, "I heard something about some Australians coming down here. Wait a few minutes and you can talk to him." So eventually, after he'd got off the phone I talked to him

25:00 and he told us where we were to go. We were to go just nearby, it was just what had been, what they called a box, an area where a lot of trenches had been dug by the British troops, we were to occupy that. He said, "However, I haven't got the plan, but I'll get it from Mersa Matruh, but I can't get it til the morning." This was late in the day. So he then said to me, "Would you care to stay to dinner with us?" He said, "It'll be a very scratch meal, because we're

25:30 about to move out." It was the divisional headquarters there, a lot of officers. So I said, "I'd be delighted, of course." So the brigade intelligence officer and I stayed to dinner with them while the troops had their own, weren't very. I mean, we only had drivers with us, that was all. They had to look after themselves outside. But anyway, they did that all right. So they turn on a five-course meal, that was what they called a

26:00 poor rough and ready meal, but it was five courses, and then afterwards they had a bar there with brandy and whiskey and cigars and all the rest. I had a few brandies, I didn't smoke so that didn't interest me. But the other chap, the brigade intelligence officer, he had a cigar and brandy, and then at the end of the evening we had to go out and sleep on the cold ground

26:30 and break up army biscuits the next morning for breakfast. It was a funny arrangement.

And was that also where they had bone china?

Yes, they did. Yes, they did. They had their full mess equipment, you see for a divisional headquarters.

It does seem quite strange.

It was strange to us anyway.

27:00 But anyway, the next day he got the major general commanding. Incidentally, his name was Everts, he later came out here at when they set up Woomera. He was in charge of Woomera, the starting of Woomera. But anyway, the battalion came up the next day, by which time he'd got the plans from Mersa Matruh, and they went out into various parts,

27:30 into the trenches and they had to clean a lot of the sand out of a lot of 'em, which didn't please them, and we'd barely done that when they were ordered to, we were going to Mersa Matruh. So they up sticks and we moved to Mersa Matruh. Well, that was done by train, but an advance party of a few fellows went on and we went by truck motors and it was at night, and we had to meet

28:00 our guides at Mersa Matruh, or just outside Mersa Matruh, and when we got there we found him and he, I don't know who appointed him as the guide, but he was a bit of a dumb cluck, and anyway we got going through the night, then all of a sudden he said, "I'm lost." And I knew very well that there were mines all round, anti-personnel mines all round Mersa Matruh. So I said, "We're not going

28:30 any further." We were on a road, so we stopped the company and we lay down on the road and slept until dawn, because we weren't going to be blown up. So that's what happened, and then in the dawn we marched in and found that our position there was on the perimeter. They had a, Mersa Matruh had been a what they call a fortress area, but with trenches and all the rest of it and

29:00 an anti-tank ditch all round it to stop the tanks, and one of our first jobs was to clean out the sand, or a long job to clean out the sand out of this anti-tank ditch, and we lived at Mersa Matruh for almost two months, and Mersa Matruh was not the best of places because we lived in dugouts and it was very hot. Going back to Fahrenheit temperatures, one day was a hundred

29:30 and twenty-five and the next was a hundred and twenty-seven. You may remember hearing about the big temperature here in a couple of years before the war where it had got to a hundred and seventeen. That was terrific, it was thought. But we were, as I say, a hundred and twenty-five and the next day a hundred and twenty-seven, with a big sandstorm thrown in for good measure. And water was scarce. We were rationed in water. The water rations was four

30:00 pints per man per day and the cooks took two pints, so we had two pints to wash and shave and give yourself a drink with. It wasn't very much. Anyway, we survived. Anyway, we were there for, a few Italian or German planes came over and dropped a few bombs around the place, but not near us. And eventually we left there.

Well, before we move on from Mersa Matruh, what could you do when

30:30 **a sandstorm came?**

You went into the dugout and stayed there. There wasn't much chance of the Germans or the Italians coming with their tanks, because it was so hot. They'd have fried in tanks, so we weren't very worried about them. But at times it got cooler, of course, and we were busy getting the sand out of the anti-tank ditches and generally,

31:00 Well, just sitting there.

And how could you avoid getting sunburnt?

We were wearing full uniforms. We'd got fairly used to sunburn in Palestine, because I think we were in shorts at that time, and I think we were in Mersa Matruh too, I can't remember exactly. But they got fairly brown, I can

31:30 tell you that, so that didn't worry them very much.

And what other problems were there at Mersamatruh?

Before we leave that, I should say the reason we were at Mersa Matruh was this. You see, Rommel was besieging our 9th Division in Tobruk and it was, I think it was feared that he'd march past there and come towards Alexandria, which was

32:00 where he was headed for, and we were to stop him if he walked past Tobruk. But he wasn't game to do that, because of course if he'd march past they'd cut off his supplies behind him. The Tobruk boys would've marched out and cut off all his supplies.

And what other problems with the conditions did you have at Mersa Matruh?

32:30 **You've mentioned sandstorms and water rationing, what about bugs and…?**

Yes, I should have mentioned that. In the dugouts, at least in the ones that we were in, they were infested with fleas and bugs. Now, the fleas didn't worry us unduly at night, but the bugs kept you awake, 'cause they'd bite you, which was a bit annoying. But we survived.

33:00 **And you were in a strategic position at Mersa Matruh, but did you see any sign of any enemy at that point?**

Only a couple of planes came over and dropped a few bombs around the place, but not near where we were.

33:30 They were, we were not very close to the town. We were on the perimeter of the fairly big circle. They didn't worry us much, but they dropped a few bombs and did a bit of damage nearer the town. Incidentally, Mersa Matruh had been, has got a very nice beach, and it was apparently a favourite place for tourists, because you may know that Edward

34:00 VIII when he was dallying with Mrs Simpson he took her there and they were there for a while. It was also the place where Antony and Cleopatra dallied two thousand years ago.

Well, yes, it must've been there, knowing those historical stories.

Yes, well, when you've got. Anyway, I should've added, one day we were allowed,

34:30 I think it was done in turns, but I was allowed to take my company down to the beach and go for a swim, which suited us very well, of course, because we weren't very clean, and we had a good day, and then we went back, of course.

And I understand you were told to report to Nazareth with other officers?

No, what happened was this. After I'd

35:00 been almost two months at Mersa Matruh the brigade commander ordered me to go with, again, the brigade intelligence officer and a representative from each of the other two battalions to Nazareth. He said, "You'll go to Nazareth and report to whoever's in charge." That's all he knew and all I knew. So off we went, and we crossed the Suez Canal at Ismailia, which is a fair way down from El Kantara, and went across the desert,

35:30 and we were in a couple of utilities, and we stopped at Beersheba, now Beersheba, I wanted to stop there because Beersheba was the place where our Light Horse did their famous charge in 1917. Have you heard of that? Well, that's where it was, and to my surprise the trenches were still there and all the barbed wire. It was still there, and I should've said that Gaza itself had been the scene

36:00 of three big battles in the 1914-18 war in which our Light Horse had been involved eventually. And they had, Gaza itself, the town was in ruins from the bombing and so on that occurred in 1914-18. The Arabs wouldn't build another town just there. They built a town a little bit away. It was Allah's will that this happened. They just left it the same with the trenches at Beersheba.

36:30 It's in the, it's not quite desert but it's very low rainfall at Beersheba, of course. And from Beersheba we went on up to Nazareth, which was in northern Palestine. My orders from the brigade commander was to report to whoever's in charge. That was all it was. I don't think he knew what was going to

37:00 happen. Anyway, that was my order and we went up there, and eventually we found a British headquarters there, and it was the headquarters, was the 6th British Cavalry Brigade, and the brigadier was away somewhere and the fellow in charge was the CO of the Scots Greys, which is a very famous British regiment. So I reported to him and he said, or he told us we'd be moving into Syria, and

37:30 that's about all he could tell me. He didn't know exactly when. In the meantime, the battalion came up the next day and they dossed the night by train and they dossed the night, when they got off the train a few miles away on the roadside, and then we went to and lived under the orange trees at a Jewish kibbutz in northern Palestine for about a week, and that was great because

38:00 not only were there plenty of oranges we could help ourselves to but they had a village store and we could buy these big cans of chilled milk, and I've never seen so much milk drunk by fellows who'd been starved for a drink in Mersa Matruh. They drank a hell of a lot of milk. Anyway, and we got to know them very well, and after the Syrian campaign a number of fellows

38:30 got leave and went down and stayed with the people there. They met them very well and got to know them very well and they had a dance there with the locals and so on. And after the war I think one or two of our battalion went back there, they were over there so they went there and stayed with them, and one or two people from there came and stayed here in Adelaide with some of the fellows.

39:00 But after our stay for a week or so with them, of course the campaign in Syria was due to start.

OK, well, before we get into the Syrian campaign I think we should just change our tape.

OK.

Tape 4

00:30 Incidentally, I just remembered, you might be interested in this. There were a number of Arab villages near us at Julis, and one day the nearest one invited our CO and several of the, two officers, I think, to come and have lunch with the Mukhtar, who's the head man of the village. So the CO and I went there, and somebody else was with us, I can't remember who now, to

01:00 have lunch with them and it was a typical Arab lunch, you know, with a sheep was killed and so on, and then the Mukhtar's wife made some coffee. What she did, see, there was no wood there, everything was heated on primus stoves and she had the usual primus stove with boiling water, and then she tipped the coffee grounds or whatever it was in it and boiled

01:30 it and then she put a spoon in and took a spoonful out and tasted it and she didn't apparently think it was properly cooked or something, made, anyway, she then spat it back into the saucepan, which rather staggered us. But anyway, it didn't matter because it was all boiled, and so we sat down and had coffee and mutton with them and so on.

02:00 **Well, when you were living under the orange trees and mixing a lot more with the locals, what sort of reputation did they have?**

They were very good people. I understood that they'd all come from Czechoslovakia, they were Jews from Czechoslovakia, I believe, that's what we understood at the time, and as I say we got on well with them very well indeed.

02:30 **And did you have tents when you were living there?**

No, we didn't. It was summer, the middle of summer, and warm nights. That didn't matter, we just dossed down under the orange trees.

What sort of opportunity did you have as an officer

03:00 **to speak to your men, the troops?**

What about?

Well, did you get in amongst the troops or…?

Yes, always. We were just part of the company. Yeah.

Well, I ask because, I mean, you've mentioned a couple of times where you as an officer would go on ahead of the company for various reasons, but I'm just wondering how often would you personally get in amongst

03:30 **the…?**

I'd be with 'em all the time, you see, whatever we were doing I was with them always. And so were the other officers, that was the normal thing.

And as an officer you mentioned that you got sit reps. What's a sit rep?

Situation Report.

04:00 **And what would that tell you?**

Very briefly, what was going on at wherever it came from.

And when you received that report?

It was just for our information, that was all.

How often would you then…?

Well, you'd get them depending on what was going on. For example, when we were in action in Syria we'd get them every day giving us details of what the other companies, the

04:30 other battalions and so on were doing, yes. The same in New Guinea. We had daily sit reps of what was going on, and in the Owen Stanleys and so on.

Well, before you moved off into Syria,

05:00 **what sort of fitness training did you undertake?**

That's exactly the point. We'd been living for some months in dugouts, and you're not very fit for a time after that, so we did a lot of marching, climbing all the hills we could find, because we knew when we

went into Syria it's very hilly country, very steep hills,

05:30 that we'd need to be fit enough to climb them. So what we did, we marched through every blessed hill we could find round the place to get them fit again. And we did. We had about a week of it and they got reasonably fit again.

Well, tell us what sort of orders you received

06:00 **to move into Syria?**

I'll tell you what happened. I was ordered to report to the CO of the 2/16th. I'd been put under his, my company put under his command and the CO of the 2/16th was our former 2IC [Second in Command], Colonel, what was his name? I can't think of it for a minute.

06:30 Anyway, it doesn't matter. So I duly reported to him and he told me where I was to go. The 2/16th, I should say that this wasn't at the start of the campaign. We went over the border, and the 2/16th had, 2/14th sorry. 2/14th had captured the border post and my

07:00 17 Platoon under Lieutenant Rudd were sent up by the brigade commander to find out what was going on, because he didn't know. Nobody had told him. So told him, as they should have. Anyway, he went up there, found that the 2/14th fellows, having captured the customs post, were more or less sitting on their tails, and he told me that they were riding round on some horses they'd

07:30 Captured, and knowing Lloyd he decided he'd have a go at the French, 'cause they were not far away. The 2/14th fellows said that there were too many of them, they couldn't tackle 'em. So Lloyd Rudd and his platoon said he'd have a go at 'em. So he attacked 'em with the help of some light tanks from the 7th Division cavalry, which were armed with light tanks, and also,

08:00 yeah, 7th Div cav, and he spread his troops out and attacked the French and put them to flight, and then had to report back to the brigade commander what had happened. So that was the company's first experience. It was only one platoon, I know, but first experience with the French. And as a matter of interest the 2/14th

08:30 history doesn't say it quite that way. 'Cause I've got the 2/14th's history.

Well, where did you take up positions? You moved near the border?

Yes. Well, what happened with us we moved over the border and moved up quite a way,

09:00 and I remember I was told to take an artillery officer and an engineer officer and do a bit of a reconnaissance over very open country, and while we were going across that a ship came along, a warship outside, and we were close to the coast, and I didn't take any notice of it because our ships had been going up and down the coast shelling you see, and all of a sudden

09:30 some shells started landing very close to us. So we hastily moved, and then our artillery took the ships on. The field artillery took on and hit the ships, and then our warships came dashing along and chased 'em back to Beirut. Anyway, but after that we moved further on to near the River Lattani, that's where I got these

10:00 orders from the CO of the 2/16th, that I was told by the brigadier that I'd be under his command, and he told me what I was. We were to cross the Lattani and attack a barracks and a ridge there, where they suspected there were a lot of French there. This was to be at night, and so we go near the river,

10:30 which was a very fast flowing river and very deep and fairly wide, and you couldn't swim it with your gear on, and they had a little folding boat there, and the 16th had got across before us and they'd moved further to the right and succeeded in beating the French where they were going. Anyway, we had to get across in this little folding boat, six at a time.

11:00 And we had to be across by, I think it was seven thirty, because at that time the CO of the 16th said that they were arranging an artillery barrage to fall on this area around the barracks which we were to attack. So we did that. We went across six at a time. I went on ahead, of course and the rest followed on. Took a while to get across, and they weren't all across by the time this

11:30 barrage started, because that was the time we were supposed to move to attack this ridge and the barracks. So I couldn't wait for the 3rd Platoon, so I went in with only two platoons. Anyway, they captured the place without much difficulty, having had bombarded pretty well, and the other platoon caught up with them afterwards. But they captured the barracks and fitted themselves out with

12:00 new uniforms there. This had been a place where the French people lived, apparently, because it was an officers' mess, obviously, and they got all new shirts and shorts, khaki shirts and shorts, and they raided the officers' mess and there was plenty of grog there, including a lot of Lebanese beer which they, having tasted it they said, "It's nearly as bad

12:30 as water. We won't drink it." Others said, "Well, it's better than nothing," and they drank it.

Just before you move on, you mentioned a very difficult river crossing in a folding boat?

Yeah, that's the folding boat business yeah.

How did you get the boat across?

Sorry, I should've mentioned that. It was pulled across by signal wire. The fellow at each end pulling that across by signal wire.

13:00 Well, there was no other way, there was no oars.

And how did you get the wire to the other side in the first place, or…?

Somebody had to swim across and take the wire across, but that was one of the 2/16th fellows did that before we got there. Well, having captured the barracks that wasn't the end of it. It must have been about midnight

13:30 when one of my chaps brought a French officer to me, and I hadn't done any French since I left school in 1928, and of course I couldn't speak French very well and he couldn't speak English very well, it was decidedly poor. But anyway, we made ourselves understood and he said he commanded a company of Algerian infantry which he had not far away and that

14:00 he'd been told that if he surrendered them all we'd slit all their throats, that was to make 'em fight of course, and I assured him we wouldn't slit their throats. So he then said, "All right, well, if one of your officers'll come with me I'll take him back and he can tell my troops that and I'll surrender the company to you." So Lloyd Rudd happened to be near me at the time and he said, "I'll go," so off he went with this bloke, and sure enough, in about a quarter of an hour in came this

14:30 bloke with all his company and surrendered them to us.

Just mind your microphone there. So how willing were the French to surrender, or…?

Well, it varied. You see, that crowd, obviously some of the shells had landed pretty close to them, I guess, so he was quite willing to hand over provided we didn't slit their throats, and

15:00 that's why he surrendered. But at other times they didn't surrender easily, of course. But they were colonial troops, you see, they weren't Frenchmen. He was a Frenchman, but his troops were fellows from Morocco.

This was the foreign legionnaire or…?

No, that's later, I came in contact with them.

So what sort of French was this?

15:30 Well, they were Moroccan infantry.

And how many men were there? Was it a small…?

He had about a hundred men, about a company.

Well, how important was it to have an

16:00 **element of surprise? You'd done fairly slow crossing across the river?**

That's right. But you see, the 2/16th had got across before we did, but they moved to the right and we were to go more to the left and attack the barracks area. They'd gone further right for something they're after, but anyway they won their battle to, and then held the ridge, and we had the job of doing it at night, as I've described.

16:30 **And you mentioned there was quite a bit of booty from the barracks?**

Well, that's what I was telling you about. We got uniforms and the fellows got their beer and…although they didn't think much of it, and they got a number of, not just at the barracks but a bit further away in the little cliffs alongside the road, 'cause the road followed the river round from the bridge, then turned

17:00 right to go north, there were caves there where the French had put a lot of weapons and food and ammunition, and I know quite a few fellows got revolvers.

And once the barracks had been taken were there any other French that appeared or…?

17:30 No, well, we'd done our job. We were told to capture it and we did, and we just stayed for the rest of the night there, and then about five am, I suppose, it was one of the other companies, A Company, came across the river and they proceeded to move further along, and they were fighting with the French, who were a bit further along. Not very far but a bit further.

18:00 **And who took responsibility of the POWs [Prisoners of War] or the…?**

Well, what happened to the POWs was, they were taken down and they were taken across in the same boat gradually, took a while to do it, but some of our fellows did that and they handed them over on the other side to somebody, I don't know who. Got rid of 'em, anyway.

18:30 **And did you then have to guard the barracks for a period of time?**

Not for very long. We moved on a bit and spent the night, the following night, we rested for the balance of that day while the other companies moved forward past us and they had a battle with 'em a bit further on.

19:00 **And what happened next?**

Well, the next thing that happened was what they had a battle a bit further on at a place called Adloun, but before that we were sent up, there was a side road coming in and that needed to be protected in case the French came through the hills to that

19:30 in that way. So I was sent to take my company to watch that road and what we did, we had hills surrounding us. The road came towards us and then turned in front of us and then through a gap into the hills onto the plain, and so I had the company, one platoon looking straight down the road. One platoon on the hills on the left and one on the right,

20:00 and our job was to, as I say, to see, to deal with any French that came along. And sure enough…but I also I had one mortar section with me with a mortar and its ammunition, and sure enough two French armoured cars appeared over the horizon and came towards us, and everybody opened up with their rifles and machine guns, but of course that didn't worry the Frenchmen

20:30 in their armoured cars. But the mortar let fly. We were behind the ridge, so they couldn't see us although they realised we were there, and the mortars let fly with their mortar bombs and my fellows all fired with their rifles and Bren guns. Anyway, I saw the leading armoured car, I saw the one mortar bomb landed right under the nose of this thing and

21:00 it obviously damaged it, because they then withdrew, they disappeared over the hill. So that was the end of that episode. And we stayed there for part of a day. I had to report back to the CO, because he insisted on having a conference at the end of every day of the company commanders, and I found a bike, a push-cycle and I hopped on that to get back.

21:30 **And how mountainous was the terrain that you were in?**

It was pretty hilly. There and further on there was a lot of hills, and of course a lot of the fighting was in the hills. Our next fight was at a place called Hasseniye a bit further on. I can show you the map if you're interested,

22:00 further on, and in that occasion we had to attack over a fairly big flat area with a hill at the far end with the French sitting on it, and we were on hills on this side, but the local inhabitants in that area had terraced a lot of these hills. A terrace is about eight foot down to the next one. This is to grow crops on, you see.

22:30 At Hasseniye we had to attack across, it was about, I know the distance because we worked it out, it was about twelve hundred yards to attack these Frenchmen sitting on the ridge that we could see. Couldn't see them, 'cause they were dug in. So we arranged for the artillery to bombard them. Our CO told me

23:00 what I was to do and he arranged that, and they bombarded them for quite a time and we advanced across this open ground and there was a stream there and the fellows stopped and had a drink of water and then went on and captured it without great difficulty. We had a few casualties, not many. And most of the French departed. But I got there what I thought was a very good trophy. This was the Foreign Legion

23:30 we were fighting there, and they, for some reason they had with 'em a beautiful silk flag of the Foreign Legion with the crest and all the rest of it, and I grabbed that and put it in my valise, the sleeping bag we used to cart round when we could, and put it there and brought it home. And eventually I thought, "I'm damn silly to have this, I'll give it to the War Memorial." So my

24:00 son was going over to the War Memorial, so he took it over and gave it to them. But anyway, that's by the way,but that's what I captured there personally. It was the 6th Company of the French Foreign Legion. Had it on the flag.

Well, can you just take is through that action again at the ridge at Husseni?

24:30 **Two platoons went in with artillery support, was that…?**

Huh?

Just, can you take us through that action?

Yes, what do you want to know, exactly?

Well, where was your company positioned and…?

Well, we were on a ridge looking at them about twelve hundred yards away, and we had to go down the

ridge across this open ground, and they were sitting

25:00 on the ridge opposite shooting at us.

And you mentioned that there were some casualties?

Yeah, some. Not a great many. Do you want to know how many?

Not how many, but what, was there an RAP [Regimental Aid Post] close by, or…?

No, no. You see, the RAP would be some distance behind, particularly at that stage, because certainly

25:30 the rest of the battalion were a bit behind us with the RAP. I don't know exactly where they were. But two or three fellows were killed and quite a number wounded, and you see the stretcher bearers would come and pick up the wounded, those who couldn't walk always. But I think most of them were walking wounded, and they walked back.

And those that were killed,

26:00 **were they buried?**

They were buried on the spot, not that day but shortly after, our padre, the chaplain was a very good one and he would go and bury them on the spot. That's what happened. Then after the campaign they dug them up and took them down to Gaza. They were all buried at Gaza, which was a British

26:30 war cemetery from the first war. All our fellows killed in Syria were taken down there and buried.

And as an officer where would you have been positioned yourself in that action?

Well, the usual drill was this, you've got three platoons and the usual thing, this is what happened anyway, that two platoons attacked and then the other platoon a bit behind.

27:00 I'd remained with the third one because I've got to be in a position to direct that wherever it was necessary to reinforce or help in the attack. But they were all part of the attack, but you know, I could send 'em to the left flank or the right flank or wherever it was necessary.

27:30 **And after that ridge action what were the orders then?**

Well, we rested for a bit. The battalion moved on to a big battle outside Sidon. Sidon was a fairly big town, and again we had the job of going down a slope over terraces and attacking the French on

28:00 another ridge about fifteen hundred or maybe a bit more yards away, attack them there, the artillery first having let loose their shells on them.

And how did you move? I mean, you're talking about very mountainous terrain, so how did you move from the ridge at Hasseniye to the ridge at Sidon?

By foot. Although, no, wait a minute.

28:30 from Hasseniye we were carried at some stages in trucks, and this is interesting because we were moving along the road, it must've been before the Hasseniye affair, and suddenly a French plane appeared around a corner flying very low and proceeded to shoot us up, and we were in these trucks and we all dived out into the ditch

29:00 on the side of the road, in good time fortunately. They killed one or two fellows of the company and wounded a couple of, something, but the majority of us were unhurt. We were in the ditches, and they then passed over us and went further on. And my youngest brother was in the anti-aircraft platoon of the battalion, and he didn't tell me, but some of the other fellows have

29:30 told me that he shot down this French plane with his machine gun. Anti-aircraft platoon were armed with a tripod, four sections tripod with a Bren gun on the top and that was his job and the whole job of that platoon, to shoot down any planes if they could, the best that they could do. Whether he hit it and brought it down I don't know, but that's what the other fellows said in the platoon,

30:00 so I'm told. But anyway, then the plane came down, it shot up a lot of prisoners that had been taken, French prisoners. They were marching along the road well behind us and they shot them up. They hit one of our officers, not, he wasn't with the French prisoners, a fellow called Gordon Stuckey and smashed his leg, and he was evacuated, of course. They killed one of my men.

30:30 The plane killed one of my men and wounded several, but we got out of it pretty lightly because they caught us, you know, in trucks. It wasn't easy to jump out quickly and avoid it. We really moved.

Were these actions that you're encountering, I guess first Lattani and then at Hasseniye, they're your first action in war?

Yes.

31:00 **How were you reacting?**

Well, I don't know, but we'd been trained to do this sort of thing we just did it.

Did you ever encounter in those first actions a moment where you had a realisation that this was not training, it was the real thing?

We knew beforehand. You see, the 2/14th had gone

31:30 across the border first and captured the border post, and the 2/16th, I don't know where they were before the Lattani affair but I don't think they'd been in action before, but anyway they were in action slightly before us on Lattani, so this was, well, this was what we'd been trained to do.

But even in spite of your quite lengthy preparations, I was just wondering whether you

32:00 **stopped for a moment to reflect on the gravity of the situation?**

No, you couldn't do that, really. I mean, I had orders to capture the thing so that's what we did. I know at Hasseniye I had my only shot in the war. We were, one of my corporals, I was with 'em, you see, in the

32:30 3rd Platoon and he was having a shot at the French, so I hopped down with my, I always carried a rifle with me, and so I said to him, "What do you reckon the range is?" He said, "Well, I reckon it's twelve hundred yards." So I put my sights up and I had a shot at the French, and I don't know, I doubt if I hit anyone at that range, but anyway it was fired. But that's the only time I ever fired a weapon. But you see, officers were armed with a pistol,

33:00 a revolver, nothing else. But that's not very much use, so I always carried a rifle wherever I went. I should've told you that while pre-war, the 27th battalion had a very good rifle club, and we'd go particularly during the winter, or right through the year really, but we'd have a shoot every

33:30 several weeks down on the port range and fire at the different ranges, and then on, particularly on Eight Hours Day [now Labour Day] there was always a big competition among all the units here on the rifle range firing against each other, see who was the best.

And the five other officers, did they also chose to carry rifles or…?

Well, some did, some didn't. That's,

34:00 I mean, I don't know what they carried, 'cause usually we were by ourselves.

And why was it that officers weren't issued with rifles?

Well, I really don't know, but they were issued with revolvers only. I think quite a few did get a rifle and use it, but I just don't know.

34:30 A revolver's not much use at twelve hundred yards, is it? Or even at four hundred yards. They got a limited range, of only about a hundred yards, I suppose.

And when you were at Hasseniye what was the weather like?

It was very clear and calm and hot.

35:00 And that's why at Hasseniye, going across this open area, and there's a stream at the bottom the fellows stopped and had a drink at it. They took the chance of the French shooting 'em down, but they had their drink anyway.

And how much cover did the terrain provide you?

None. That's the whole point, there was none.

35:30 **Well, you mentioned that you moved from Hasseniye to Sidon, how far of a march was that?**

It would be, don't know exactly, but it would be probably ten, fifteen miles. But I should

36:00 say this, that after we left Hasseniye we remained there for perhaps a day and we had to move by the brigadier's command through the hills at night, and that was a, it wasn't terrifying but it was a very difficult march and a very tiring one. Very difficult to know where you're going, but you just had to follow the fellow ahead of you.

36:30 But we were bombed while on that march. Some of the local inhabitants had told the French where we were and some bombs were landed very near us. Didn't hit anyone, but nearly did.

How did you know that the locals…?

Well, they wouldn't know otherwise that we were moving through the hills.

And were there any casualties from those?

Not that time, no.

37:00 But they got a bit close.

Did you hear them coming?

Yes, you could hear 'em, yes. Oh yeah.

Well, what were the orders once you arrived at Sidon?

Well, before that we had a big battle, and as I've said it was similar to Hasseniye, that we had to go across,

37:30 go down these terraces, jump down these eight-foot terraces and then across the open ground. We started, and we'd arranged for the artillery to fire on them, of course, and we moved off, but they seemed to have more machine guns than they'd had elsewhere, and we had quite a few casualties.

38:00 Poor old Lloyd Rudd was killed. I was wounded, and a lot of fellows were wounded. We had fairly heavy casualties. Few killed and quite a lot wounded. But anyway, we captured the ridge eventually through the good work of some of the sergeants. One sergeant in particular, because

38:30 in that attack we didn't have any officers left. See, I'd been wounded and Rudd was killed fairly early in the attack and the company was actually commanded by one of the sergeants. Which was a bit unusual, because we started the attack minus one officer who

39:00 said he wasn't well, and so on. So we started with only Rudd and myself as officers.

OK. We need to go through this in quite a lot of detail. So we might just stop there and change our tape.

Tape 5

00:30 **Cedric, you were about to take us through a very significant piece of action in which you got injured and you lost Rudd?**

I'll tell you what happened after I got hit. I had a runner with me and he stayed with me for a while, then he went on. But eventually I was wounded in the leg, a bullet through the leg, you see. It made it difficult to walk, of course, and, but eventually I was picked

01:00 up, and we'd at some stage captured a number of big black Senegalese fellows, and they got one of them to piggyback me, and first of all piggyback me into a neighbouring Arab village where I sat down and the locals provided me with, I think it was milk to drink, and

01:30 they were weeping and so on, the women were weeping and, you know, they were upset. Anyway, and then we moved on and he delivered me to the field ambulance and I was carted back to Haifa, to a CCS in Haifa, and I was there for a day or so, and while I was there, this was rather funny I thought, one of our officers, Ross Thomas, had been wounded just off the Lattani, they'd moved on a bit further and

02:00 I'd heard that somehow that he was in this CCS, so I said to the nurse, "Is Lieutenant Thomas still here?" She said, "Yes." I said, "Can I see him?" She said, "All right." So she put me in a wheelchair and wheeled me in to where he was sitting up in bed sucking beer through a straw. And he said to me he was in there because he'd had his jaw smashed. A mortar bomb had landed near him and

02:30 smashed his jaw, so he couldn't speak very well, all wired up. Anyway, he said, "Would you like a beer, Zac?" That was my nickname, of course. I said, "I'd love one." And the sister said, "Well, you're not having any." So that was that. Stayed a while and then left him, and after a time I was put on the train to go down to Gaza Ridge, to the 2/1st Australian General Hospital, and that's where I spent

03:00 six or eight weeks.

Well, can we go back to the actual action itself...

Yes, certainly.

...and how it started?

Yeah. Well, it started, because after we'd gone through the hills, as I've said. I should've added that we finished up in the fairly early morning near a church, and

03:30 the French bombed that area and our mortar platoon happened to be there and the fellow commanding the platoon, a good old friend of mine Jack Fraser, he's still about, an aerial bomb landed near him, he lost an eye and his batman was killed, you know, at his side almost,

04:00 but then the orders were given eventually for us to go across and do the attack, and that would have been in the middle of the day anyway. It was daylight. Now, what else did you want to know?

Well, moving over to do the attack, it was daylight, were you in clear view of the enemy?

Yes. That's the point. In these, when you go down hills and you're attacking people on a

04:30 hill opposite you're in clear view all the time, and that's why a lot of fellows were killed there.

Well, how did Rudd get killed?

I presume it was a machine gun bullet, I don't know. But he was killed with a bullet anyway. They had our range and they opened up on us. Had our range right through our walk across the valley.

05:00 **You were quite exposed going across the valley?**

Yes, all the way. Yeah. Same at Hasseniye, it was exactly the same, except there were more Frenchmen at Sidon.

Well, how were you hit in Sidon?

How was I hit? I presume it was a machine gun bullet, I don't know. It was a bullet, that's all I know.

Well, being so exposed like that

05:30 **crossing through the valley, what would you do to protect yourself, how would you protect yourself? How would you try and shield yourself?**

Well, you couldn't. You couldn't. You had to keep going. Your only aid was the artillery shooting at them until you were fairly close, which they did.

06:00 **Was there a sense at all of being led out into a slaughter?**

No. No. But there were twenty-three of my company, including myself, killed or wounded that day. And they were left without an officer for a short time. Not that that mattered too much, the sergeants were

06:30 quite capable.

So quite exposed like that and being hit and then being taken out and having to leave your company behind, how did you feel about that?

Well, I wasn't very happy about it, but what could I do? You see, we, every officer was pretty close to his men, as you'd understand.

07:00 **And how did you feel about the loss of your men?**

Well, you grieve a bit, but what can you do? Particularly Lloyd Rudd, because he'd been with me in the 27th pre-war and I knew him very well.

When did you receive the news that Lloyd had been killed?

Late in the afternoon of that day I heard,

07:30 I learned that he'd been killed. Somebody told me, I couldn't tell you who, somebody told me.

And that grieving that you had for the lost men, when did you feel that grieving?

Well, I suppose at the end of the day. It's very hard to know because,

08:00 well, I just don't know, but I was certainly a bit upset having lost that many. Because the wounded I wouldn't see again for the rest of the campaign, probably.

And when you were hit, and can you describe what happened, how you knew you were hit, the feeling?

I'll tell you. I felt a, the

08:30 force of a bullet is very severe. It knocked me over. I was moving forward and it knocked me forward. I'd jumped down some of these terraces and was in the, about to jump down another one, and it just knocked me over, that's all.

And how did you get out of there?

Well, I stayed there, because you see the Frenchmen were shooting at us. If I'd stood up and hobbled about I would've been

09:00 easy meat for them, so I stayed there and was picked up later in the day.

Well, how long did it take for the action to calm down and for your men to make progress through?

How long did the action take? I don't really know, you see, because it was, I can only go on what I was told, but

09:30 it would probably be a couple of hours, I suppose, I don't really know.

So when you were hit and you were down what did you do to attend to your wound?

Nothing, put a bit of…we all carried bandages, you see, one bandage, and I suppose, I don't know, somebody put a bandage on me, I suppose, I can't remember.

Did you go into shock?

No, not really.

10:00 Well, not a noticeable one, anyway.

So then you were taken out by the Senegalese?

Yeah, by this black fellow.

How did he carry you out?

On piggyback. He was quite cheerful. See, a lot of those fellows didn't mind being captured, didn't worry them being captured. They were quite happy to do this sort of thing.

10:30 **And after the British CCS where were you, how were you transported to the 2/1st Australian Field Hospital?**

As I said, I was piggybacked back to the field ambulance, which was not very far behind because they couldn't climb over hills with a motor vehicle, but I was carried back by the bloke and handed

11:00 over to them and then they, I can't remember, they probably picked up another couple of wounded and they took us back out to Haifa, which is quite a way away.

Who else was with you when you were being carried by the POW?

Well, initially by somebody, one of the company, I can't remember who, or a couple of the company. But I just don't remember who it was.

11:30 But it wouldn't have been too many. Might have been one or two, but I can't remember that.

Did you see any of your company before you left them?

Just this one or two that I mentioned, and I can't even remember who they were because I was carted off in the morning, I'd remained out there overnight and I was carted off in the morning and piggybacked

12:00 down by this fellow to the road, the nearest road, where the ambulance was.

Well, you said you were there overnight, did you just stay in the place that you were hit?

Yeah, I just lay there, yeah. It was a good rest.

Did your men wonder where you were or did they assume that you'd…?

I think they knew, because this fellow who'd been with me as a runner, I'm sure he would've told them

12:30 where I was. Well, he must've. He just died last week, incidentally.

And once you were taken to Gaza to the field hospital you spent some time there being treated? How was your wound treated?

We had a very good surgeon there and he treated it

13:00 by putting me in plaster and then I was able to hobble round on crutches, and then for the first few days while I was, before they put the plaster on they treated it with something or other, some ointment or something, I don't know what it was, and then once he put the plaster on I could hobble round, and I went, and

13:30 an adjoining hut was the mess. The mess for the officers, the wounded officers. They're all wounded fellows in the ward, and it was there. The plaster remained on for quite a while, of course, and eventually it got stinking. You know what wounds and plasters do, they get stinking, and the fellows in the mess objected to the stink, so I had to go back to the ward until I got a new plaster on.

14:00 **What was the smell like?**

I don't know, it stank, that's all I know.

So what news were you receiving about Don Company?

Not very much initially, but I did hear, because you see a lot of the other wounded from the 2/27th were taken to another hospital, the 2/7th at Rehovet, which was not terribly far away, probably

14:30 thirty miles, something like that, and some of them could walk round, as I could eventually and some, I think one of them, I found out from one of the, I can't remember. I don't think there was any of our Don Company in the same ward. You see, some of them may have been taken to the 2/7th at Rehovet, I know some of them went there

15:00 'cause I visited them later. I don't know what happened to them all as far as where they were, the wounded were put up. There was some of the other ranks wounded who were at Gaza Ridge in other wards, because the officers were all confined in one ward, you see. They had one ward for wounded officers and another ward for sick officers and

15:30 I think I heard, I can't recall now how I heard, but I knew very quickly what the ultimate result of that battle, I know that.

And what was that?

Well, it captured the ridge, which was their objective, in due course through the good leadership of on sergeant who took his platoon on the ridge and captured it.

16:00 The French had had enough of the artillery, I think.

Well, I was going to ask how the company went on without any officers?

Well, that's what you've got sergeants for. They take command. They know that.

And you said you visited some of the other men at the 2/7th?

16:30 Yes, that was later on, because I was at the, for six or eight weeks, I can't remember exactly, went up and visited them at the 2/7th. This fellow Thomas was up there sitting up in bed having a beer. Sitting up in his bed having a beer.

Before you were able to get up and become mobile, how…?

That wasn't very long, of course. Doesn't take 'em long to examine the wound and then treat it and

17:00 put a plaster on, and once you've got a plaster on you could, they give you the crutches, you can move about.

And did you ever become bored during this treatment and…?

No, I didn't, because we spent a lot a time talking to each other and there were no other 2/27th fellows in the ward but there were a number of fellows from the other two battalions, the 14th and 16th, and a number of fellows from the

17:30 2/25th, and I got to know them very well. See, you were talking all the time with them except when the medical officer came round and the sisters brought the meals and that sort of thing. Or we had our meals, if you were able to walk, in the mess room of course.

What were the nurses like and the sisters?

They were very good. Very good. I remember one in particular who was a big tall woman, and she was very

18:00 good, but the fellows used to call her the Flying Fortress. She was in command.

I was about to ask how she got that nickname.

That's why, I suppose. No, she was very good too. They all were actually. We got to know them very well, of course, and when I could hobble round and

18:30 some of the others also we went down. Our old RMO [Regimental Medical Officer] was there for some reason, I don't know why, and he wasn't wounded as far as I know, and he was there but I know one day we were, went down for a swim at Gaza beach, we couldn't swim, but we went to the beach. In fact I've got a snap of them sitting there.

So how else did you spend your time in that

19:00 **six to eight weeks?**

Well, I had a very good friend who'd been in the 27th with me called David McLean-Smith, and he'd gone away with the 2/1st Machine Gun Battalion, and somehow or other he found I was in the hospital and he came to see me, and he came several times 'cause I was, he was a good friend of mine and

19:30 he asked if I'd if he could get me something to drink. So I said, "Well, what can you get me?" And he said, "Well, I can get you a whiskey." So he bought not one but several bottles, not at the one time, several over a period, several bottles of Johnny Walker whiskey, and it was very cheap. The Johnny Walker red label was five shillings. It seems silly now, that price, and

20:00 the black label, which was the more expensive, was six shillings. And he helped me to drink it. We'd sit outside, 'cause it was very warm outside, you see. We'd sit outside in the warmth, and at other times

some of the other fellows'd help demolish the bottle. It didn't last long.

And then once your treatment was over you went onto the convalescent camp?

Yes, I was there for a week or ten days, I can't remember exactly.

20:30 But we had quite an interesting time there, because nearby, only I don't know, a mile or two away were the girls from the 2/2nd CCS. They'd been up in the desert and they're on leave and we got to know that, and they joined us. We went on picnics and so on, and

21:00 in fact I've got a picture of some of them. We quite enjoyed their company and hoped they did ours and we were able to go down onto the beach and have a swim, 'cause we were on the cliff overlooking the beach at the con depot. Also there was a Jewish fellow ran a riding school nearby

21:30 and we somehow found that out and we approached him and asked if we could hire one of his or several of his horses, and we went out for rides on these horses, which were lovely horses to ride. They were little Arab horses, and beautiful horses, easy to control. Very different from the horses we'd learned to ride on in the army, in the 2/27th, 'cause

22:00 in those days the officers had to learn to ride, and we'd learned to ride under the command of our adjutant, this is several years before the war, and we'd go for rides. There was two favourite places, one was on the South Road, and you know St Mary's Church on South Road? From there down, it was just vacant paddocks in those days, and we'd go in these paddocks and ride.

22:30 We all had learnt to ride at a riding school at Keswick, in the barracks. They had a big building there which was used for learning to ride, how to mount, how to deal with the saddlery and so on, and we learned to mount when the horses were stationary, and then when they were trotting and then a slow canter. Well, anyway, these rides,

23:00 we had a number of them and learned to ride reasonably well, and I remember one in particular. We went up what's now called Green Hill Road. In those days it was called Park Terrace, and half of it was earth so we kept on the earth, of course. We went up to the lunatic asylum and stopped there for the fellows to have a smoke and then turned round to come, got on the horses and turned round to come back and the whole lot of 'em bolted. Nobody could

23:30 stop the horse he was on, they all bolted. And the poor old adjutant was very worried, because we were going over the bitumen roads. If you know the area, there was first of all the Parkside tramline and road to Parkside and Fullerton and then the Kingswood one, the Unley one, the Hyde Park, the Goodwood one, and the Keswick one. We went over the Keswick bridge. What he was afraid of was that the horses would slip on the rails,

24:00 of course. Anyway, they didn't. They didn't stop till they hit the stable doors in the barracks, Keswick Barracks.

Might just pause.

That's my wife on the phone, I suppose. (Tape break)

Going back to the horses, the Arabian horses, and your time with the nurses, what, that was only ten days that you were in the depot, but…?

24:30 Yeah, only about ten days, yeah.

And you spent most of that out and about?

Yes, we went for swims, and in fact I've got a little snap of Justin Skipper, who was one of our officers who was there. I don't know why he was there, but he hadn't been wounded, but he'd obviously been sick, and sent there a photo of him and another fellow called Frank Clarke, whom I'd known pre-war but who then enlisted in Victoria, so the three of us were there

25:00 and we would go for swims and we just, only had to go down the slope into the beach.

Well, you were now getting ready to rejoin the battalion?

Yes, that's right.

And how were you feeling about getting back to them?

I wanted to. What used to happen was when the MO [Medical Officer] in charge of the con depot thought you were fit to leave there we went back to our training

25:30 battalion. See, the AIF had established training battalions, the idea being that wounded people, reinforcements, people returning from schools, would all have to go to the training battalion first and stay with them for a while until they got a reasonable number to go back to the battalion. That's what happened. I went back to there, we were only there a few days, two or three days perhaps, and then went back to the battalion,

26:00 and that was interesting because we were sent by truck to Haifa and we got on a captured Italian ship to sail up to Beirut, which was quite a way. In Beirut we got off and I, together with any other fellows from the brigade, we went by truck from there up to our battalions, which was

26:30 out in, as far as we were concerned, well out in the wild, from very steep hilly country east of Tripoli.

And having been hit and going through the healing process of the wound were you nervous at all about getting back into the field?

No, no. That was, well, just part of it. No, no, no.

27:00 **Did you think about getting hit again or getting wounded again?**

I don't remember doing so. But it was always a possibility, wasn't it? Didn't worry me. I don't think it worried anyone as far as I know.

So you joined the battalion back at Tripoli?

Outside Tripoli, yeah.

And what happened then?

Well, we were there for quite a long while,

27:30 and we were digging trenches and constructing barbed wire and so on, and then when it got towards Christmas time we moved into what they called winter quarters nearer to Tripoli. Not many miles out of Tripoli, the whole battalion moved in there, which had been sort of our rear headquarters before that,

28:00 and we were there at Christmas time, we camped with our tents just twenty miles or so, I suppose it was, outside of Tripoli, and while we were there, a bit before Christmas, one night there was a heavy snowstorm and all our tents

28:30 collapsed on us with the weight of the snow, of course. But that was easily fixed, and then they had the, fellows had a lot of fun constructing snowmen and snowball fights and the usual things, and I've got a few snaps of some of them, and then we moved in a bit closer to Tripoli and our mess had a Christmas dinner there in 1941, and all the

29:00 troops had a good time. They were allowed some beer and so on and celebrated Christmas in the usual way. Officers being ducked and so, the usual rigmarole. Although it wasn't ducked there, it was slung in the trenches which had been dug, the slit trenches, they were full of mud, so they were doused in that.

Snow is bitterly, bitterly

29:30 **cold, and you would've been…**

It's very cold at night in the tents, as you could imagine, and I think we had enough blankets to keep us warm. I think we had about six blankets each, but anyway it was enough to keep warm, but it was cold. See, we had a great big EPIP tent for the officers to spend the evenings in, and it got very cold there and

30:00 they devised various means of heating. The lanterns which we had, we didn't have anything else but lanterns, they managed to, you put 'em under, the tables had blankets over them and they put a few blankets underneath, that'd warm up the air at least under the table to keep your legs warm, that sort of thing.

And how did you keep your hands and faces warm?

That

30:30 wasn't too bad. We could put gloves on. They all had our woman's organisation back home made a lot of gloves for us, and we all had the gloves to keep our hands warm at that stage.

And you mentioned earlier about brothel pickets at this time?

Yes, what happened when we were closer to Tripoli, we had to provide, I think, every night a brothel picket of twenty

31:00 or thirty men, and they were stationed near the brothels just to keep order, that was all. See, there were no fights and so on.

Well, what do you recall about your turn on?

I didn't take any turn. No, I didn't have to do it. Didn't particularly want to, but I don't remember it. But I know they stopped any fights. That was the purpose of the picket.

What about VD [Venereal Disease], how was that controlled?

31:30 Well, it was controlled by, both in Palestine when we were training there and later by telling the fellows that they could get condoms whenever they wanted them, and they were strongly advised to if they

were going to brothels, to put 'em on. In fact, they had a poster which I saw in our

32:00 Palestine days, I think it was, no, yeah. It must've been Palestine, which said, "Play safe fellows, use a sheath." And I had occasion to go to the divisional legal officer's office, and he had one of these posters stuck up there, and the comments of the other officers were, "Very appropriate, as it's a brothel anyway."

32:30 But he was a fellow called Freddy Gamble. He later became a district court judge in Victoria. He wasn't a South Australian, but he was the divisional legal officer. I got used to sit on courts of enquiry and a court martial when we were up in the north there, and

33:00 the president of the court was Arthur Blackburn VC [Victoria Cross], who commanded the 2/3rd machine gun battalion, and I was appointed as his judge advocate. My job was to advise him and the members of the court about the law. He knew a lot more about it than I did.

Sorry, the court of inquiry and working as a court martial, whereabouts up north was that?

I think it was, I'm trying to think just where it was.

33:30 It was while we were at Tripoli, I think. The court of inquiry there was. We had several of the courts of inquiry over the loss of some cameras from the kit store. Now, when, before we went, well, before we went into action you had to hand into the kit store any cameras you had or anything valuable that you wanted to make sure it was kept, and

34:00 also a kit store which took your winter clothes or your summer clothes as the case may be. In this case it was, this must've been after Christmas, it was getting a bit warmer anyway. But anyway, the kit store, divisional kit store had the kits, which was mainly your clothes that you were not wearing, just to care for them, and somebody got at some

34:30 of the cameras in the kit store and so one of the courts of inquiry were on, it was designed to find out what happened. They never could find out. They duly recorded that the things had been stolen. God knows how, and the kit store, the, we didn't have courts of inquiry about the kit store. But the fellow who was in charge of the kit store was another officer from the 2/10th whom I

35:00 knew well, he'd been in the 27th with me and he used to boast, "What we can't lose the divisional mobile bath…" They had a mobile bath. What happened when it started to get a bit cool again, they decided they'd wash all the warm clothes, you see, so as a result all the clothes shrank, and they

35:30 were issued when it got cold and nobody could get into them. So his proud boast was, "What we can't lose the divisional laundry will launder for you and make useless."

So how often would the court of inquiry meet?

Well, I don't know, I didn't sit on them, but I sat on one or two. Certainly the one about the kit store and, but I know there

36:00 were others, but other officers were involved in those. That's the only one I sat on, but I sat on a court martial with him too. As I said, I was appointed as the judge advocate to advise Arthur Blackburn, which was…I knew him, of course, from here, he was a South Australian, and it was a bit funny to be appointed to advise him.

And what was the court martial about?

I can't remember what it was about now. I really can't remember that. But

36:30 that didn't matter.

Can I just take you back to the brothel picket for a moment and just a question about VD. How were the men inspected for venereal diseases?

Many cases? Quite a lot. The AIF set up what was called the 8th Special Hospital down at

37:00 Gaza, not far from where we were, and my brother-in-law, who'd enlisted later in 1940, my sister's husband, he was posted to that unit. I don't think he was very pleased about it. But he was one of the officers in that 8th Special at there, and he came and visited me while I was in there. So they had a special hospital for them. In fact there was a song going around. You might remember there was a well-known song at the time, 'The Love Bug'll

37:30 Get You If You Don't Watch Out', which was popular, and they converted that, 'The 8th Special'll get you if you don't watch out'.

Well, it was an offence to contract a VD whilst in the army, how was it handled when men did contract a VD?

Well, they'd treat them, and I think a lot of them got over it all right and they came back to the battalion.

38:00 **And were there any repercussions for them?**

No, not that I know of. Never heard of them.

And what were the most…?

They were probably docked pay or something, but I really don't remember.

And can I just ask just one last question about this, what was the most common VDs?

I don't know. I really don't know. Talking of that sort of thing the 7th Divisional Cavalry Regiment was

38:30 sent to Cyprus, we learned this afterwards, of course, and that was a notorious place for VD, and a lot of them got it. They had the worst reputation for VD of the whole of the AIF.

That's interesting to note. And you were just outside of Tripoli for quite some time?

Until just

39:00 shortly before Christmas, until we went down into what they called winter quarters, which was fairly close to Tripoli, and we had our Christmas dinner there. I've got somewhere there a photo of our officers' mess at the dinner.

Well, during the winter it was snowing which made it extremely cold, but what was the summer like?

Well, we didn't spend summer there. You see, we were fighting in June, July,

39:30 and that campaign only lasted five weeks before the French surrendered. So that was our experience, that was pretty warm, of course. But not too bad.

And that five six weeks of fighting, how did it feel to lead your men out again?

To meet the men that…

40:00 **No, to lead them out into battle again?**

Well, I didn't lead them again during that campaign, 'cause I was in hospital. You see, I was wounded on the 14th of July and, 14th of June rather, and the campaign ended, I think it was about the middle of July, I could tell you if I look up the book, which was about the time I was, well, still in hospital

40:30 when the campaign ended and the French surrendered, because our battle at Sidon was a very important one. It was an important town, and then the battalion had a final very big battle at Damour, which is only, I don't know how far, ten, twelve miles I suppose, from Beirut, which was our objective.

41:00 So that's what happened. You see I don't know if you followed the story of the Syrian campaign, but we were on the, our column, which consisted of our brigade, were on the coast area, and inland a bit among the hills was another column consisting of our 25th Brigade, which was the 2/25th, 2/31st and 2/33rd, they had a pretty hard time.

41:30 The French counterattacked 'em there and, but anyway, they beat them eventually. But over on the right there was another column consisting of some English troops, some Free French and some Indian troops and their objective was Damascus, and they got Damascus before we could get to Beirut. They captured Damascus.

Well, we've just run out of tape again so we'll leave it there.

Tape 6

00:31 **Well, Cedric at the end of the Syrian campaign and the Middle East campaign how were you and your battalion and your company, were you all satisfied about the success of the campaign?**

Yes, they were very happy yeah. Yes. The whole division was happy about it.

01:00 Because, you see, they'd had this big battle at Damour, which was, went for several days, it was very difficult country, and they marched into Beirut, the French surrendered, so what better than that can you have?

It was, the Middle East was a very successful campaign for the Allied forces?

That one was, but Greece wasn't. That was a

01:30 Disaster, Greece and Crete.

But the Syrian campaign was quite good. But you had suffered a number of casualties and you

had been wounded yourself. How battle-fatigued do you think you were when you left the Middle East?

We were very fit, because you see we'd been in northern Syria after the campaign for some months.

02:00 What? From mid-July till January 26th we left the Middle East. No, we were pretty fit again.

You mentioned earlier that…well, first of all, how did you get the news that the Japanese had entered the war?

We got it through our signallers. They used to listen into

02:30 brigade headquarters signallers, and also it was put over the wireless, apparently, but they learned pretty quickly anyway that the Japs had bombed Pearl Harbor, and we guessed immediately we'd have to return. The point being there was no AIF, or virtually no AIF troops in Australia to defend the place.

Well, your

03:00 **company was put on the Ile de France?**

That's right, the whole battalion was. By that time I was commanding headquarters company.

And where did the Ile de France sail to?

She sailed from Port Tewfik, Suez to Bombay, and we got off at Bombay and we got onto smaller ships, and the ship we got on was called the City of London. It was one of a convoy of ten ships,

03:30 and we sailed down in a southeasterly direction across the equator, and then they turned north to land in the south coast of Java. But when we got, I don't know how close, but fairly close, we were told it was too late, the Japs were already there. So we turned tail and went down south of the equator once again and we turned and crossed the equator once more heading in a northwesterly direction and we were bound, we discovered, for Rangoon in Burma,

04:00 and it turned out that Churchill had directed that without reference to our Prime Minister. When he found out that that's where we were headed he sent a signal immediately to us to return to Australia. So we had to go to Colombo in Ceylon to get fresh provisions and fuel for the convoy, and we all returned to Australia. And if we hadn't done so, if they'd captured or killed us, which was what would've happened if we'd gone to Burma,

04:30 there'd have been no troops to hold the Japs in New Guinea. Because it was the 7th Division and the 6th Division in New Guinea that stopped the Japs. The militia units couldn't. And if they'd got to New Guinea they'd have been in north Australia quick smart. It's only a hundred and fifty miles or something to the top of Queensland.

And when you were wandering around the Indian Ocean

05:00 **were you given any information about what, why you were wandering all over the place?**

No, not really, but we knew from the way we were heading just where we're going. I mean, we all had compasses and we were looking at those. And we got some information, but not everything.

And where did you disembark in Australia?

05:30 Adelaide. We sailed up the Port River. And we got on a train alongside the ship and the train took us out to Mitcham Station and we had to march from Mitcham Station down to Springbank. At that time, opposite the, what's now the repat hospital. They'd had a number of huts constructed, galvanised iron huts, and we marched, and when we got down there we occupied those huts.

06:00 But quite a few fellows were in difficulties going from Mitcham down there with their feet, because being so long on a ship your feet get very soft and you're not allowed to wear boots on a ship because they got studs all over the bottom and they'd wreck the decks of the ship, and so they were wearing sandshoes, and then of course they had to put the boots on to leave the ship and come out to Mitcham station and go down there, and

06:30 a lot of 'em had that difficulty.

And what sort of homecoming did you receive?

What sort of what?

Homecoming did you receive?

Well, we all went home, and we had a very good one.

And where did your wife catch up with you?

Well, she was then living in Price Crescent, Hawthorn, opposite the Hawthorn Oval. Do you know the Hawthorn Oval?

07:00 Well, directly opposite that. She'd for most of the war been living with my daughter and her parents, living with her parents, but then some months, I'm not sure how long, but, for she'd rented a place opposite the oval in Price Crescent, so we joined her there.

And had she given birth to…?

Yes, she. That was another thing.

07:30 When I went away she was pregnant, and on the 5th of January Margaret was born and I got a cable announcing that. That had been sent by my father-in-law, who was very excited about it, it was his first grandchild, and by chance our CO had a son born the same day. But he didn't know about this son's birth until the following day, and he was very annoyed about it, that I would know a day ahead of him. He used to rib me at times about

08:00 that. But I found out later what happened. My father-in-law. The child had been born in the middle of the night, and in those days you could go in to the GPO [General Post Office] and send cables at any time of the day or night, and that's what he did in the middle of the night, sent a cable. That's why I got the information a day ahead.

And what, how did you spend your time

08:30 **with your new family in that leave?**

We just were at home most of the time, obviously, and met, you know, visited a few friends, that sort of thing. We didn't do much other than that.

08:50 Screen blacked out

08:55 we then went

09:00 by train and we went up, went to Ballarat and turned north, crossed the Murray at a place called Numurkah, and from there we went in by train up the western line of New South Wales to Glen Innes in northern New South Wales, where we were camped for two or three weeks, and we were fed on the way by the local people at the various stations, and that was very good. They treated us very well.

09:30 They wouldn't have seen the troops much in that part of the world.

And what was your eventual destination?

From Glen Innes we went to firstly to Lowdes [?], but only for a day or so, just over the, what seventy or eighty miles north of Brisbane, and then to Caloundra, where we stayed for two or three months. But a funny thing happened on the way up.

10:00 I was sent as a reconnaissance party, if you like, with a couple of other fellows from Glen Innes, and we had to cross the Queensland border and we came to a place called, what was it? Anyway, it doesn't matter. There was a fellow, this was in the middle of the night, the fellow came out from the hut on the, there was a fence and a gateway and he was by the gate and stopped us and solemnly asked us if we had any rabbits onboard. We assured

10:30 him we didn't have any rabbits and we told him we were going to Queensland. So he let us through without further ado. They had a rabbit-proof fence, you see. And in Caloundra we did quite a lot of work. A lot of the inhabitants had gone, and we occupied the school, the public school, as our headquarters,

11:00 and lived in tents and so on all round the place. But we dug machine gun posts in the main street of Caloundra under the shops and so on, and we sent up a standing patrol down the Bribie Channel. Do you know Brisbane at all? Do you know Bribie Island?

I've heard of it.

Yeah, well, we were on the mainland, of course, but at one part it's very narrow, and we had a standing

11:30 patrol there, and we'd change them every few days. We got a launch in Caloundra, plenty of boats there and take the fellows down, take their mail and rations down every, and then every few days we'd change them, so another mob. It's only about ten or a dozen fellows were sent down there as a standing patrol. See, they were doubtful about some of the people that lived in Queensland. There were a lot of German and Italian people there and they were a bit doubtful about 'em, and in actual fact we took over,

12:00 our mob took over from some a militia unit patrol there and they said that they'd been attacked in the middle of the night by a number of men and hit, and they had to hit back of course. So there was something very odd there.

And you mentioned that you were digging gun emplacements or…?

That's right, this is the ones I mentioned, yeah.

And that some of the locals

12:30 **had been evacuated?**

A lot of 'em had, yeah.

And did you understand why they'd been evacuated?

Because the Brisbane Line was supposed to be, the government had asked, realised that if Queensland were invaded northern Queensland would more or less occupied by the Japs and they wanted to be able to meet them on the Brisbane line. That was the idea.

13:00 And ultimately, as I understood it, I didn't know, but understood it that they would ask people to move out if the Japs ever landed. But certainly a lot of the inhabitants of Caloundra had gone. And we did a lot of training there. The first time we ever did any jungle training, on the Blackall Ranges, which is just behind Caloundra, there is a lot of scrub

13:30 and a long road with a lot of scrub and difficult country, and I was put in charge of the enemy force there and we took on each battalion in turn, it was an exercise and we reckoned we beat 'em up and they learned a lot from it, which stood 'em in good stead. I think the troops, perhaps, didn't learn anything, but the brigade headquarters and the battalion commanders learned a lot from it.

14:00 We took on each battalion in turn.

And what do you think they were learning?

What was likely to happen when they're fighting in the jungle, because communications are always difficult, they learned that. I mean, before we'd been in open country where it was easy with wireless and so on, but in these close country jungles wirelesses are practically useless. That thing, and the other was the question of evacuation of casualties

14:30 because we reckoned a number of them would have been, if we're using live ammunition, would have been killed, and the question arose how do you evacuate them with their wounds and so on. So that, they hadn't thought much about that but they did after that.

Well, you mentioned earlier on in the day that

15:00 **it was General Allen who came to you?**

That was in New Guinea.

OK. So that wasn't before you left?

No.

Righty-o. Well, how did you travel to New Guinea?

We travelled on a Liberty Ship, of all things. Now, they, do you know what they were? They were built by the Yanks, they're welded ships and very roughly prepared, and they were built in thirty days,

15:30 and the troops used to say, "Built in thirty days. Sink in thirty seconds," which was pretty right. But we travelled on it, and the fellows lived in the hold, which was used for carrying cargo and they slept on the palliasse filled with straw down there so they couldn't light a cigarette. So they're on deck most of the time. We had our meals on the deck, and the latrine accommodation consisted of a ship's, or a trough they'd made from malthoid

16:00 along the side of the ship with a ship's hose in one end. And somebody would turn on the hose a bit hard and they all got wet bottoms.

And did you have a bed on the Liberty Ship?

I did, being a senior officer I did, and the CO did, but, and I think the medical officer and the padre did, but I don't think anybody else did.

16:30 And we had the same rations, we had our own rations, bully and biscuits and so on.

And how else had you been kitted out for the jungle?

We had nothing else, just what we'd come with initially for the first campaign in khaki uniforms. That was one of the problems that

17:00 the powers that be should've been awake to, the fact that in the jungle a khaki uniform stands out, they're easily picked and shot.

Well, when you got to Moresby did you dye your uniforms?

No, what happened was we…from Moresby we went up into the hills, and we camped at a place called Itiki up in the hills behind Moresby. The reason

17:30 for that was our brigade commander selected that place, because up there we wouldn't have as much malaria. He knew we'd be facing malaria, which is what you get in the lower-lying parts. We didn't get

much malaria there. Some, but not much, and that's where we got ready to march on the Kokoda Track. And we had to, everybody had to, they had a grindstone up there, we sharpened all their bayonets and they had to work out what rations they were

18:00 to carry, because we had to carry everything on our backs, and they worked that out. So they carried five days' rations mainly bully and biscuits, on their backs in their haversack. That's what they set off with, and what happened the day they went in. The battalion was to move in two halves, the first half, the very day that they the first half moved off I got a signal to report to Major

18:30 General Allen, generally known as Tubby for obvious reasons, and so I went to him and he said to me, he was a funny man, he said, "You've been promoted to lieutenant colonel, and you're supposed to go down to command the 51st Battalion, which is in Queensland." He said, "That's bloody stupid to send you down there when here's the 36th Battalion without a CO. You'll be the CO. I'll fix it." So he did.

19:00 **And why was General Allen a funny man?**

That was just the way he went on. He was well known as a funny man, a very good commander but a funny fellow. Just the way he told me that.

And how did you react?

Well, I was a bit surprised but I didn't know quite

19:30 how to take it, because I knew that I would be in command of the second half of the battalion the following day. So I was in two minds, what do you do? I couldn't do anything about it. I didn't want to not go with my own troops. Although by that time I was the battalion second in command, but when you've been training with them for two and a half years

20:00 it's a bit of a blow to leave them, isn't it?

And what sort of farewell or leave-taking did you take of the 2/27th?

Well, I was there and saw the rest of them marching off and just, I told them on the day I was told and told all I could, but I couldn't do anything except watch 'em go and they gave a cheery smile and so on as they went.

20:30 **So where were, well, first of all what did General Allen or anybody else tell you about the 36th battalion?**

Well, he told me I was to command them. I found out where they were and I went over and joined them, and it was true, they didn't have a CO at the time. The fellow who'd been the CO had left them to go back to his original battalion. He'd been the CO

21:00 of the 2/1st Pioneers and he went back to them, and that's how it became a vacancy. And they were a militia battalion from New South Wales and they hadn't been, they'd done no training, virtually, in New Guinea up to that time. They'd been used as wharf labourers and digging trenches and that sort of thing, doing all sorts of work, but no training, and that was disgraceful.

21:30 And that wasn't the only battalion that was treated like that. All the militia battalions that went there, there was the 49th and the 39th and the 53rd, they were all used for labouring purposes, and that was utterly disgraceful because most of them had very little training.

And what sort of familiarisation did you go through with the 36th?

With them? Well,

22:00 they were continuing with their labouring jobs. They were doing all sorts of work digging trenches around the area of headquarters, a place called Murray Barracks down on the flat and various other labouring jobs. I got no chance to give 'em any training, and then eventually we were sent up on the higher ground and did a lot of patrol work, but it wasn't true training. But they were afraid that the

22:30 Japs might come round in effect on a side track and come in there. We were sent to patrol the tracks round there for a time, and then we were, our headquarters at that stage was at a place called Uberi, which was the first stage of the Kokoda Track, and we were there for quite a while, and such was the panic in Moresby that, all the people there were in a hell of a panic and I was ordered, together

23:00 with the CO of the 3rd Battalion, another militia battalion, who was a first war fellow, and his adjutant to go up what was known as Imita Ridge, which was the first ridge that you climbed to get on the track, and it's a very steep ridge and had seventeen hundred so-called steps, which are rough steps, and he and I and his adjutant climbed up, at least the adjutant and I did, but he was first war fellow, he didn't get halfway he just couldn't make it. So he went back, and ultimately

23:30 they sent him back to Australia and got a new CO for the 3rd Battalion. He was a very good bloke, the troops all liked him. He won a Military Cross in the first war. He was no fool. So we were there at Uberi doing a bit of patrol work forward of it for quite a time, and I posted a three-inch mortar on a very high prominence

24:00 alongside where we were camped, and they had to get up with, they had some makeshift ladders to get to the top of that and they had a mortar up there ready to fire it at any Japs that came in the gully below it. But they never got there.

And when you joined the 36th Battalion, did this mean that you got a batman?

I took my batman with me. He went with me from the 27th.

24:30 **So you were able to keep him?**

Yes. He went with me.

What was his name?

Clyde Jacobs, generally known as Oigle.

And what sort of batman was he?

He was a very good one. He'd been my batman for a long while. Very long time, and he was very good and he remained with me till the end of the war.

And why did he have that nickname?

I don't know, but that's what he was called.

25:00 **And what sort of character was he?**

He was a funny fellow. He was a very likeable bloke. He was an older fellow, he'd be a fellow, at that time, I suppose, in his mid-thirties or something and, but he was an amusing fellow. He was a very good batman, and while we were, I'm not sure where we were

25:30 at the time, but the girls used to write with socks and things that they'd made and sent over and they'd always put their names and addresses in. So he replied to one of them, started corresponding with her, and eventually married her when he went home on leave.

And why was it really necessary for you to have a batman?

Well, they do a lot of things other than

26:00 looking after the officer concerned, me or whoever it is. Make sure I got meals, and he was also our runner, carrying messages frequently, used for that purpose. But generally to look after the officer he was with in a whole host of ways. It wasn't just look after his clothing and food, but any other things we wanted him to do, and

26:30 we frequently had to use them carrying message and so on. They were usually older fellows, not one of the young fellows. Not always, but usually. Sensible fellows.

Well, it was very common for soldiers to have nicknames, I'm wondering if the officers like yourself had any

27:00 **nicknames?**

Most of 'em had a nickname of some sort, yeah. I can't remember all of them, but most of them did.

And did you have one?

Well, I was always known as Zac because that was the nickname I had at school, and course I joined the 27th and that nickname went with me. In fact, the CO called me Zac, even.

And is that

27:30 **how your troops referred to you?**

Yes, they did, yeah. At one stage further on, when we were fighting, an order was issued that we would not allow any saluting or anything to indicate that we were officers, and as a result officers were referred to, and others, by their nickname, you see.

28:00 **Well, what sort of new challenges in your position as an officer were you faced with when you were sent to the 36th Battalion?**

Well, the lack of training. You see, they all had rifles. I think they were issued with Bren guns while we were there, or just before we went over the range, but they'd never trained with them.

28:30 They'd trained with the old Lewis gun. Most of 'em had never thrown a grenade. Most of 'em had never fired a Tommy gun. We got issued with grenades and Tommy guns when we were flown over the hills to fight.

And how did you know that they hadn't, that they couldn't do these things?

Well, I knew just with enquiries as soon as I hit them that they hadn't done these things. And many of

them had never fired a Bren gun. The number one and

29:00 two on the gun had got a few rounds through, but the rest had never fired one. And when we went to, over the range to Soputa, the brigade commander I was sent to serve under, he ascertained this and he got a whole lot a the fellows to actually fire the Bren gun and do a bit of training with the Tommy gun, fire that and do, threw a few grenades. So that was disgraceful that they'd never had the chance to

29:30 do that. See, there was a control of ammunition, and I asked for, while I was near Moresby asked the then brigade commander, a fellow called Smith. He was a nice enough bloke, but he didn't really know what went on, and asked him to release ammunition so the fellows, we could have rifles zeroed, put to fire accurately. He said, "No, they've done their table A," which was the

30:00 annual course that everybody had to do. But a lot of the fellows had not even done that, because we had a lot of reinforcements and so on. So there was, I mean the rifles were used, but they weren't always accurate, and they should have been. But it's because the silly old fellow wouldn't release the ammunition to practise with. It wasn't only me, one of the other battalion commanders also had the same, he went with me actually, the same experience.

30:30 **I imagine it would've been incredibly frustrating for you.**

It was. But what could I do about it?

Well, after you finished your work at Murray Barracks, what were the orders for 36?

Now, what happened, we were working there one day, which was the, I think the 15th of December, and in the middle of the day we got

31:00 an order that we were to be on a plane at six o'clock the next morning to fly over the range. Now, that involved a lot of hurried work. See, a lot of the fellows were detached, doing odd jobs all round the place, a number in hospital, a number doing all sorts of things, and anyway, we got 'em all together somehow and we were ordered to, we were in khaki clothes, and there'd been all the rumpus over the khaki

31:30 clothes worn by the fellows who were going over or fighting over the Kokoda Track at the time. So I had a friend in the 6th Division headquarters who'd been one of our 27th Battalion fellows pre-war and had joined the 2/1st Machine Gun Battalion, been in Greece and so on, and he was the fellow in charge of the dye, so I went to him and told him, so he gave me a big quantity of dye and

32:00 that night we had one of our forty-four gallon drums full of water boiling and dipped, shoved a whole lot of dye in it and put their clothes in it and had to put 'em on wet in the morning, that didn't matter. But it turned out to be dark blue. He'd given us twice the quantity of dye needed, and he then proceeded to ask for the half of it back. I said, "You're too late, old boy." So we had dark blue clothes. But that was better than khaki,

32:30 and with the rain on us continually it soon lost a lot of the dark blue colour. It was sort of a motley colour, but it wasn't too bad.

There are some funny things that happen. Well, once you'd put on your dark blue, slightly wet uniforms where did you head off for?

Well, we then went down to the aerodrome.

33:00 You see, movement by aerodrome involves a lot of office work, and our adjutant and his assistant and typist had worked all night, because you have to make out tables of which men went on which plane. We had thirty or forty planeloads, and there had to be a list of everyone that was on a particular plane and all accounted for, so it involved a lot of work. Anyway, that was done, and we got on the plane. Actually, they didn't leave at six, it was later in the morning.

33:30 But we all hopped on anyway and flew over.

And what sort of planes were they?

DC3s, Douglas. There were a lot of them up there at times.

And which drome did you go to?

Well, now, there were no regular dromes. We flew over and we flew very close to the trees. You see, all the fellows looking out the little windows, I think he felt, like most

34:00 of us, that we might hit the trees. But the reason for that, the Japs had their Zero planes flying around, and they couldn't easily see us because all our planes were all camouflage painted and would have been difficult to see against the trees. But anyway, that's what happened, and we got over there. One plane was forced down at a place called Wairopi, just near the bridge, you might've heard it,

34:30 the Wairopi bridge, at a place called Wairopi, and they had a three-inch mortar with 'em, which is a very heavy bit of work. I mean, there's a great big heavy barrel and a great big base plate and a lot of gear, and they managed to get some Jap horses and load them on them and they joined, it took 'em a couple days to get down, catch up with us. But we got to our destination, which was

35:00 a rough strip at a place called Popendetta that the natives had cut the kunai grass down, and we were able to land there, and my orders were to report to General Vasey, who was at Soputa, which was about twenty, thirty miles from the airstrip, which I did, and that was rather funny. He was known to all the troops as Bloody George from his frequent use of the word 'bloody'. Anyway, I reported to him and he said, having told me where I was to

35:30 go, he said, "Would you care to stay to lunch with me?" This was in the middle of the day and, "We're having roast pork for dinner." He said, "One of the fellows has shot a wild pig, and we're having roast pork." I said, "I'd love to, of course." So I sat down with him and had roast pork, and then walked with my batman to the next place. I had to report to the brigade commander, I was to serve under a fellow called Porter, and when I got there he told me exactly where

36:00 we were to go, and he said to me, "You'll have about three hundred Americans under your command," he said, "if the Japs fire at them they'll fire back, but they won't attack the Japs, they're not much use." And he was quite right, of course. That's what happened, and so we went to where we were to prepare to fight, to actually fight the Japs.

Well, this was a new enemy, what had you been briefed or

36:30 **lectured on about the Japanese?**

About the Japs? We'd been told a fair bit about them, but we certainly didn't know all about them, and their method of fighting was quite different from the French, I can assure you, because we're dealing with people who fought in the jungle, or not necessarily jungle but scrub country and that sort of thing. They were very hard to find, and that's what we found.

37:00 You see, Porter got us to. The first time we got mixed up with the Japs one company was put under command of the CO of the 49th Battalion, and they had a few casualties, not much, and then they came back to us. But then we were to do a battalion attack a day or two later, which we did with two companies, and that's roughly two hundred men,

37:30 and they had to attack an area where they couldn't see the Japs. They were hidden in low scrub. They'd dug very good what we call bunkers. That's, they were dug right down so that they're standing, look, at just a bit above eyesight. Just above level with the ground, and they could see, I'm convinced they could see people's legs. They mightn't have seen their bodies, but they could see their legs, that's all they wanted and they

38:00 could see us before we could see them. Now, this first time we went to attack we had an artillery barrage, but the artillery were directed to fire where they thought they were, our people thought they were, but it wasn't necessarily where they were, in fact, and they didn't kill many of the Japs. Even if their shells burst where the Japs were they had all earth and logs over the top of them, so the shells didn't worry them very

38:30 much, and our fellows got murdered. The two companies attacked them with roughly two hundred men, and fifty-five men were killed, wounded and missing in five minutes. And that rocked them. They'd never been in action before, that really rocked them, and they came back. Wasn't very fair, but that's what we had to do. They'd had no training in jungle conditions.

39:00 **And how did it rock you?**

Well, it rocked me the same as the fellows that so many would be killed. I was behind them with the other company, because one company had been detached with the other company ready to send them wherever I thought was appropriate. But a lot of the bullets whizzed past us. None of us got hit, fortunately, but anyway, that's what happened.

39:30 **And when you first arrived at Sanananda what position did you take up?**

Well, we were told where to go. We started from there on this attack I've just described. The brigade commander told us where we were to go. But you see, the whole area, it was either covered with low scrub mixed with very high trees in which they had snipers and with patches of open country,

40:00 and the Japs, of course, were in the scrub and you couldn't see them until you were almost on them. And we were given no chance to make a proper reconnaissance. You see, in that sort of condition it's absolutely necessary to make what's called a reconnaissance. That is, send a patrol round the area to find out, get some idea of where they are. But we weren't given any chance to do that. And the same thing happened at

40:30 Gona with my old battalion. They were given no chance to make a reconnaissance, as a result a lot of 'em were slaughtered. So we didn't do any more attacks after. Or we did one, but from then on we did patrol work, where platoon patrols would go out to find out where exactly the Japs were, and they did. They suffered a few fellows killed, but they didn't do too badly.

And had you walked

41:00 **from Popendetta to Sanananda?**

Yes. To Soputa, and then from Soputa down to. It was not actually Sanananda, it was the Sanananda track. Where these Japs were they'd taken advantage of the fact that there was a junction of two tracks through swampy areas, in which before the war a corduroy track, that is wood laid down, went through the swampy areas, and obviously where

41:30 the tracks joined was an important place and the Japs took possession of that, and that's where the fighting took place, or nearby.

OK, well, we'll have to stop there and change our tape.

OK.

Tape 7

00:30 **Before we continue on talking about the patrol work you did in Sanananda I'd like to ask you about your brother, who was also serving in New Guinea.**

That's right.

Firstly, when did he join the AIF?

Just after I did, in May '40. Actually, his number is lower than mine. The reason was that

01:00 all our officers were the first into the camp, but they didn't get their numbers straight away. Went down ultimately to Wayville, had medical exams and were issued with our numbers. He's got a lower than I have, anyway, that doesn't matter. But no, he joined very early in May '40. But he was put in the headquarters company, because the procedure was you never had two brothers in the one company, for obvious reasons.

And

01:30 **so which company was he with?**

Headquarters company. He was in the anti-aircraft platoon.

And I understand when you were in Caloundra he had left for New Guinea?

That's right. He was promoted and sent to New Guinea and there with the 53rd Battalion and it was with them, he was the first one killed.

And I understand that was on the Kokoda Track?

That's right.

When did you get the news that your brother had been killed on the

02:00 **track?**

Some days later, I'm not sure just exactly how long, but a few days later the news came back to me. But we were then up at, no, I think we were down at Murray Barracks at the time. Anyway, I knew fairly soon.

And how did you respond to the news?

Well, what could I do? It upset me

02:30 somewhat, because you see he was the youngest of the family and more or less the baby of the family.

And when he joined or when he enlisted did you feel a sense of responsibility?

No, I mean I couldn't do much about it, he was in a separate part of the battalion. But he'd been training before, with the 27th Militia Battalion, as I had, you see. He'd been with them for two or three years,

03:00 so he knew what he was doing.

And prior to his death did he tell you anything or write to you about anything?

He wrote me a few letters, and I know he didn't think very much of the 53rd Battalion. One thing in particular he wrote about was there seemed to be a great paper war. He said, "I thought that there was plenty of paper with the 2/27th but it was nothing on this mob. They were paper wars."

And

03:30 **having an idea of what was happening on the Kokoda Track how did you feel when you left the 2/27th to see them to go ahead?**

Well, very mixed feelings, as you can understand, because as I say I'd been with them for two and a quarter years and we'd fought together in Syria, and you don't like leaving the fellows that you've become old mates. But there it was, I was pleased enough to be promoted,

04:00 and I had the job of seeing them all march off because I hadn't left them at that stage. It was only the day before I learnt that I'd been sent to the 36th.

And knowing or having experienced a family member dying on the Kokoda Track, how were you feeling about your battalion

04:30 **then moving on to the track?**

Well, I don't think that altered my view. I mean, I was upset over my brother, but I would've liked to have gone with them, that's the point. But I had no say. I liked to be with my old mates.

Well, now you were with the 36th Battalion…

Yeah.

05:00 **…and doing patrol work around the Sanananda Track.**

That's right.

What kind of patrol work was it?

They were fighting patrols, and they were all designed to get information, and if they bumped into some Japs being fighting patrols they could actually fight. They weren't just to get information, they were ready to fight at all times. And they did. They had a good many clashes with the Japs and killed quite a lot of 'em, but they lost a few

05:30 men too.

Well, after your first day at the Sanananda Track and taking so many casualties, how were you able to motivate the men to keep their morale up?

Well, I just issued the orders and they would do it. They were very good. See, the whole trouble with the militia units was they'd had no proper training, as I've explained. But personally they were good fellows, and later on, when we'd had a fair bit of

06:00 training, they did exceptionally well, I thought anyway. They would have been just as good as the AIF if they'd been trained as well. But they weren't, they were very poorly trained.

Well, how did you, did you continue training or issuing training to them whilst they were doing the fighting patrols?

No, you can't. You tell 'em what to do, but that's about all you can do.

06:30 **And how long were the fighting patrols going on?**

That went on, we were there until, let me think, early January of '43. We went there in, we landed in Popendetta, I think on the 16th or 17th of December, and we went straight after we were told, were to go to Soputa, and then onto Sanananda Road, and we would've landed there

07:00 the same day as we landed from the plane, and we were there till about the 5th or 6th of January. We spent Christmas day there, and I well remember that because as a very special Christmas gift we were all issued with a little white paper bag full of boiled sweets. Where the dickens they got those from I don't know, but they were very welcome.

And how else did you mark Christmas day?

That's all we had, I mean we couldn't have any church

07:30 services where we were. Further back they might've, but we didn't. But the padres did their best to celebrate the occasion. We had a very good padre.

So you were there till early January '43?

We moved over to Gona and there I took over from what was left of my old 2/27th, my old

08:00 mate Harry Katekar, who had been the adjutant of the battalion and was still the adjutant, or he was in command actually of what was left. There were only three officers and sixty-seven fellows left out of battalion. They went over there with two hundred and three hundred and twenty-three or something like that. The rest had all been killed or wounded, and I took over from him at a river west of Gona

08:30 proper, but I saw the graves of all my old mates in the 2/27th and I counted eighty-six of them, and another fifteen I knew had been badly wounded and had been taken back to the dressing station a mile or two back and fifteen had died there. So that's a hundred and one we'd lost there.

And when you came across those graves did you mark the moment? Did you

09:00 **pause and…?**

That's all I could do. The then padre of the 2/27th had personally buried all the fellows there and put a little white wooden cross, you see, on them, with their name on, and that's how I knew how many belonged to the 27th.

And when you saw the massive amount of graves did you,

09:30 **were you, did you consider what could've become of you if you'd had stayed with the battalion?**

I knew I could have been among em. Well, you just take that chance. You've very sorry to see it, but what can you do about it. A lot of the officers were killed there leading their men, and

10:00 including one of my former original platoon commanders and one of the fellows that's in the little snap of us staying at the convalescent depot, he was there, he got killed there too, and a number of others. But they were sent in without any proper reconnaissance on the orders of MacArthur sitting on his tail in Brisbane and issuing ridiculous orders not knowing anything about the conditions and the nature of the country where they had to fight.

10:30 He issued an order, he knew somehow that the 2/27th were arriving at Gona on 25th or 26th of November, I think it was, he issued an order that they will capture Gona tomorrow, and that was just stupid because they needed at least three or four days to make a proper reconnaissance. It was a difficult area and the Japs were well dug in, the same as at Sanananda

11:00 and with snipers and all sorts of difficult considerations to look into, and it's important, it's absolutely essential to make a proper reconnaissance first before you tackle the enemy in a place like that. They weren't given a chance. They had one day to do it. It is, it's ridiculous.

After seeing that and

11:30 **feeling quite passionate about the circumstances the men found themselves in how did you continue on? How did you pick yourself up and move on?**

Well, we just went on, and I knew. I struck Harry Katekar. We took over from him a bit north of Gona proper, because he was in charge of what was left of the battalion, and he told me all about it. I didn't know till he told me. I knew there'd been a lot killed but he told me

12:00 exactly what happened about the lack of reconnaissance and so on.

And when you took over the 2/27th how were the men?

36th you mean? They were all right, there was nothing wrong with the men. But they lacked training.

No, the 2/27th, you took over…?

When I met them again?

Yeah.

The seventy of them again? They were

12:30 just going. They were leaving. They were happy.

What was their morale like? How were their spirits?

It was pretty good. Always was. Yes, but they were they were very concerned that they'd lost so many of their mates unnecessarily. I mean, they didn't say very much to me,

13:00 but I found the full story from Harry Katekar.

And how was Harry Katekar at this time? What was his mood like?

Well, he, I mean he was reconciled, these things happen, what can you do about it? But he was also the one in command. He was, there were three officers left, but he was, the other two I think were pretty sick and he was the one that really running the show.

13:30 He came from Renmark and he was a solicitor and I knew him beforehand and knew him in the battalion, he was a very good fellow. He died about, I suppose, six or seven years ago.

And what were your orders when you took over from the 2/27th?

When I went, when I took over from the 2/27th?

14:00 Just to go to Gona West, as it was called, from the 2/27th, and they'd tried to, I understood, to get across the river, but the Japs were sitting on the other side and beat them up if they tried to get over on the way, because you couldn't swim it, it was too deep and wide, and they'd built a little raft to get across, but the fellows were killed trying to go to the

14:30 other side, and we experienced the same thing.

Well, how did you overcome that?

Well, what happened…we did a lot of patrol work again out on the side, I went out on one or two of them myself to see what the country was like. It was very heavy jungles, and then eventually one of the patrols came back towards the

15:00 coast and they followed, going up the track which ran just inside the coast, and they went up a long way. The Japs had cleared out and they reported that to me and I immediately went over the river and the camp where they'd been. When we went there Harry told me that the Japs were there and he didn't know how many, of course, but he knew there was a fair number of them, anyway,

15:30 but what had happened…when we went there, when the Japs were still there, we had our one three inch mortar with us and we fired a mortar every night, we were ordered to do it, every night at odd distances and at different times, and I think that made the Japs decide to get out, because when the patrol reported that they'd gone I went over, there'd been we reckoned, just about a thousand men there judging from the

16:00 equipment and so on they'd left behind. And I had an unusual experience there, I saw a bottle on the ground with some brown liquid and I thought, "Gee, there's some rifle oil, we could do with that." So I picked it up and there was no label on. I turned it over and there was a white horse on the cork. So I thought, "Gee might be some whiskey." So I pulled the cork out and sniffed it and sure enough it was White Horse Whiskey. My guess was that some Jap had had it in his pack

16:30 they'd moved out in the middle of the night and he'd forgotten to put it in his pack. Anyway, the brigade major happened to be with me at that time and he said, "I'll have half for brigade headquarters," and I said, "Well, we'll just have to have the other half," so several of us knocked it over. It was an unusual find.

And you had Americans in your battalion?

Not in the battalion, they were under my command. But I didn't get them to do anything because of what he'd told me, that they weren't much use. They wouldn't

17:00 attack 'em. So the Yanks wouldn't attack the Japs, well, what do you do with them?

Did you ever test that to see if they would?

No, I didn't try. I was told they would never attack 'em, so they stayed there, never moved.

And once you eventually made it over to the river?

The Amboga River? Yes, well, it was clear that the Japs had cleared out, and we reckoned there must have been about a battalion or perhaps a thousand men there from all the junk

17:30 they left behind. They'd gone. But then what happened next was…we were there for quite a little while, and then the big battle at Sanananda took place again and the Japs were beaten and they were all tyring to get away. We were sent back to Gona and we lined with standing patrols along the track leading back for a couple of miles to a place called Jumbora,

18:00 or just this side of Jumbora, the coast side of Jumbora, and our job was to capture or kill the Japs as they tried to escape, which we did.

And what did you do with the captured Japanese?

They were sent back as prisoners. Sent back, there weren't very many of them because most of them wouldn't surrender, don't worry. Most of them carried a grenade that they would, not only there, but

18:30 the other battalions that fought at Sanananda proper and at Buna, they had a lot of sick people, they had hospitals, and each man, I'm told, had a grenade, two grenades. One to throw at whoever was coming and one to kill himself with the other one. So they didn't get much mercy. You weren't going to wait to have a grenade thrown at you, were you?

Well, I was going ask that, from the kamikaze…?

19:00 Well the same sort of idea, yeah.

Did any of your men get injured from their own suicides?

Well, I don't know. I understood yes, and certainly a lot did over at Buna I understand.

And from there?

Well, from there, eventually after a little while we were flown back, went back to Dobodura, the other drome, which had by that time been made

19:30 operative, and we were there for about ten days before we got on a plane and went back to Moresby. And while I was there my second in command and I went and inspected where we'd been fighting there

on the Sanananda track and looked at the bunkers that the Japs had built, and we understood then why we didn't succeed against them, because they were well sited so that they could take advantage of every bit of the way they were facing,

20:00 and they were not very far apart, and if a mob went to attack one the people on the right would fire across them and hit 'em on the side, that sort of thing. And they had a lot of them.

So what did you do with the men for that ten days at the aerodrome?

Nothing. We were just waiting for the planes to come, and

20:30 a strange thing happened on the way there. We, for the first time we were issued with the American K-ration, which contained, it's a tin with three days' meals in and typical American, there's quite a lot of highly spiced stew in it which is very nice and cigarettes and chewing gum and the usual things, and our fellows thought this was wonderful

21:00 after living on bully and biscuits for about six weeks, so they thought it was wonderful. But after about two or three days they refused to eat it any longer, and they wanted their bully and biscuits again. I had to get a jeep and scout round and get it. See, there were only a hundred and six of us left. Scout round, and bully and biscuits for them again.

Why did they not want to finish the pack?

They don't, they thought the stew was wonderful at the start but

21:30 it wasn't their usual food and they soon got tired of it and didn't want it any more and they wouldn't eat it. Well, then we flew back to Moresby, and I went down with malaria straight away and I was in hospital for a couple of weeks, in the meantime the battalion flew home without me and they all went on leave, of course, and I eventually went home on leave and spent, what'd we have? Two weeks' leave

22:00 at home. And we all collected again in, where'd we go? A camp just outside of Townsville.

And was there training at the camp outside of Townsville?

Not very much training, because we were only there a short time. No, we were there for quite a while, that's right. No, we didn't do much training. We did some, but not a great deal, and then

22:30 while I was there I had another dose of malaria and went to the hospital there and we were really suffering from malaria, as we had been in New Guinea, but there particularly bad. You know, evacuating ten or a dozen fellows a day. So it was really hopeless to try training in that sort of situation. And a lot of us, including myself, were sent to Charters

23:00 Towers, which was about ninety miles away, where they had a convalescent place, and we were given a lot of very nice fresh food so as to build us up again, including a number of the drugs to, because we were all suffering from anaemia. You know, we were getting very thin and so on, and that's what they dosed us up for.

Can I just ask that you put your hands down, because we can't see...?

Sorry.

Your mouth, then. That's...

Sorry. Well, that's what happened.

23:30 I was there for two or three weeks. So were the others that went there.

So where did the, where do you think the anaemia started to happen for you?

It started at the end of, in New Guinea, because the effect of malaria is to cause that. You know what anaemia is, I suppose, roughly? Your blood

24:00 gets affected and you feel unwell and all the rest. Anyway, we all recovered from the anaemia there and came back eventually. And we hadn't been back there very long when we were sent up to Cairns and out up on the hill outside Cairns, a place called Kuranda. Have you ever been to Cairns? Well there's a railway ran up to

24:30 a place called Kuranda. It was rather funny. At the bottom of the hill is a place called Redlynch, and the trains going up the hill had to split into two to get up the hill, so they went up in two parts up the hill. And we were about two miles from Kuranda. We had to build ourselves a new camp in the scrub there, and that was all right. But then the powers that be decided that

25:00 we'd go to Darwin, and so they sent an advance party up there, and as soon as they got there two or three of the fellows went down with malaria, so they didn't want malaria. They'd tried their best to avoid having malaria in Darwin. So the medical people shunted these fellows back as quickly as they could. And then a lot of the other battalions some of the other battalions, the brigade were not far from where we were at Kuranda,

25:30 and we were shifted to another brigade and to the 6th brigade, and we were ordered to take from the others those who had had malaria, which suited us. They'd disbanded three militia battalions and we got a number of fellows from those battalions to build up our numbers. The 39th, the 49th and the 53rd. Anyway, we built

26:00 our numbers up, and we were there for quite a while. But then another funny thing about the malaria, the powers that be said, "As you're getting all these fellows who've had malaria, the fellows who've not had malaria, we'll take them from you and they'll go to one of the other battalions to build them up." So we were ordered to have a formal parade of the whole battalion and I ordered them to stand, take two paces

26:30 forward those who have not had malaria, and of course they weren't gonna leave the show. Two fellows took a pace forward and we lost two men only and we acquired a whole lot of fellows that had had malaria.

Well, what precautions did you and the other men take against malaria?

Against malaria? When we went to Moresby we were issued with quinine, and we were ordered to take one quinine tablet a day. That was all right.

27:00 We took it religiously. They said you won't get malaria if you take the quinine, the medical people. But we all got malaria. It just didn't suppress it at all, or only very temporarily. Then they, later on they brought in another substance called Atebrin, which made a huge difference. The fellows took that, and the number of people going down with malaria was markedly reduced, and

27:30 when we were in New Britain we were still on the Atebrin, very strictly enforced, the one tablet a day, and we got very, very few the whole time we were in New Britain.

But from Australia you went back to New Guinea, is that right?

After leave?

After leave, you did have some more leave?

Well, after the Islands, after New Guinea, we came back. I was left behind with malaria, but I came down on the mailbags in a DC3

28:00 to Mareeba, which was an aerodrome in northern Queensland, and from there I flew down to Sydney and then home on leave. That was all right, it was very good. And after leave we had to reassemble again, and that's when we reassembled at Townsville, and then we went up to this camp at Kuranda which we made just, not far

28:30 from Cairns. And we were there for not very long, and then we were ordered to go down to, where did we go? To Townsville, I think and we got on a ship and went back to Moresby, and we went up to Koitaki, the area where we'd been. No, sorry, we went from there, flown across to Dobodura again, and we were

29:00 camped at Soputa near where we'd been fighting, and we were there for quite a long while and we did a lot of training there and a lot of work. We helped build a hospital. We did a lot of ship unloading and all sorts of jobs, as well as quite a lot of training.

Well, what was the training you were now doing?

Well, all sorts, but one in particular. We had the opportunity to do some training. We cooperated with

29:30 the American barge company doing a landing from the sea. We all got on these barges and landed on the sea coast, and that's not as easy as it might sound because you had to organise, there was a regular routine for that. That party went ashore to cover you while the rest landed and they had to get in their order ready to fight, you see, it was quite good training. But

30:00 all sorts of training, and they got a, really, the first real time that they had a good lot a training there. And eventually there were a whole lot of troops there, including a whole lot of Americans. We helped build a hospital because we had a lot of tradesmen, and we established for the 36th a cricket oval, because there were two cemeteries built there.

30:30 Big cemeteries. One for the Americans. One for the Australians, and of course there was a lot of couch brought for the cemetery, and a lot of it, we got the bits and planted, got the fellows, the whole battalion, to march out and put bits of couch in this area, and it all took root and made a good cricket area. We got concrete and made a cricket pitch. They established a racecourse with the horses that the Japs had left behind, and every week we had a race

31:00 meeting.

Who were the jockeys?

We had, each battalion or each unit there seemed to have a horse or two, and there was a bit of stealing of the horses went on. But they even had bookies, but they were illegal, they weren't allowed because

the profits were supposed to go to the prisoner of war fund. So one of my officers was a very good mathematician, so he was

31:30 put in charge of a totalisator to run, and that was the only authorised means of betting that they had.

And the cricket pitch, who were the teams made up of?

Well, the other, a number of units nearby. You see, the whole, our 6th Brigade were all there and there were various other units, quite a lot of miscellaneous units there. So we had a good competition there for a while.

Did the American troops try to play cricket?

32:00 No, they didn't try it, no.

Did they understand it?

I don't know. They didn't come anyway, so it didn't matter.

Did you have much to do with the American troops there?

No, we didn't. We had quite a bit to do with, we had a bit to do, because at Oro Bay, which is south of Buna, which was the Americans' main port by that time, we did a lot of exercises out in

32:30 the hills behind Oro Bay, difficult country. High, very rough, hilly country and then we got friendly with a Yank unit there and they said they'd like to do the exercise. So we said, "All right, we'll provide the umpires," and so off they go with our umpires and they were going to be fed from the air. They weren't going to carry their rations on their back as we'd

33:00 done in New Guinea earlier, and after a day or so the air force couldn't find them so they were without their rations. So they all went back without completing the show. But the air force were very good, the Yank air force there. I took, and some of the other officers took the opportunity to fly with them, because we got them to do a bit of strafing

33:30 as part of the exercise, which they did, and I went up behind, see, they had different types of planes, and I went up in a Boston plane, which was a fighter-bomber. A one-man plane, and the folding boat which he had behind the pilot we threw out and I lay down on my stomach behind him while he was doing the exercise, and he was strafing and so on, which was

34:00 quite interesting, and then after it was all over, of course, we went back. But we did quite a lot of training with the Yanks and their air force, which was very good because we'd never had experience with that sort of thing before.

And how were you seeing the battalion change in front of you with the training?

Well, you don't see it but you know they've had it and therefore they know how to meet

34:30 different situations.

And was your confidence growing in them?

Yes, very definitely. Yes. See, we did a lot of training when we went back to Soputa the second time. We were camped alongside the Girua River, it was quite a big river, and we had a road coming from Oro

35:00 Bay, and a lot of Americans came over to visit the American cemetery, and I know on one occasion a truckload of Yanks came to us, they'd been to the cemetery, they'd just come back to, just come to go to the cemetery, and they inspected the cemetery for perhaps an hour and then they came and said, "How do we get back to Oro Bay?" By that time they had made roads. They're hopeless.

So you were

35:30 **in New Guinea for just about a year before moving on to New Britain?**

No, we were there for about ten months at Soputa and we did a lot a training all round the place, and we had a good look, everybody had a good look at where we'd been fighting and at Gona. Our brigade commander decided after we'd been going for a good many months that we better have a bit a time off, so down at Cape

36:00 Killerton, I think it was, we established a camp, and the fellows had a week down there doing nothing except learning to swim and just enjoying themselves on the beach. Which was a very good idea, it was a good idea of his. And they enjoyed it, I can assure you. But it was necessary to learn to swim, because quite frequently we had to swim across rivers. Not so much in New Guinea, but in New Britain it turned

36:30 out we had to do quite a lot of it.

Well, just, that's a very good point. How many of the men didn't know how to swim?

Quite a few didn't. A lot of the country fellows didn't know. I suppose most of the city fellows had, you know, learnt to swim at the beaches, but I'm sure a lot of the country fellows never learned to swim til

then.

And then just, firstly,

37:00 **the hospital that you built, what hospital was that?**

I think it was the 2/7th, I think it was. I'm not sure of that, but it was an Australian hospital anyway. And the sisters were there and they were always at the races. They enjoyed that. It was a bit unusual.

Well, was there a makeshift 2/7th prior to you?

No, well,

37:30 there were tents, you see, but our fellows built permanent buildings there for the hospital. They did a lot of the work for the hospital and building, because we had a lot of tradesmen, you see. I don't know if you know, but Number Five Platoon in an infantry battalion is a battalion of tradesmen, plumbers, carpenters, all sorts of tradesmen, and those fellows are handy in that sort of

38:00 situation.

And where were they getting their supplies from?

I suppose from Moresby, I don't know. I never inquired about that. A lot of local timber was used, I know that. Local trees were chopped down and used.

And did you have much to do with the locals?

The natives? Not there, no,

38:30 not very much. I didn't have very much to do with them at all earlier, or even when we went back a second time. They didn't come into the picture much at all at that stage.

Now, you said some of the training was for the landings?

Yeah.

39:00 **Did you, with the men that you were training with, some of them at that stage didn't know how to swim, did you have any accidents or problems?**

No, we didn't. No, that was all right.

And what ships were you training with?

American barges. They're landing barges with a ramp on the front that they let down.

And how often were you

39:30 **training for the landings?**

How often? We did it. I think we only did the one complete battalion exercise with the whole battalion on some of these landing barges. They'd gone in further away and then came round to a landing beach and all took part in it. The whole battalion was in it.

And you were preparing for New Britain?

Well, we had no idea of New Britain at that stage, but we were doing this

40:00 in case we had to do a landing wherever we were sent to. We didn't know about New Britain at that stage, because what happened eventually, after about ten months there, we were sent to Lae, only for a couple of weeks, and then we went up to Bulolo, inland in the mountains a bit where they'd

40:30 previously had gold dredges working at Wau, and we were there for quite some time. It was a much better climate. The fellows enjoyed it, cold nights or cool nights and pleasant warm days. It was a good place. And then we were eventually sent down to Lae again, and this was in October '44, told that we were to go to New Britain,

41:00 and so eventually we got onto barges that took us out, 'cause Lae didn't have a wharf, got on barges that took us to the Dutch ship, the Swartenhondt. I've got a picture of it there. It's quite a fair-sized ship, and we got on her, all got on and sailed, and we called at Finschhafen for orders from the admiralty people they had there. It's a place

41:30 that Margaret went to a bit earlier. Anyway, and off we go to New Britain. Now, do you know the map of, do you know where New Britain is and so on? It's roughly east.

Yes. But what I will do is to stop you here before we get to New Britain because the tape's run out and we can pick it up from there.

OK.

Tape 8

00:33 **So, Cedric, just before we move on to New Britain can I just go back to the beachhead battles that you were fighting at Sanananda and Gona?**

Right.

From your point of view why was Sanananda a hellhole?

Well, because there were I gather there was about a thousand or twelve hundred or something Japs there,

01:00 and because the battalion or the brigade was ordered to capture it no matter what and given very little time to do it. They didn't have time to make a proper reconnaissance, and because they had jungle conditions, they had scrub, they had open areas where if you were in that you were fairly slaughtered. The Japs had lots of machine guns. They sited their machine guns very well in

01:30 bunkers and elsewhere, and they just slaughtered the blokes in the open areas and when they came out from scrub or whatever. I mean, I wasn't there at Gona, but that's what I'm told by my mates who were there.

Just from your...we'll just stick to your story, and you were on the Sanananda Track?

That's right.

So I understand that it rained every night?

It did.

How did that hamper your...?

02:00 Well, it hampered things in that it, all we had in the way of clothing apart from the uniform was a groundsheet which you could put round yourself and a tin hat on which, of course, deflected the rain, and that's all we had. I mean, there were no umbrellas or things like that. So it meant that the

02:30 fellows got fairly wet very often, and if they're wet they're not very happy, particularly if they've all got the signs of malaria that, you know, the start of the shivering and all that sort of thing. So it really wasn't very good.

And how did you manage to sleep?

Just slept on the ground wherever you were.

What did you use to protect yourself from the mud?

03:00 The groundsheet protected you from that. That was wrapped round you, and your legs got muddy, but you could manage generally to keep warm and keep dry with the groundsheet round you. You had nothing else. See, you only had that, that was the only, you didn't have blankets. You had your uniform on and the groundsheet round you and your tin hat on,

03:30 that was all. That was one of the difficulties, that people got very wet and remained wet, but you couldn't do anything about that.

Well, the conditions were very different from the desert that you had been fighting in?

Hell, yes. Yes.

You've just talked a bit about the rain and the mud,

04:00 **but for you what were the differences?**

Well, what you've said. The rain and the mud, as compared with the sand in the desert, and the land in Syria was all dry and it wasn't sand so much but it was dry and hot. Quite different. No rain there.

04:30 **And your task was to detail platoons to go out on fighting patrols?**

No, I'd give orders to the company commanders. They would make whatever, give whatever orders they'd wanted about their platoons. But I would direct them what to do and they in turn would direct their platoon commanders what to do, where to go and so on.

And where would you get your intelligence from?

My intelligence and my orders

05:00 came from the brigade commander, who was my immediate superior.

And how did your signals or communication system work?

Well, we had these little portable or what were called 108 sets, wireless sets but they were no use in the jungle conditions, they were discarded very

05:30 early in the piece, as far as I can remember anyway. And so any messages that needed to be sent were sent by runner, one of the fellows who carried a message back to wherever it had to go or forward as the case may be.

And

06:00 **you've talked quite a lot about the heavy casualties, but what did you actually see yourself of the casualties?**

The total?

No. Did you see any of the wounded yourself?

Yes. I didn't see many of the dead. I saw a few, but I certainly saw a lot of the wounded because they, in a lot of cases they came back just the short distance to where I was and I'd see them. They got all

06:30 sorts of wounds. A lot in the legs because of the Japs being lower, and a lot in the arms as well as snipers up in the trees, they'd hit people like Bert Ward, he was hit in the head, and a bullet went right through his tin hat and made a big furrow in the top of his skull. We had all sorts of wounds in different parts of the body, because a machine gun would hit the fellows anywhere in the body.

07:00 There was no doubt about that.

And did the fellows wear their tin hats fairly religiously?

I think generally they did, yes, because it was some sort of protection, although they were not designed to resist bullets. They were designed to protect the fellows' heads from shrapnel fragments, that was the original purpose of them.

07:30 From artillery shells bursting.

And when those wounded came back to where you were did you…?

Not very far, only a few yards normally. What?

Did you talk to them or…?

Well, it depended on their condition. Some were able to talk to you momentarily and some weren't able to. It varied so much.

I imagine that would've been quite

08:00 **distressing?**

It was. I remember particularly at Sanananda one very young fellow coming back, he got wounded in the arm, I think, he was really, how will I describe it? Upset over it, he was almost crying, and it's on record that at Gona one of the fellows complained to his officer, that he said wherever he went, "Some bastard

08:30 shot me." And ultimately he was trying to get out, I suppose. He had two or three bullet wounds in him.

Well, at least he still had a sense of humour.

Well, he didn't, but the rest of us did.

And

09:00 **you didn't stay physically at Sanananda when victory came?**

No, we were at, when the victory, that is the total victory at Buna, Gona, Sanananda took place we were then at Gona, or Gona West by the River Amboga, that's where we were at that time.

09:30 **Well, when you got news that Buna, Gona, Sanananda did end up as a victory how did you react?**

Well, nobody did anything about it as far as I know.

10:00 Our mob didn't, they were just very glad it was all over. Simple as that. They didn't celebrate in any way at all. Nothing too worthwhile to celebrate.

And I have heard stories from others, I don't know if you came across this at all in your time in New Guinea?

What's that?

But I'm just wondering if you had heard any stories yourself while you were

10:30 **in New Guinea about the Japanese cannibalism?**

Yes, I had an actual experience. One of my fellows. We did a lot of patrol work, particularly beyond the Amboga River, a lot of patrol work, and one day one of our patrols, they were not, we didn't have very many fit men to take part, but one of the patrols bumped into a whole mob of Japs and they had to get out, obviously, and they did. But one fellow was killed. So they

11:00 went back, a number of the fellows went back the next day to bury him, all the flesh had been cut off his body. There was only one reason for that, wasn't there? That's the only experience we had of that. We heard of plenty of other instances, but not our own people. But we did know about what happened at Gona. You've no doubt heard the story of how they murdered the six women missionaries there, haven't you?

11:30 Well, you see two of them were killed, they separated them and two were bayoneted to death and the other four were taken down to the beach at Buna they were stripped, had their heads cut off and their bodies thrown in the sea. Now, one of those girls that was killed at Buna was the sister, her brother in the 2/27th. So it was a bit close, wasn't it? He didn't know at the time, he didn't know for a while after it, but he was told.

12:00 **Well, when those incidents about cannibalism and stories were floating around, how did that change?**

The views of the fellows? Well, it made 'em tend to say, "Well, we'll make sure we kill 'em. We won't take 'em prisoner," because if they've got a grenade with 'em they're all the more sure they'd kill 'em first before they got the chance to throw a grenade.

12:30 We had the job later when we were at Gona. Come back from Gona West and man the track running from Gona back to Jumbora. Now that was a couple of miles, and our job was to catch the Japs tyring to flee from the battles of Sanananda and Buna, and our fellows had the job of either capturing them or killing them, and very, very

13:00 few surrendered, and those that did, you know, they weren't in very good condition. They could barely walk, I understand. But we had standing patrols all along that track for the purpose of catching them or killing them. But when they heard about, particularly, they didn't know at that time about what happened at Gona with the girls, but they certainly knew quickly about it. One of our own

13:30 mates who'd been cannibalised, and that made 'em feel, "Well, we're not going to bear them." They took no chances with 'em, they'd shoot 'em quick smart.

And were there Japanese bodies buried on…?

No, our fellows at Gona, for instance, there was a hell of a

14:00 lot of 'em I don't know the number, but there were a lot and there's pictures in the book as a matter of fact, a lot of pictures were taken of all the dead bodies there. There were a hell of a lot killed at Gona, hell of a lot. The Japs didn't bury their dead. They were all just lying around with the maggots eating them up.

And when 36 Battalion would,

14:30 **along the Amboga River area that you were patrolling, when Japanese were killed were they buried or…?**

Well, what happened I know. I remember one patrol went over and some of our fellows had been killed on that patrol, and then another patrol went over, I think on the next day, they buried our fellows and they also buried the two Japs

15:00 that were killed there, I know that. But it depended on the circumstances whether they'd bury them. If they were fighting still they certainly wouldn't bury them. They didn't go out of their way to bury 'em. But the ones that were killed at Gona were stinking, they had to be buried according to my information. But when we took over at Gona proper

15:30 there was one joke, there was a creek at Gona and the water used to go in and out with the tide and there was one dead Jap that floated in and out every day, and they called him Charlie. He floated into the sea and back up the river and so on. Well, they weren't gonna wade out in the deep river and pick him up and bury him.

16:00 **Well, given all of these high, very high emotional feelings that were floating around, I guess from your point of view, how easy was it to hate the Japanese?**

Well, see, before we went there we knew what had happened in Nanking in 1937. When the Japs took possession of that place they killed a quarter of a million civilians, men, women and children,

16:30 just for the fun of it, and we knew that. So we were well aware of their cruelty. We didn't know the deaths of these girls at Gona till well afterwards, but we knew about our fellow that had been cannibalised straight away and that's what influenced the fellows. As you can imagine.

Well, you've mentioned that

17:00 **the 36th Battalion had a padre, and I understand it was his responsibility to do the burials?**

That's right. He didn't have to but he did, and the photo is in our battalion history there of him doing the work with the graves.

But did you have any role yourself in, for example writing to families or…?

No, I mean it was impossible. For one thing we didn't have any, or hardly

17:30 any writing materials. But we didn't have time, really, at the time and in any event I didn't know where to write to. I mean, we knew the fellows but we didn't necessarily know their widows or mothers or whoever it was. I mean, the platoon commanders might have known. They may have written, but I didn't know all those details to write.

And whose

18:00 **job was it to record the deaths or keep track of them?**

I don't really know. We had to report almost every day to brigade headquarters of so many dead, and at some stage the information as to who was killed was passed, back but I really can't recall who did that. But it happened, but I can't tell you how it was done.

18:30 **And what other tactics did you use? Did you use any surprise tactics against the Japanese yourself?**

Well, no, I can't say that we did. The only surprise tactics

19:00 you could ever use would be to come at them from a different direction, I suppose, but they were cunning enough to site their defences all round, so no matter which direction you approached you were met with pretty severe, usually light machine gun fire. They were very good at that sort of thing, how they sited their bunkers.

19:30 **And moving through the jungle pathways that you were on, how much did you rely on sound? Could you hear the enemy?**

Sometimes you would, but very often you wouldn't, because the nature of the country was such that firstly you were going through mud most of the time, and that really

20:00 doesn't make any sound, and in any event all the vegetation deadened the sound a lot, so you sometimes might, but very often you didn't.

And what about smelling them, could you smell their campsites or…?

Not the campsites, but their bodies. I mean, Gona was a good example of that. They reckoned it was absolutely, I wasn't there at the time, I came later, but all the fellows that were there said it was absolutely awful, the

20:30 Stink, because they didn't bury their dead. They used them as a fire step, as a protection in front of where they were firing. And our fellows couldn't understand how they could put up with it. So they told me.

It's a very gruesome picture.

Yeah. And of course Sanananda itself, down nearer the beach it was very swampy and a lot of actual

21:00 pools of water and they'd see bodies floating round in it, you know, absolutely riddled with maggots and so on. So they told us.

And did you ever see any yourself?

No, I didn't, because by the time we got to Gona the battalion had buried all Japs except this one, Charlie,

21:30 but all the rest had been buried. There were, I've forgotten, there were a good many hundred Japs they'd buried there. It's all recorded in the history, but they had the job of burying them all. And talking of that, a funny thing. When we went back to Soputa the second time the powers that be decided they'd better have a Jap cemetery. So they prepared a cemetery on the

22:00 Sanananda Track and got a lot a bodies. The Jap bodies had been left lying around, and they got a lot of them and buried them and put a little marker on each one with some Japanese characters, I don't know whether they were the names, but Japanese, they might have got the names, I don't know, but they had characters on these pegs, and the Yanks used to come along in a jeep, go past our camp at

22:30 Soputa, go down the Sanananda track to visit this cemetery. Not just to pay respects but what they did, according to all accounts, was that they'd dig up someone to get their skulls, they wanted their skulls, and they made, cut the tops off and make ashtrays of them. And a funny thing happened, by that time

the army had established a

23:00 field punishment centre not far from Soputa, and a couple of Yanks went down one day to this cemetery to get a skull, and on their way back two Japs marched out on the tracks with their hands held up and a white flag, and the Yanks turned round and went the other way. But then they thought they'd better do the right thing, so they came back and picked these fellows up and they took 'em down to the first

23:30 other troops, which was an Australian field punishment centre. At that time that field punishment centre was commanded by our regimental sergeant major. He was an old soldier, and he promptly relieved them of all the watches they'd had on them. See, they'd picked all the watches of our dead. Not only our, not only our battalion but all, there were a lot of Australians killed there and he relieved them of all those and when the Yanks got back to their unit

24:00 they handed over the Japs to him to look after, the Yank headquarters wanted to, wrote a nasty note saying, "What have you done with all these Yanks?" These Japs had complained, the Yanks had complained that our sergeant major had taken all the watches off them, and they wrote complaining about this and said, "What's the idea?" So he being an old soldier he said, "Well they came and they wanted cigarettes, and they offered whatever

24:30 watches they had to get a cigarette." He had a whole host of watches taken from the dead. So that's what he put in the answer to the Yanks' letter.

And what do you think the fascination was with getting a Japanese skull?

I can't understand that, but that's what they did, I believe. Some of

25:00 our fellows asked 'em and so on, but that's what they did. Seemed a funny thing to me.

And did you have to discipline any of your troops while you were in New Guinea?

Only for minor things. Nothing very serious.

What sort of minor things?

A fellow might go away somewhere or other, I wouldn't know where, but he wasn't present for a day or two and he was absent without leave,

25:30 but there were other, there might be an odd fight or something or other, but nothing was very serious.

And how easy was it to keep the discipline going in?

It wasn't difficult at all. It was quite easy.

Under such very stressful conditions?

Yeah. Oh no, it was easy. We never had any trouble, really, with that.

26:00 **And was there any difference in discipline between the AIF, the 2/27th and the 36th?**

No, there was no difference at all. No, they were the same. They were the same people, really. The only difference between the AIF, they were all experienced troops. They'd fought in Syria, for example and they knew what fighting was all about. Whereas the militia boys, at the start, didn't know anything about it, you see.

26:30 But they soon learned.

Well, it is interesting to hear about things like watches and things being taken off the Japanese, but I haven't often heard about things going missing from Australian dead.

No, well, we tried as far as possible to, I think it's well known, to bury our dead people as soon as we could. We couldn't always do it immediately. For example,

27:00 in the patrols we did over the other side of the Amboga we had to bury some dead belonging to the 25th Brigade. They'd been there early in the piece, or it was January when we were there, probably in November, and they'd had a few dead fellows killed and they hadn't been able to bury them. Well, when we came on the scene we buried those fellows. Took their dog tags

27:30 off them and handed them in. But one of the fellows, strangely, had on an unusual shirt. It was a woollen, a khaki woollen shirt. It was the strangest thing I could remember about the dead, and back about, what would it be? Fifteen years ago, I suppose, we had a reunion ceremony here for members of the 7th Division,

28:00 and we got a few from interstate, and one fellow came from Queensland and his name, I remembered the name of the dead fellow 'cause he had his dog tags on, and I said to him, "We buried a fellow of your surname that had a, was wearing a shirt, a woollen shirt." He said, "That was my brother." They'd got out without being able to bury him, you see. But wasn't it strange that we buried him,

28:30 and being with this woollen shirt on, which was very strange and he said, "No we each had one of

those."

Well, you've mentioned that you had a bit a contact with Vasey, but what were you views of Blamey and...?

29:00 Not very good. You know the story of his famous or infamous parade at Koitaki, don't you? Well, that information went like wildfire around all the troops in Moresby at the time, and there were a lot a very rude remarks made by the troops about that, because my old battalion at Effogi had fought their guts out for two and a half days and held the Japs for two and a half days which was absolutely vital, and they weren't running at all. They were retreating in good order

29:30 at the command of the brigade commander. They were obeying command, and he was not far behind, so he was in the joke too. That was a shocking thing to say, and our fellows from the 2/27th still remember it, and they've never forgiven him for it. They still talk about it.

30:00 **What do you think it showed on his behalf?**

I don't know. Total ignorance of what went on, he didn't know. I think I've told you that he came with Frankie Forde [Prime Minister] and MacArthur to near Uberi when we were there, that's as far as they got. They had no idea of the conditions that the troops were, that the battalion was

30:30 fighting in. Not just our battalion, but the rest of 'em too. They wouldn't have a bar of him from then on. I'm told, I didn't know, but some of the men, they had race meetings in (UNCLEAR), and he'd turn up and they'd ignore him or give him a few boos and so on. But I do know this,

31:00 the wounded people in hospital at Moresby, he visited them one day, and they knew he was coming and they'd armed themselves, got the nurses to get lettuce leaves, and when he marched along the corridor, the wards, they turned their backs on him and chewed their lettuce leaves. We heard that at the time. No, it was disgraceful, I reckon, terrible.

31:30 And so many people had been killed to do that sort of thing and they were following orders. It was the only thing their poor old brigade commander could do, because they were outnumbered about six to one. And in Moresby itself there was a hell of a panic. I know that because we were down there at that time and the great

32:00 panic everywhere there. All the base troops.

And did the officers talk about Blamey's speech and actions much or...?

Well, they certainly had a lot to say about that episode. But they knew him, see, they knew him in Palestine and the Middle East. There were all sorts of

32:30 stories about him, not only with women, they could forgive that of course but about, he was supposed to have been involved in rackets. One was over the pictures being shown at the picture theatre there. He was supposed to have got a rake off every picture shown. The cost of prices of every picture shown. Another one was on toothpaste. We couldn't get Colgate's, like the usual

33:00 toothpaste we had in Australia, the canteens had toothpaste made by a firm called Best and Gee in Melbourne which nobody had ever heard of, but the Victorians told us it was made in Melbourne, and our fellows, there was nothing else they could use, and they reckoned it was pretty poor toothpaste, but the Victorians claimed he was getting a rake off on every tube of toothpaste sold. I don't know whether that's true or not, but that's what they told us.

33:30 So all these stories about him.

I haven't heard those stories before.

Well, that's what they say.

So he was profiting from the war, I guess?

Yes, that was the idea. Whether that was true I don't know, but that's what they told us. They knew him better than we did because he was a Victorian.

That's an interesting, different picture or side of the man.

He was a strange mixture.

34:00 He incurred the wrath of all the troops in the 6th Division because he was in Greece with them and when he got out of Greece, he got flown out of Greece he took his son with him. His son was the captain in one of the battalions. He should've, if he was taking anyone it should've been one of his principal staff officers. He took his son. That immediately annoyed the 6th Division fellows no end. He was a captain in one of the battalions.

34:30 **And how difficult is it to keep on going when you've got higher in command, you know, men like Blamey, higher in command and making speeches like that?**

Well, you can't do much about the speech, can you? I wasn't at that parade when he addressed the brigade because I was with the 36th that time. This was after they came back from the Kokoda Track,

35:00 and I think the fellows were so astonished they didn't know quite what to do and some of them, I understand there was quite a noise made by the fellows objecting to it, but what could they do? Incidentally, I forgot to tell you. When I was with the

35:30 27th, when we were training in Palestine I had a week's leave in Cairo and that was very good. It's a wonderful place, or was at that time. The RAF [Royal Air Force] had a very good idea, they hired two Thomas Cook houseboats on the Nile. One was used for convalescent officers and the other one for officers on leave. Well, I was lucky to be picked to go on leave. I had to have forty pounds in me pay book, which was a lot of money in those days, to be able to do it. But I went down with the, and you saw the

36:00 photo of the fellows that was on leave with me, Bill Hayward and other fellows, and we had a very good time, and it's a wonderful place, and we were made honorary members of the Gezira Club which is a British Club on a big island in the Nile. It had everything you could think of. A racecourse, polo ground, tennis courts, cricket oval, squash courts, tennis courts, a dance floor, a dining room, everything,

36:30 and we made full use of that, and some of the nurses were also made honorary members, including Margaret, and we'd go there frequently to take advantage of the place. I had the cheek to play their tennis professional. I wasn't a very good tennis player, but I had a game of tennis against him anyway.

Well, I imagine that would've made your time in the Middle East?

It was very good, and that photo that you saw was at the Pyramids

37:00 that's the, or was then the accepted thing, you had to have your photo taken near the pyramid, the big pyramid and we went to another pyramid further down the, step pyramid, which is shown in steps. It's a very ancient pyramid, older than the big one, and we went inside that. We had a guide with us, and he said, "In here you'll see the Australian hieroglyphics." And on the ceiling of the thing some fellow from the First

37:30 AIF had with candle grease, he'd got on somebody's shoulder with a candle, I suppose, and written his name and army number from the first war.

Well, I guess we should move on.

Yes, go ahead, you're, ask me whatever you want to.

To pick up the story,

38:00 **you had orders to move to New Britain?**

That's right, and we got onto the ship called the Swartenhondt, which was a Dutch ship, fairly big ship, the whole battalion got on it and we went to Finschhafen to get orders, and then we set off for a place called Cape Hoskins on the northern coast of New Britain, but when we got twenty or thirty miles from it the skipper said, "Well, you're getting off tomorrow, I'm going into Talesea," which was there was a peninsula

38:30 on the north coast called the Willaumez Peninsula and there's a town halfway down called Talesea, a well-known place. He said, "You'll be at Talesea and you'll get off there." I said, "We're not getting off there, we have to go to Cape Hoskins." He said, "I can't take you there, I haven't got any charts." The people at Finschhafen, the navy people gave him the charts only as far as Talesea, and we weren't getting off. We had all our equipment, everything, so I said, "No, we're

39:00 not getting off. You've got to take us to Cape Hoskins." He said, "I haven't got any charts. I can't do it," and I said, "Well, here's our terrain study." We used to be armed when we were going somewhere with a terrain study with a lot of maps and charts and so on, telling you all about the place you're going to. So I handed him the terrain study, I said, "Here's your chart, now take us." He said, "OK," and he took us on and dropped us off at Cape Hoskins.

39:30 **And we were looking at a picture earlier on of all the stores and…?**

All the stores? Well, we had to take a lot a food with us. Those tins are of food, flour, all sorts of things because we were supplied from Lae from time to time. A small ship called the Tung-song used to periodically turn up and deliver food, all kinds, for us.

40:00 But we worked on the, the Japs had had an airstrip there and we took over from the Yanks and they'd pushed the Japs away but they hadn't bothered to remake the airstrip. Anyway, I had with me, at that place, at Cape Hoskins I had an engineer platoon and they didn't have much to do so I said, "Right, you go ahead and remake the airstrip."

40:30 The Japs, when they left, had put a whole lot of big shells and mines under the airstrip as it was so that when anybody walked on it or drove on it they'd blow up. So the first job the engineers had to do was get them all out, which they did, and then they made the strip and had to cart thousands of tons of

gravel to put in the holes. It'd been bombed a lot, you see, by the Yanks, the strip. They made the strip a nine hundred-yard strip

41:00 and I said, "Well, that's not long enough, you've got to make it full-sized strip." So they made a sixteen hundred-yard strip.

Can I just interrupt? Sorry.

Tape 9

00:30 **Just before we broke, then, you were talking about in Cape Hoskins, preparing the airstrip.**

Yeah.

What else did you get the men to do there, whilst they were spending their time there?

Well, they naturally explored themselves for the immediate surroundings. They always did that wherever they were. It seems to be an Australian characteristic. But there was some interesting things, one or two interesting things to see, because there was a

01:00 bubbling mud spring. It's a very volcanic area and they saw that and there were mountains nearby, they had a good look at those. There was not much else to look at for them to go exploring, but they explored what they could. But then we took over from the Yanks, they'd captured it, a big seventy-five-

01:30 millimetre anti-aircraft gun, a great, long-nosed thing, but the Japs had pulled out the firing pin out of the breech box, so it wasn't much good without the firing pin, and we had plenty of ammunition for it, they'd left that. But I wanted to get a firing pin made so that we could use it in case we needed it. But a firing pin has to be made of hard steel. We have an armourer, of course, in every infantry battalion,

02:00 and he advised that we needed hard steel and he didn't have any. We had plenty of ordinary common soft steel, but we had no hard steel which he could make into a firing pin. So we heard somehow that there'd been another one of these guns over at Gasmata on the south coast of the island, so we thought there might be a firing pin in that gun. So we sent one, the

02:30 pioneer platoon, the officer and his whole platoon across the island. Took 'em five days to go across the island, and they went through and they reported when they came back. They started off with one of the police boys and then they went from village to village with one of the locals to introduce them to the next village. Anyway, they got there but they found that the Japs had also thrown away the firing pin of that one, so their trip was in vain. But then they went along to

03:00 Jacquinot Bay and were there when the other two battalions of the brigade landed on New Britain, which they found quite interesting. I guess the fellows in those two battalions were surprised to see some of their brigade there waiting for them. And then they had to walk back over the island, and they reported that in the middle of the island the natives had never seen white men before.

And how did they respond to the white men?

All right. The natives were quite

03:30 friendly, there was no problem. So that was their expedition in vain. But anyway, there it was. But what happened there, we then gradually moved up the coast with patrols. We were limited how far we could go initially, and then gradually they allowed, the divisional headquarters allowed us to go further and further up with patrols, and then, I think it was just about Christmas time or just

04:00 after Christmas we were allowed to go to a place called Nantambu further along the coast, about a hundred miles or so further along, and establish ourselves with battalion headquarters there. The reason for that was the north coast in the particular season gets very, very rough, and Cape Hoskins had no protection. There was no harbour, just an open beach. That's all right in good weather,

04:30 but when it was really rough it wasn't the best. So we wanted a harbour which could be a good harbour for ships, small ships. So we eventually allowed, we moved up, as I say, gradually, and then finally we moved to this harbour at Nantambu, which was protected by an island in front of it, and it was only a small harbour, but it was good deep water and the ships, when they came to us, they didn't anchor there,

05:00 they tied a rope to some of the trees ashore because it was so deep. It was an old extinct volcano, you see. Anyway, that was all right, and we established ourselves there. We left one platoon as Hoskins to look after the airstrip and the air force, which were then using it every day and keep it in order and so on and protect it. They never had very much to do, but anyway they were there. Well, eventually they joined us up at

05:30 Nantambu and then we did further patrol work from there along and had frequent clashes with the Japs, Jap patrols, and we had to increase the size of our patrols from a platoon to a company because the Japs got, sent more numerous patrols and it wouldn't be fair to meet the bigger ones, so we had

companies going on them. Anyway, they had many, many clashes with them. I went out on one or two of them to see the country and see what it was like. It was

06:00 difficult, because a lot of swamps and a lot of big rivers full of crocodiles, and the fellows weren't very happy swimming across them with the crocodiles. But anyway, they did, and they had fellows watching to shoot 'em, I suppose, and well, eventually, that went on until it was April of 1945, when we were told that another battalion from the south coast would

06:30 cross over and we were to cross over to the south coast, and we established staging posts across there because it turned out it was a five-day march and we had to have these posts so that we were at point A the first night while the other battalion was on point B. Then we'd move on and they'd move on and they crossed over, we crossed over, and we eventually got to the south coast, and there was so much swamp the fellows had to wade through near

07:00 the south coast that when they got there they walked into the sea to get their clothes clean with the mud. And at the south coast they were very welcome, the Salvation Army fellows had a lot of hot coffee for them. So we were there for a day or two and then we had to get on an Australian barge. They were not very wonderful barges. They were big things, but they were not good sea boats, but we got on several of these and we went down to Jacquinot

07:30 Bay, which was about a hundred miles west, and we were there for some weeks, and eventually we got on the well-known steamer the Taroona, which used to run from Melbourne to Hobart, we got on her and we went back to Brisbane and then home on leave. I should've added, talking of the barges. A lot of our fellows didn't have much to do when we were at Hoskins,

08:00 and anyway, they found a couple of Jap barges under mangroves in a lagoon, and one of them they patched up. It had had bullet holes in it and they patched those up, and then the question of the engine, and it was a diesel engine. The Japs had left plenty of diesel engine fuel there, but they needed an injector, being a diesel

08:30 engine, and they dived, because the Japs had taken it out, thrown it away, so it wasn't much use. They dived all round in the lagoon and they eventually found the injector and put it in place, and the thing started to work and came out into the open sea and joined us at Cape Hoskins, and we used that barge quite a lot because it was a good sea boat. It had twin keels and it didn't have a propeller like most boats, it had an Archimedes screw. Which went round and round

09:00 and didn't leave any wake at night. So in other words the air force couldn't pick up one of these boats with an Archimedes screw, so we used that quite a lot. It was a good sea boat, and we could go out in the sea when it was too rough for the American flat bottom barges operated. They thought we were quite mad, of course doing it. But anyway, that's how we worked.

And did the Japanese barge have any markings on it to make it known as Japanese?

Yeah, but they were painted out,

09:30 that was no problem. We had to advise headquarters and everybody that we got this barge, and we were working on the next one when we were told that we were leaving so we didn't bother about finishing that. But the one barge we used a lot, it was such a good sea boat.

Well, just going back to the fighting patrols and the contact with the Japanese that you had, what state were they in when you came across them?

They were ready to fight, and

10:00 we had a lot a battles with them. They were ready to fight, don't worry. But the other important thing, we were told when we went there, there were about thirty, this was by our brigade headquarters, and they got it from divisional headquarters, there were about thirty-five thousand Japs in Rabaul at the eastern end of the island. That was the Jap headquarters in the Southwest Pacific, and…

10:30 But anyway, we landed and went along, but just before Christmas of that year two Japs surrendered to us. They'd escaped from Rabaul in a little folding boat, and at dawn the surrendered to one of our standing patrols further up the coast and they sent them back to us at Hoskins, and we had a Jap interpreter with us and he questioned them. The immediate question was, "How many Jap troops are there in Rabaul?,"

11:00 because everybody wanted to know that, and to our astonishment he said there's about, one of them said there's about a hundred and ten thousand of them there and I wirelessed that information immediately to divisional headquarters and they sent a signal back. 'Cause they were at Madang, of all places, hundreds of miles away, and they sent a signal back saying, "We don't

11:30 believe that. We've got reliable information. There's only thirty-five thousand." Anyway, when the war ended and the Japs surrendered at Rabaul there were a hundred and five thousand of them there. But if the Japs had had a go at us we'd have looked very silly with, they could've sent fifty thousand against us and made mincemeat of us.

Well, the Japanese were notorious for harassing and traumatising local

12:00 **natives of the area.**

That's right.

What were the state of the citizens of New Britain that you came across?

I don't think, I never heard of them having attacked the local natives, 'cause the natives, they were not quite sure where they stood of course, but they would disappear if there was any sign of being harassed, they'd disappear into the middle of the island and they wouldn't be there for the attack. They were quite friendly always with us. They were good.

12:30 But that was the situation. But in other places, for example in New Guinea, there were frequent stories of not only how they killed those, murdered those six missionaries, but they attacked and mutilated women and that sort of thing, and down at Milne Bay it's on record that they, a native boy about

13:00 ten I think he was, they had a flamethrower and they turned their flame thrower onto him and killed him, of course, burned him to death. That sort of thing which was, well, it's as bad as what happened in China and what happened at Gona when they murdered these people. Anyway, that's what happened, and we went back to the brigade headquarters

13:30 at What's-a-name Bay, and we were there for a little while, and then we came home to Australian on the Taroona to Brisbane and then we went on leave. See, we'd been up there for almost two years. All but a couple of months, so we all went gladly on leave and most of us were on our way back from leave when the atom bomb was dropped and they surrendered, and I was passing through Sydney on VP [Victory in the Pacific] Day. Sydney went mad, of course,

14:00 in the streets, everybody was on the streets, and I was on the train coming into Sydney and everybody was standing by waving to us and so on. And then we went up to about twenty miles out of Brisbane to a place called Petrie on the banks of the River Petrie there to see what was to happen to us, 'cause we didn't know, and eventually we were told that we would be disbanded and I got a signal,

14:30 a strange signal, from the CO of the 2/1st Battalion, which was then at Wewak in the very western parts of New Guinea, on the north coast, and the signal said, "When are you coming up here?," and signed by the CO, and I thought, "What the hell's all this?," and I went into headquarters in Brisbane and they said, "Yeah, you've been posted as the CO of the 2/1st Battalion at Wewak." I said, "But I'm not going there, the war's over. I've already put my name in for

15:00 discharge," on the, what they call the five by two scheme. Those who'd been in the war five years and served at least two years outside, we were entitled to a discharge, the war being ended, so I'm not going there. He said, "OK, forget it." So I came home and, but before that we had the pleasure of dealing with our regimental funds. You see, each battalion had a regimental fund into which the canteens fund paid a proportion of

15:30 their profits every month, and we had twelve hundred-odd pounds in that fund. That doesn't sound much now, but it was a lot of money in those days. So the question arose how we were to deal with it, because it belonged to the whole battalion, everyone. So I decided that the best thing was to organise and form a small committee to decide, because it wasn't for the officers to decide. An officer was put in charge of this small committee, and they thought about it and eventually they decided they'd like to have a picnic

16:00 on the banks of the Petrie, well, that was a good idea, but they wanted some girls to come to it, and so the officer rang the Comforts Fund woman in Brisbane and said, "We're having this picnic and it's nice weather and we'd like a number of girls to come," and the Comforts Fund woman said, "How many?" and our fellow said, "About four hundred," she said, "I can fix that, but you'll have to provide the transport," so he said, "I can fix that, we'll get a special train." So that was duly done, and a special

16:30 trainload of girls came out to join us for the picnic for the day, and at the end of the day some of the girls, we'd arranged to have a campfire concert that night with a number of kegs of beer as well as eats and so on, and some of the girls learned of that, of course, and some of them, two or three of them came and said, could they stay to it? I said, "Not on your life, you're going back on the train." Which they did, and we had a very nice campfire concert anyway.

17:00 And then we were disbanded ourselves, gradually, so many hundred or fifty or whatever it was, bit by bit were sent to a depot which dealt with the people to be discharged, and they were sent home on discharge gradually. I came home on discharge a bit later, and in December, having got rid of all the equipment that we owned, and I sat down with

17:30 some of the fellows and wrote a short history of the 36th Battalion. A few copies were typed, and we made that and that was the basis of the battalion history which later on was prepared in full. Anyway, then I went home and that was the end of it.

Well, if I could just take you back a few steps?

Yes.

The news of the atom bombs being dropped on Japan, how did you react to that?

That was

18:00 interesting. All the fellows, when they heard it, said, “Bloody good, the bastards.” So that was their attitude, “Serve them right,” because they’d heard all the stories about these six missionaries and various other cruelties. The other one that they knew about was at Tol. The 2/22nd Battalion, which was part of the 8th Division, had been sent to Rabaul, and

18:30 the Japs had landed there with a huge force of fellows, thousands of ’em, and a lot of ’em were killed and a lot of ’em had to get out and they retreated to the west, and they arrived at a place called Tol, which was where our sister battalions were fighting the Japs when we were there. Anyway, at Tol the Japs caught up with a lot of these fellows. They tied a lot of ’em to the

19:00 trees and used ’em for bayonet practice, and some of them managed to get away a bit but they were caught and shot or bayoneted, and we didn’t know about this till we went across the island on the way home. But that was what happened there. But the sister battalions found the skeletons still tied to the trees. So they weren’t very happy either. Anyway, then we

19:30 went, as I say, to Jacquinot Bay and stayed a while and then back home, and I was passing through VP Day on through Sydney on the way back to the battalion. We gathered together at Petrie just outside Brisbane, and finally, that’s what happened.

And when you heard about the atom bomb being dropped what did you know about the devastation that it had caused?

We didn’t know very much, but we heard all about it,

20:00 because actually I think I was at home on leave when that happened. See, it was a few days before the Japs surrendered, and the celebration of VP Day was when they surrendered, not when the atom bomb dropped, but a few days before, I think I was at home that time on leave.

And after you’d heard about the bomb being dropped how long did you expect before the Japanese would surrender?

20:30 Well, we had no idea. We didn’t know, nobody knew, until eventually, they had to get the emperor to tell them to do it, to surrender everywhere, because they had people not only in New Britain and New Guinea but other islands all round the place, Singapore, Borneo, everywhere, and they had to be told, get the emperor to tell ’em to surrender and that took a little while before they actually surrendered everywhere.

21:00 **Well, you said you then received a message when were you coming to Wewak, did you consider staying in the army then?**

No, not after five and a half years, I suppose. I wanted to get home. No, I had no idea of staying in the army. Neither did anybody else in the battalion. They all were anxious to get home as soon as they could.

21:30 **Well, what was the great motivation to leave the army?**

Well, we enlisted for the duration of the war, everybody did, and as soon as the war ended they thought they were entitled to go home and so they all went home fairly quickly. A few felt they would like to stay on and stayed on for a while. They were sent to, I don’t know, some units, I don’t know what they were, but the rest of us all went home.

I’m just asking because you’d

22:00 **actually, you know, had quite a successful career and were quite well established?**

Yeah. No, well, that’s what happened anyway.

And how did you find civilian life?

It was easy enough to get back to. I fairly quickly resumed my practice as a solicitor. ’Cause my partner, who joined me just before we went away, he was still going and he’d taken another partner in

22:30 with him so there were three of us there and we continued on just as if nothing had happened.

You said that when you did leave the army you actually…?

I didn’t leave the army. All officers were all put on the reserve, and we could be called up at a day’s notice and I was called up for several court martials. When I got home in South Australia I did several court martials. I was

23:00 called up for the duration of the court martial, I went up to Woomera on one. I can’t remember exactly what the fellow was charged with, but we had to deal with him, and then I did another one in Adelaide. Being a solicitor, I was called on to do it. I was brought from the reserves for the day, you see, or two days, whatever time it took.

Well, you said earlier that you gave legal advice to many men

23:30 **from…**

Afterwards? Yes.

Afterwards. And how were they coping with civilian life?

Varied a lot, but most of them very well. I think it's fair to say most of them coped very well indeed. A few didn't. A few got on the booze, unfortunately, but the majority fared pretty well, as far as I could see anyway. But the things they consulted me about were wills and buying a house

24:00 and all this sort of thing in the main. Occasionally there was one, my old Don Company fellows, over a period, I acted for him three times on a drunk driving charge. And I got him out of one, and the police prosecutor said he'd called too many policemen. I cross-examined both of them and put one story against the other and he was acquitted, which pleased the fellow very well.

How important was it to maintain

24:30 **that relationship with the Don Company?**

Very good, and we continued it till this day, as you probably know from others you've questioned. You see, with Don Company we still, we've had for many years a lunch just of our own Don Company fellows, and we're having one next Friday at the Wakefield Pub, gather together, we've been going for quite a few years and they told me the other day twenty-three had already booked to come. We get some interstate

25:00 fellows come over for the march, fellows who'd been reinforcements for the battalion, largely from the armoured division, which was the division, that division was broken up. They'd been in Western Australia for most of their time and they were broken up and the 27th got quite a lot of reinforcements from them. And some of these fellows, I think, had come, they'd been posted to Don Company when they joined the battalion and they regarded themselves as belonging to Don Company, and a few

25:30 of them turn up from the other states. They're always welcome.

Well, before we talk about Anzac Day and it's significance, I'd just like to ask a bit more about the time when you came back from the war, did you have any nightmares?

No, I didn't. I don't know whether any of the fellows did. No, I didn't. I doubt if the other fellows did either.

26:00 I just resumed home with Margaret, not, Margaret was my first wife, Dorothy, she lived with me for thirty-five years, then she died and then I remarried, strangely, the mother of my daughter Margaret's husband. 'Cause we knew her well, and she was

26:30 with me for twenty-two years and she died in her sleep suddenly with a heart attack. And I married Margaret just over four years ago.

And where did you meet Margaret?

At the church. She was a worker up there.

Well, what did you miss about the army?

It's the comradeship,

27:00 I'm sure, is the main thing. I'm sure that's right. That's the main thing, anyway.

Well we've talked about being wounded and the healing process of that, but you also, through your experience, lost a lot of mates and a brother, how long did it take for the healing process…?

It's very

27:30 hard to remember, but it took a while. But you soon forget that. I still remember my brother from time to time, but the rest, you know, after a time you don't worry further about it. There was nothing you could do about it.

And when you came home from the war did you share much of your experiences with family or your wife?

Not with my family or wife, no. Oh no. But

28:00 I've marched on Anzac Day, either here, or in Sydney, ever since, and we've had a reunion here every Anzac Day, and the 36th Battalion have had it similarly. I go there on alternate years and march with the 2/27th here on the other year, and in each case they have a lunch with all the fellows and so on after the march.

Well, just going back to the comment that you never shared,

28:30 **why didn't you share any of what you'd gone through or your experiences?**

With my wife, for example? I don't know, but it didn't seem to me that it was right to tell her. I told her some things, but not everything. Wives are not terribly interested in that, I can tell you.

Well, I've heard you speak quite a bit about

29:00 **the atrocities of the Japanese and what you had seen and heard, have you made peace with your enemy?**

I haven't. I wouldn't go near the cows. I'd never go to Japan. I was invited by a Japanese client at one time, she wanted to know why I didn't go to Japan. I told her, "Because you killed, your troops killed my brother in New Guinea, where they had no right to be." So she didn't know what to say. But that's

29:30 the position. I don't trust 'em. I don't, I've got a book written by a retired supreme court judge which deals with the question of what happened, particular at Sandakan and Borneo, when two thousand fellows lost their lives after the war, the war was just about to end and the Yanks wouldn't provide planes to land our parachute battalion to rescue them.

30:00 That was pretty poor. Anyway, that's what happened, but this chap was there on a war crimes trial after that in Borneo and he deals with the question towards the end of his book of what he thought would happen if we were ever at war with the Japanese again, and he concludes it'd be no different. They won't have changed. They don't change, in his opinion. I don't know, but that was his opinion.

30:30 I wouldn't trust them.

Please don't take this as being facetious…

No.

…but you did take on a Japanese client?

Yes.

I'm just wondering is that a bit contradictory, or…?

No, because we take on anyone who's a client whatever they want us to do. She wanted some small job

31:00 to be done. I mean, we don't mind who we take on as clients. We don't say, "Well, you're a Jap, we won't have anything to do with you," but that's the normal approach. But I wouldn't go to Japan if you paid me.

Well, you've been mentioning Anzac Day and the Don Company getting together on an annual basis.

Yeah.

What does Anzac Day mean

31:30 **to you?**

Well, that's a bit hard to really define it, isn't it? But we always used to march on Anzac Day before the war, our 27th Militia Battalion always took part in the march. All the units did, as well as the fellows who'd returned, were returned soldiers, we always did. We knew their story. The 27th battalion had a fairly live, the first war, a fairly live association, and we used to get

32:00 invited to their smoke social which they had on the Liberal Club building on North Terrace, and I went a few times. It was very good fun, because you went in and as you went in you paid whatever we had to pay and they immediately handed you a bottle of beer. It was quite good shows, quite enjoyable. And I forgot to tell you that I've got a copy of their history, the 1/27th, and one of the things we had

32:30 to do when the 2/27th was formed, our CO told us that we should read to the troops the full story of the 1/27th, and I did that and so did the other company commanders. So they knew what their ancestors had to, how they'd fought and so on and didn't need me to tell 'em that they were expected to do as well. Which they did.

33:00 But it's an occasion, I think, where we get together and we remember all our old comrades who died in the war and since. I always go to the dawn service. Having our Mitcham one at a different place this year, at the Memorial Garden up here. We'd previously gone to the gardens at the end of the bus terminus. But they're having it next to the library there this year.

33:30 **And I've left it to ask, which battalion do you march with on Anzac Day?**

Well, there's only the 27th here. But I take it in turns. I go to Sydney next year. I take it in turns in going, and Margaret comes with me. Last year she and I went to Sydney, this year we're in Adelaide. So she goes to her mob and I go to the 2/27th.

Well, when you came back from the war

34:00 **and were marching with the 2/27th Anzac Day had obviously changed its meaning for you, what was the feeling, like the first Anzac day you marched back?**

I don't know that it was much different. But we all think about our own mates, not so much the first war fellows. But we remember them too, of course, but we were more concerned with our own mates who died.

Well,

34:30 **as we look back on today and throughout your whole war experience, how would you like the… well, first I'll ask you. The 36th Battalion, how would you like them to be remembered?**

Just the same as the 27th. I mean, they were a lot of good fellows and we remember them when I go to Sydney in the same way as I do here with the 27th.

35:00 You see, they were initially, they were all compulsory trainees, they were conscripts, but a number of them joined the AIF while they were still with the 36th. But they didn't get enough of them to make the 36th an AIF battalion, 'cause part way through the war it was decided that if the battalion got over fifty per cent of it's number as AIF,

35:30 they'd transferred to AIF within the battalion, we became an AIF battalion. We never quite got there. We got to forty-nine per cent but that didn't matter, really. But once they'd had some training they were very good indeed, there was no doubt about that. But they needed the training that we'd had, the very good training that we'd had with the 27th.

And what about Don Company with the 27th Battalion,

36:00 **how would you like them to be remembered?**

Well, it's the same old story. They were closer to me than the other companies, although I commanded headquarters company for a while, but they were the fellows we worked with. You remember them well. You get very close to them, having been with them for a long time and fought with them, wouldn't you?

36:30 **And personally, for yourself, what was your proudest moment during the war?**

Proudest? I don't really know. Never thought of that. I really don't know. I suppose the end of the war when we went home. You hadn't thought about that much at all,

37:00 the question of pride.

Well, how did your experience through World War II change you?

That's a bit hard to answer too.

37:30 I don't really know, but when I came home life was back to normal, my practice was as it was before the war. But the main differences, of course, were the gatherings with our old associates in the 2/27th, which we didn't have before the war. We were meeting the fellows from the 1/27th, but that's not quite the same thing as the fellows you fought with, is it?

38:00 That you fought alongside.

Well, how had your outlook changed?

Well, that's a hard one too. I don't really know.

38:30 The only differences, I suppose, we try and help our comrades of the 2/27th in whatever way we can, all of us, not just me, and we have helped them over in various ways over the years, and that's about it.

And this is a record that will be

39:00 **kept for future generations to look back on to learn from your experiences,**

Yeah?

If you were to leave any advice for those future generations what would it be?

I hadn't thought of that one either. I don't really know what I'd tell them. My son, for example, knows all about our, I gave him a copy of the 2/27th history, my

39:30 daughters had copies also, I don't know what they've done with them, whether they've read them, I presume they read them through, I didn't ask. But that's a fairly common thing, to buy the copies of the history, and they can see what the fellows in the battalion did, and now it's up to them to draw any conclusions, I think

Well, is there anything that you would like to put on the record now?

Only I thought you might be interested in the decorations

40:00 I got, that was all. I got a mention in dispatches, which I've got the…I'll show you the things, they're there. I better take this off, I suppose. (TAPE BREAK)

Your mention in dispatches?

And a DSO [Distinguished Service Order].

And what was the mention in dispatches for?

For my work in Syria. And the DSO for New Britain

40:30 and service generally, I suppose, but they were mentioned, the things that were mentioned.

And was there a piece of action that can pinpoint the mention in dispatches?

Not really, it was covering the campaign.

And was that the same with the DSO?

Well, the DSO was for, particularly the service in New Britain, because we were all on our own there

41:00 and, well, we were facing a whole horde of Japanese if they liked to have a go at us, and I think we did a good job there. But, well, that's it.

Well, thank you very much for sharing your story with us today.

That's all right, I'm pleased to do it.

Thank you.

I'll show you the documents.

INTERVIEW ENDS