

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Walter Wallace (Gordon) - Transcript of interview

**Date of interview: 30th April 2004**

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1920>

### Tape 1

00:35 **Well start off with the overview that Kieran [interviewer] spoke to you about, so I'll get you to take me through really briefly from where you were born, where you grew up and through from there?**

Right I was born in Cairns, I started school in Gordonvale, I was there for three or four years and then we moved to the Atherton Tablelands to follow Dad's line of work, this was the Depression years. And

01:00 then Mum developed cancer, apparently from the time I was born and we had to come back to Cairns for treatment for her. She passed away when I was fourteen and then I went from there into the railways and I worked away from home and I've been away from home more or less ever since. And I attempted to join in 1939 but they knew I wasn't eighteen so they sent me home and then they stopped recruiting and I rejoined then when recruiting opened

01:30 in, I think it was May 1940. I was a cadet in the militia [the CMF, Citizens Military Force] and then I turned eighteen in November of 1939 and I became a fully fledged private and from there I went into the 2/15th Battalion. And we went to Darwin first and from Darwin we came home pre-embarkation leave, over to the Middle East on the Queen Mary to Trincomalee [Ceylon, now Sri Lanka] and then on the Indrapura to the Red Sea. And up

02:00 the canal and into Palestine and from there up the desert to relieve the 6th Division and then we were in the Benghazi Derby and the Jerries [Germans] chased us back to Tobruk [Libya]. And we were held at Tobruk for the whole time and came out of there in November 1941 and from there back to Palestine and up to Syria and almost onto the Turkish border. And then when the El Alamein show started we got called back to go back into the show again and

02:30 we did the El Alamein show and from there we came home. Had leave home, trained in Kairi on the Atherton Tablelands and then up to Lae and Finschhafen [New Guinea] and home from there. And then late in that year I was discharged, not discharged but found to be B2 [unfit for active service] and I was then sent to the 7th [convalescent unit] Cairns and I finished there waiting for my discharge. And

03:00 my mob went to Borneo and that's the only shot I missed. From there I was married in 44 and we had a family of four, four boys. We had our first home and then I was in the railways and I got transferred to Richmond in Western Queensland, I was out there for three years, back to

03:30 Cairns and then in 66 my first wife died and I had the four boys, well two of them were getting up a bit, but one went into the air force and the other fellow went down to Melbourne to chase his career as a cyclist. And the other two were home and I raised them and a couple of years later I met Trish and she was quite a bit younger than I was but we became friends and from there it developed and

04:00 about nine years later after my youngest was twenty we married. Well then we were doing up our home in Cairns and Trish said to me, she'd like to move to Brisbane to be close to her parents. So I thought, "Well why not? The home we get down there will be her home and she'll have the say who comes and goes." And we came down here, we had four more, but luckily we got a daughter in this crew and from there both

04:30 of my families have melded in so particularly well together and I've been very lucky, I may as well have married the same women twice. They were seven days apart in their birth time, you know but not in the dates of course. And then wife's just gone away, our eldest is still living at home, our second eldest is married and our daughter is at University at Gatton and Lindsay was in the navy.

05:00 And he's just recently became engaged to a girl from Tasmania, although she happens to be a Kiwi [New Zealander]. And the girl that my second bloke married was a Kiwi as well, so we've got an Anzac connection. But that's about it.

**Well excellent that was very well done. What I'll do now is go right back to the beginning and I'll get you to tell me what you remember about growing up in Cairns?**

Well I was born in

- 05:30 Cairns in 1921 and we apparently we moved to Gordonvale when I was quite small. Dad was looking for work and he was quite young and Mum and him were only twenty one and we moved to Gordonvale. Well Dad cut cane and then, this was the Depression years of course and he did it the hard way because in the slack season
- 06:00 they grubbed stumps by hand, there was no chains or tractors or things to pull them out, it was a case of dig them out by hand or use dynamite to blow them out and then when the season came around again they'd go back to cane cutting. And when we lived at Gordonvale I started school there and the first year when I started, I beat Mum home, but I went back to school because the girl next door happened to be a school teacher so I went back with Bessie and
- 06:30 from then on that's when school started. I went through for about three or four years in Gordonvale and then Dad again, we had to move to the Tablelands and we got onto a small property outside Pieramon [?] and from there I went to school at Pieramon. But because the headmaster, a chap named Tom Love was a bit of a, a year or two ahead of his time, we dug out of red granite
- 07:00 a tennis court and he taught us to play. His wife used to teach the girls cooking and sewing and what have you. He taught us to build gunyas [aboriginal shelters] and to make boomerangs out of tree roots and how to throw a spear with a woomera [spear thrower], as well as teaching us sports. But anyhow the crux of it, he went into hospital to have his appendix out and he had it out under local anaesthetic so he could watch in the mirror above the table and come and tell us kids about it. Well when Dad
- 07:30 heard about that Dad said, "He's a bloody nut." and he said, "You're out of there." so he sent me to Kairi, which was a few mile further over towards Malanda.

**Well just tell me a bit more about this teacher, what kind of a man was he?**

Oh Tom was a very presentable chap and a good teacher, we enjoyed him. I mean building gunyas and making boomerangs and things like that had it all over sitting

- 08:00 in school yards, or digging tennis courts and learning to play tennis, you know. And we used to go to school on horses of course and his wife was a very nice person. But then Dad reckoned I wasn't getting an education, the way he wanted it. Anyway I then went to Kairi over near Malanda and I used to get into a bit of strife there occasionally because my horse put him in the horse paddock and lass named Joan Jashops [?] had a beautiful blue roan
- 08:30 mare and my bloke got in and got her into the corner and went hammer and hell at her one day with his hooves and this girl master said to me, "Wallace get that bloody horse and get home." So I didn't need two invitations and I took off for home and then another time I was going there and I was going through Pieramon, I used to have to ride through Pieramon to go to Kairi. And I could hear this yapping behind me, I look back up towards the hill and here's our Alsatian bitch with eight pups
- 09:00 following me. So I couldn't make up my mind whether to take them back home or to go onto school. So I continued onto school, tied Jenny up downstairs but the pups all came up into school and of course the kids had their fingers down behind the stools and that and calling the pups on. And so anyhow eventually Dan Redden said to me, "Wallace, get those bloody dogs and go home." So anyhow from there when Mum, was ill with
- 09:30 cancer and that we had to leave and come down to Cairns. Dad used to bring Mum down to Cairns occasionally, I was left, I was an only child and I was left there on my own occasionally. And one particular night I remember waking, I could feel this weight on the bottom of my bed, and I had the twenty two alongside the bed, and I pulled it out and said, "Get out whoever you are." and it was the old dog, she lifted her head up and I was just relaxed completely and went back to sleep. And of course no windows
- 10:00 or doors closed because you didn't, nothing like that ever occurred in those days. And Dad came home the next day and I was alright you know, I was a kid about eleven I suppose. But anyhow we moved back to Cairns and when we got back to Cairns I had to take a team of horses back up, we had to get rid of the horses, we didn't have room for them in Cairns and I drove a team of horses up over
- 10:30 the Gillies Highway on my own, against the traffic. If I went up over the old cattle track and that, when I got to the top gate I had to come down onto the road, and those days the traffic went one way for an hour and then the other way for an hour and they had a gatekeeper. And the gatekeeper was a bloke named Jack Titlow and I bought my horses down onto the road, they were loose in front of me and I was riding my horse and as I'm going
- 11:00 past old Jack was abusing me because I was coming up against the traffic. And I told him where to go, as a cheeky young bugger and anyhow I got to Yungaburra where the horses were being handed over to Williams Estate. And then one of the Williams brothers took me down to White Cars and I caught a white car back to Cairns.

**What's a white car?**

Well they were like a passenger car service that ran from the Tablelands to Cairns.

11:30 **Like a taxi?**

Oh no it's a bigger car than that, it was an open tourer type but would have five or six rows of seats I suppose.

**And what would you pay to catch it?**

I'd have to pay for it; I don't recall how much it was, but anyhow and back to Cairns. Well from there I went to North Cairns State School, I did my scholarship there, I played football and cricket. Then I went to the State High

12:00 School in Cairns, up to junior, but I left, oh Mum died in 1936 and she was only 36 years of age. And Dad and I, the cost of the illness Mum had we ended up having to sell our home and we ended up in a boarding house. And Dad was working, he was a butcher by trade and he was working and I didn't see a lot of

12:30 him and I joined the boy scouts. And I was in the scouts, I played football for the high school, we were undefeated premiers in '36 I think it was. And then I got a job, I didn't want to continue at school, I suppose I should have but having come from the Depression years Dad was more interested in me getting a steady

13:00 permanent job. I started my first work with Tom McDonald a jeweller and I worked with him for a while and I could have been an apprentice I suppose but I hated working inside. So I got a job as a junior truck driver with Sam Allens which was a big merchants of those days, something like Burns Philp [shipping agent and import company] and from there Dad, there was a couple of jobs come up on the railway and Dad put my name in for it and I got called for an

13:30 interview. Now one was to be a lad porter and one was to be junior clerk. So we fronted up to this chief clerk, a chap named Harris and I had topped the exam they had and I should have been the junior clerk. But when he told the other bloke Charlie Walker that he would have to go away from home as a lad porter Charlie started to cry. And cause Dad wasn't with

14:00 me and old Harris was a smartie and he said, "Do you care if you go away from home?" I didn't give a bugger, Mum was dead. And so I was sent away to El Arish as a lad porter. And it made all the world of difference of about three hundred thousand dollars or so when I retired because as a clerk I would have got superannuation but as a blue collar worker I didn't.

**Well just take me through what you had to do as a lad porter, what were**

14:30 **your duties?**

Well general duties, I went down there to El Arish which was a little station just this side of Tully in North Queensland, just the Cairns side of Tully I should say, north of Tully. And the station master was a bloke named Aussie Shaw and I had to clean the station and clean the platform, water the ferns which he had hanging under the awning of the roof of the station, tussle ferns. We

15:00 went down to the beach, Bingil Bay and dug up palm trees to plant outside the station. I had to carry buckets of rain water across from the butchers to water the palms until they got established so they'd be used to the salty water. Rain water had to go on the tussle ferns and I had to climb a ladder to do those. And then go out either end of the station to get the signal lamps, bring them back in, clean them, fill them with kerosene, trim the wicks, take them back out and

15:30 light them for the night trains, on a three wheeler trike. Then the general office duties I had to learn Morse code, I had to learn all station accounts and had to deliver goods, parcels that sort of stuff and also had to learn to shunt because when trains came in we had a siding and wagons would be put off with goods in them and they had to be stacked in the goods

16:00 shed.

**How do you shunt?**

Well that means disconnecting wagons from trains and using the points to put them into sidings and hooking them back up again, that sort of thing. And while I was down there I was still in the militia, I was a cadet actually at that stage and then I joined up with Don Company of the 51st Battalion down in Tully and I used to go down there on the rail motor

16:30 one night a week and come home on the late train about four o'clock in the morning, after my training, nights training. I went into camp with them in 1939 in the Cairns Showground, just when war started and then again in 1940 we went into camp at Bowen, or Miowera outside Bowen and from there I joined the AIF [Australian Imperial Force].

17:00 I didn't tell my parents that I had joined until I had been on all my training and I was on my pre-em [pre-embarkation leave] and I sent them telegram, 'Joined the AIF. Will be home tonight'. I came home on a mail train so of course when I got home Dad told me, no way I wasn't going, he was going to stop me, I said, "If you do I'll go under another name." And in the meantime of course I forget to mention the fact that Dad

- 17:30 had re-married, and I didn't, while I have, be it no fault of my stepmother's apparently, I wasn't prepared to accept a stepmother and we didn't hit it off remarkably well. But by the same token I can remember she said to him, "Well you'd better let him make up his own mind, because if he's going to go under another name you're better off knowing where he is than not knowing." and so one of the few times we agreed.
- 18:00 But she was a very nice woman, she had a family of four, three boys and a girl and I sort of always felt one out, but that was probably me, being an only child. I wasn't spoilt actually because Dad was one of these that if you were at the table you could speak only if you wanted more to eat or stuff like that but you didn't take part in the conversation. And elbows on the table or anything like that meant the back of his hand,
- 18:30 so I, I don't blame him for it, it never done me any harm, I had a few good towelling-ups but it never done me any harm, probably do the kids these day a bloody lot of good too. But....

**After your mum had died and before your dad had remarried what was your relationship like when it was just you and your dad?**

Oh we got along, we didn't have a really close relationship, Dad was busy,

- 19:00 what I mean doing the washing and things like that, I didn't appreciate this until my own wife died and I had to do the same thing, only I had a few more to look after, you know. But it did teach me a lesson in this respect that I was determined in no way I was going to move out of my home with the kids. And I kept it going and of course when Trish came along we lived there and the boys came and went
- 19:30 because it was home to them and Trish knew a lot of things they did that I didn't and she never ever split, she never ever told. And they trust her implicitly and it's carried over you know to, they ring up and they'd just as soon as talk to Trish than me sort of thing, and she gets on remarkably well with them. And with our own family, Trish and my family the boys thought it was marvellous that they got a sister,
- 20:00 and even though she's pretty straight from the shoulder Fiona. And I can remember at one time I had a bit of a blue with one of my boys over his older brother and he had a few things to say about his older brother and I got stuck into him, I said, "Look mate blood's thicker than water and don't you bloody well forget it." And anyhow he didn't ring me for about eighteen months and he was in Melbourne and anyhow he rang one day and Fiona answered the
- 20:30 phone and she said, "And about bloody time too." And of course Chick, that's his nickname Chick he said, "She's a cheeky little bitch." but they get on well and he's pretty straight from the shoulder the same as she is. But oh no Dad and I didn't have a really close relationship, possibly because Mum was ill and he was sort of doing what he could to alleviate
- 21:00 things for her. We had a few bad moments like for instance there was a quack [bad or fake doctor] named Trail in Cairns that she went to and he used to tell her to throw water on the grass and go and walk on it if there was no dew and first thing in the morning, this is part of treatment for cancer mind you. Anyhow one of the things that happened when Mum died, she died on a Saturday and Dad was delivering for the butchers he was working for
- 21:30 and I used to go with him on the run of a Saturday, we were developing a little relationship then of course but Mum died and that sort of broke it up again. But I knew his run completely and Dad got called to the hospital because Mum was dying and I had to stay there with the other bloke they sent out to show him the run. And of course when I got to the hospital Mum was almost dead and I didn't realise it, I saw her and I said,
- 22:00 I remember walking out and saying, "Hooroo Mum." Because I never expected her to die, I expected her to be there, to come home from hospital. Well she died that day, oh I don't know how you describe it but I've been a loner ever since then, probably hard to get on with I don't know. But I was very lucky
- 22:30 with the first women I married she was a marvellous women and she was exactly the same as the one I'm married to now, soft touch, everything for the kids, which is what you expect from a wife, good cook, good seamstress. She, oh treats you exactly the same in her manner and her ways, with her it's all
- 23:00 the kids, which is what I expect and of course I get molly coddled [spoilt] too. But we lead a happy life and even though, when we first started going out together I was secretary of the Railways Institute in Cairns and at that time it was mainly run by people from the district super's office, in the clerical side. And the fellows in the
- 23:30 blue collar side didn't take a great deal of part in it. Well when I became secretary we endeavoured to change that and I went round when the new committee was to be elected asking blokes to nominate. And we ended up with a really good overall lot of blokes, blokes from the workshops, blokes from the loco [locomotives], drivers and myself I was a guard and then people from upstairs as well. And
- 24:00 anyhow we started to run various functions, we were running bingo to pay for the hall, Institute Hall, and we ran various functions and I can remember after we had our hall built and we had three pool

tables in there. We had never had a railway ball in Cairns so Trish and I put it to the committee one night, "What about running a railway ball." "Oh." So anyhow we eventually

- 24:30 talked them round. So we went on holidays and when we came back we went for the next meeting and while we were away they'd had a meeting and decided they wouldn't have the railway ball until the year after. And course we both said, "What's wrong with you, you frightened of a bit of work?." We asked them if they'd give us a fortnight to put the thing together and in the fortnight we'd sold three hundred and fifty tickets and arranged the whole thing. And it was a howling success and,
- 25:00 which we were very happy with, and we ran cabarets pretty regularly. You know we ended up with everybody coming from all walks of the railway and it was pretty good. And we enjoyed it, you know you'd get a ring at any time of the night, somebody had hired the hall, could you come over and light the oven please cause it was a bit complicated, the gas oven. From there we,
- 25:30 I eventually came down here. But with my first wife we, when I went to Richmond, oh how I came to go to Richmond we went on strike in 1948, the beginning of 1948 and the day before we had to go back to work I'd been working in my backyard and put an axe into my foot and cut the tendons. And I didn't work from February to November, I got no pay and no sick pay or anything
- 26:00 cause I'd been on strike and how we existed god knows. I used to grow all my own vegetables; we had one son and another one on the way. And, but we struggled through, the people we had our loan for from the home agreed to suspend payment for twelve months and we struggled through. I eventually, then sat for the guard's exam while I was off and I got posted to
- 26:30 Richmond. I went out there on my own and then after Trish had, after Elsie had had Wayne she came out to Richmond. And it was really the three best years of my life because we played tennis every weekend, eight hours a day, there was football every now and again, there was boxing once a month, racing once a month. Picture shows, three changes of programs a week and we normally went to the
- 27:00 three changes of programs. My eldest son and the butcher's son, young Barry Jakes sent the first marsupial mouse that the museum had ever had, a live one, they were only about an inch and a half long, down to them and it was after the floods that they'd gone looking for these and they were turning over sheets of iron and stuff like that. And another chap named Harris used to have a few racehorses
- 27:30 there and he was brining them out for exercise one day and he went past our place and he said to my wife, "Hey missus you'd better go look for that kid of yours he's up there turning over sheets of iron and there going to get a Downs Tiger." which was a snake you know. But anyhow they didn't luckily and we were out there and Don started school there. The first night we were in the hotel when Elsie first came out, we put the baby, the
- 28:00 cot got sent onto Mount Isa instead of being unloaded at Richmond and we put a drawer out of the dresser in the hotel on the floor and put a pillow in it and put the baby in that. About three o'clock in the morning he was roaring his head off, we woke up and the poor little bugger had been eaten alive by red ants and we weren't awake up to this. And we woke the whole hotel actually and the people that owned the hotel came up and
- 28:30 told us how to, you've got to put something under them to stop the ants getting on, yeh that was part of the show there. But when I was working there we used to do runs to here and to Julia Creek and you would end up buying anything from a pin to an anchor for the gangers and the fettlers wives along the way, four or five stations between each way and they'd ask you
- 29:00 would you get this and that. And I remember one particular lady she was the ganger's wife from Nelia, she came down to me one day with the drawing of childrens' feet on a sheet of paper and she said, "Mr Wallace will you get me two pairs of black patent girls shoes?" I said, "Come off it Mrs Actin I've got son's I haven't got a clue about daughters." and she said, "Oh you'll be right just go to the girls in the
- 29:30 store and they'll help you." So I went down and I bought the shoes, anyhow when I bought them back I left them at the station and I rang her later on, or I saw her later on and I said, "How'd the shoes go?." "Perfect." So little things like that we used to do for different people. Anyhow on the Christmas Eve about 1950 I came off a job and I walked into the station to sign off and the night officer
- 30:00 Danny Conway said to me, "There's a parcel there for you." he said, "It's about the size of a beer case done up in brown paper with a big red bow on the top and addressed to the Wallace children care of Guard Wallace." he said, "I think there's something alive in it." So anyhow I picked it up and took it home and unwrapped it and it's a pedigree Persian kitten, Frank Eakin bred them, and that was sent down to me as a present
- 30:30 for doing the jobs for them along the way, we had Tootie until she died. Yeh it couldn't have been better. Well then one of the other things that happened before we left there the shearing contractor Nooky Crook had a blue dog Tony and Tony was always down at our place. So anyhow when I got transferred back to Cairns I said to Nooky, "You'd better give me the dog." "You go to buggery." he said, "He's a working
- 31:00 dog" I said, "Go on Nooky." I said, "He's down at my place more than he is at yours." Anyway so about a week before we came away he said, "You may as well take that mongrel." so we had Tony until he died

too. Oh I don't know it's been a pretty good life in that respect, from we came back to Cairns and I got tied up in camera

- 31:30 clubs and my wife did to, she was quite good with the camera. Oh different things, I was in unions right from day one and in the ALP [Australian Labor Party]. And my father eventually became, he became a councillor and then he stood for parliament and he was a member for Cairns for about nine years, till he died. And I did a lot of work there, I was secretary treasurer of the Northern District 'sec' [Secretary] of the ALP
- 32:00 until one time, when I started they were sixteen pounds in debt, that's the days of pounds. Anyway over a period of a number of years I worked it up until we had five various elections, federal, council and state and we'd ended up with three hundred and fifty pounds in the bank.
- 32:30 So this particular council election came up and I said to the committee that was handling it I said, "Look, instruct the campaign director to spend, restrict his campaign until a fortnight before the election because that's the money we've got." Well anyhow at a branch meeting they gave him permission to go ahead and spend what he liked, so in the first week he'd spent about six hundred pounds. And I wasn't at the meeting I'd been away on a job
- 33:00 and so anyway when I came back of course I was ropable and I just said to them, "Look." I said, "I'm not walking the town hat in hand and asking for credit for the ALP." So I went round on collections from the wharf and places like that and we eventually, I presented my balance sheet and everything was paid and we had about sixteen pounds in the bank. I told them they'd would have my resignation, I was
- 33:30 vice president of the branch and also secretary treasurer, they'd have my resignation because I wasn't prepared to go on with that sort of rubbish. Anyhow one of the councillors wives said, "Oh isn't that good." well I won't say what I said but I wasn't, I've never said it in front of a women in my life before but I said, "It's a so and so disgrace." But anyway I continued on in union circles, I was chairman of the
- 34:00 Combined Unions in Cairns, and when they opened the new railway station in Cairns, I was the only railway man invited, the only working railway man apart from the district super. And I said to my wife, there was a cocktail party and that afterwards and I said to my wife, "I want you to go down and buy the nicest dress you can, I want you the best dressed bloody woman at that show." So anyhow when we did go to the cocktail party she
- 34:30 was and the heads turned believe me, and I thought, 'Well I'll show you what the workers can do anyhow'. So anyhow from there on union stuff, I was secretary of the unions, we went to various functions. I locked horns with the district super [superintendent] over a pay dispute and we got a win on him and he never spoke to me,
- 35:00 not directly for about eighteen months afterwards, a bloke named Cec, oh God I'll think of it later. Anyhow in this particular meeting where we locked horns over this pay dispute he had stood for the ALP plebiscite in Blackall and I said, "No one will ever convince me you stood for a bloody ALP plebiscite." I said, "You're
- 35:30 not interested in your workers" and of course he did his block [lost his temper]. But when we got the institute going he as a commissions rep was always on the committee and one of the chaps an electrician named Gordon Ross came to me one day he said, "Look I'm going to take Cec Walton on tonight." he said, "I just want to convince him he's got one vote like the rest of us."
- 36:00 And I said, "What over?" he said, "Oh a few things" he said, "He seems to think anything he wants has got to go" I said, "Right oh I'll back you." So that night we took him on and we done him. And after the meeting we were all around the bar having a drink and he was up at the other end of the hall talking to the president, Les Matthews and he came straight down the hall to me and he said, "You're a cantankerous bastard wherever you are."
- 36:30 I said, "Not me Cec." and I said, "I don't sulk." and I said, "I don't hold grudges." he said, "Meaning I do?" I said, "My bloody oath." I said, "This is the first time you've spoken to me directly in eighteen months." "Oh be buggered." he said, I said, "Think it over old fellow." I said, "You come up to people that I'm speaking to and you turn your back on me and speak to them." I said, "The only time we've ever conversed has been on business matters." And all of a sudden he started to laugh, he realised
- 37:00 I was fair dinkum, I was right. Well we got on like a house on fire after that, oh we used to go to cocktail parties at their place and his wife Larry was a great one for having all the.....what do they call that fish that you put on biscuits, Russian?

### **Caviar?**

Caviar yeh and Larry would put caviar on biscuits and Cec hated the stuff and he'd say to

- 37:30 me "Bloody rubbish." and he'd get it, scrape it off the biscuit to the dog downstairs. But anyhow we were very good friends and Larry was a lovely person. But yeh well they were here in '66 when Elsie died, that sort of threw a spanner in the works. But we managed we struggled through, the two youngest, my first family were real towers of strength, particularly my second youngest,

38:00 he was a real tower of strength. Because I was working away from home, over twenty four hours quite often and it was a case of leaving meals for them, leaving their clothes washed and ironed and preparing meals and leaving them and setting up meals for myself while I was away. And he sort of kept his eye on things and I know they did things they shouldn't have but we never had the police come round anyhow. Well different funny things happened

38:30 but.....

**How did you learn how to sort of cook and do the washing and things like this?**

Oh through Mum, what I mean when I was a kid I sort of being an only child naturally put in a lot of time with Mum and we lived on a farm as I say up in the Tablelands, I milked and fed the calves and separated and helped Mum make butter, fed the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s [fowls], got the eggs, prepared kindling, you know kids did all those sort of things those days. And I'd go over

39:00 to the slaughter yard where Dad was working at that time and give him a hand.

**As your mum was ill did you take over any duties from her?**

No Mum sort of, oh you know I used to give her a hand with everything, as I say I did all the normal chores, that Mum didn't have to go out and do anything like that. And, but no she was a lovely person Mum

39:30 and as I say I was fourteen, but I can quite honestly say I've missed her everyday since. But people don't realise, they don't put the value nowadays on their parents, if I could have her back I'd have her back tomorrow, or today. But anyhow that's water under the bridge and.....

**Well we might just pause there for a second cause we're at the end of this tape.....**

## **Tape 2**

00:36 **Okay well tell us about the lead in, what made you join the militia in the first place?**

Well prior to going down to El Arish I had been in the boy scouts and then from there more or less was a natural progression to the cadets of the 51st Battalion in Cairns. And I trained there for a while

01:00 before I got posted to El Arish with the railway and then when I was down there at the railway I realised there were Don Company in Tully and that I could carry on there. So I was transferred to Don Company in Tully and I trained with them. Well we trained on Vickers machine guns and we went into camp when war broke out,

01:30 or just after war broke out in the Cairns Showground in Cairns and then from there we went back to work and then early in 40 we went into camp at Miowera, which was a Brigade camp at that time outside Bowen. And from there I joined the AIF, I'd turned eighteen and was old enough to join and I

02:00 sort of didn't say anything to my parents. I use not go home that often when I was working and so I carried on and I joined the 15th Battalion. I joined with four other blokes and each of us wanted to go to something different. I wanted to go to the Vickers because Dad had been a Vickers gunner in the First War and I had trained on them. But

02:30 one of the other blokes wanted transport, another bloke wanted something else so we all ended up in the infantry, which was, I've never been sorry about it was a marvellous battalion and wonderful blokes.

**What stories had your father told you about World War I?**

Nothing, nothing, the only thing I, and that happened many years later, after the war you go through different things

03:00 and I come across all these post cards written in French: "mon cher Walter." and I learnt French in high school so eventually I learned to read them, and they were letters from French girls written to Dad, and just normal friendly sort of things. But he never ever told me anything, one of the few things that he told me was that his brother Jim was killed

03:30 in France half a mile away from where he was and he didn't know until they wrote and told him from home. They were in different units of course; Dad was sixteen when he went. And he went to the 21st Machine Gun Company which eventually became the 1st Machine Gun Battalion. He used to go, he had a couple of mates where we lived, around Gordonvale, they used to get together occasionally but by and large very little,

04:00 very little. And when I joined, when he realised I had joined the AIF he was going to stop me but as I said to Naomi, "I'd go under another name." So eventually I did, I went, under my own name of course. But no the militia was great I enjoyed it, I met some nice fellows there,

04:30 some of them I know that went into the air force, Peter and Sal Crow they went into the air force, others went into, stayed in the militia and eventually fought in the islands and that. But I was the only one I knew of our company down there that went into the AIF, I have no doubt others did but I didn't know about them.

**And why did you like being part of the militia, I mean you mentioned it was natural from the scouts but was there any other reason why you were part**

05:00 **of the militia in those years before?**

Oh I was interested in it I suppose, just, well for me I suppose I don't know if you call it patriotism or what but I just felt you needed to be part of your country's defence. And at that time see war was coming on, and I suppose like so many others I thought it was a bloody great adventure that was going to happen and I was going to be in it. Because

05:30 while patriotism is definitely mixed up in it, the fact that it was the biggest thing going around the place at the time and you could be in it, with a hell of a lot of other blokes your own age in that, nothing beats it. And of course there were time when you wished to Christ you'd never joined up too. But you get over that, I think

06:00 the first time a shot flies past your head you get over the fear of dying because you know it can happen and you see other blokes it happens to. And you just think right, you're lucky, you take it a day at a time sort of thing. Any bloke that tells you he wasn't frightened is a bloody liar, or he's a bloody fool one or the other because it's

06:30 natural enough to be frightened, but you overcome that because you know you've got a job to do and on top of that there's no way on God's earth you're going to shame yourself by showing fear in front of anybody else. And so you get on with the job and it becomes part of your life and particularly when you're in it for years, it's just a natural way of life.

**How do you get on with things when you're scared and when you're under fire?**

Well you know damn well you're there,

07:00 you're not going to run away and you've got blokes there, they're closer than your brothers because you're trusting your life to them and they're trusting theirs to you. And you know damn well they're not going to run away. But I mean if you did they might, but they don't and neither do you. There's a job to be done and strangely enough with the Italians and Germans you don't hate them

07:30 they're the enemy, but when it came to the other side, the Japs [Japanese], because of the things they'd done you did hate, and it's not normal to hate people. Then of course I suppose you realise that you're there, you're going to do the job, you're not going to walk away. And other blokes trust you and you develop a mateship that, I

08:00 don't know how you describe it but well you know damn well that you're going to tell somebody to do something and they're going to do it, you know you've been trained and they've been trained to do as you're told when you're told cause otherwise it might mean your life. And strangely enough as much as the history's always said the Australians are, what shall I say

08:30 rebellious or not obedient and that, don't believe it. Because when they're down to, well they might be when they're on leave and that, but when it's down to earth and you're fighting for your life it's a different matter, they're, well as far as I'm concerned there's no troops in the world bloody any better than them, and they're better than most. And it's just something, it becomes part of your life.

09:00 **And so tell us, you said you that you saw war coming, tell us how you felt when you heard the news that war had begun?**

Well I was young, it was nothing, what shall I say fearful, I thought it was stupid, I couldn't understand it, because you know living in a country like we do where you treat everybody the same and take people at face value

09:30 I couldn't understand why things happened the way they did. And you know in Germany, although I was quite young you did hear what was going on. And you realised that it wasn't all beer and skittles for the people over there. And then when the 1936 Olympics Games came on and Adolf Hitler wasn't prepared to meet the American Negro, what was his name Lewis was it, the runner?

10:00 **Jessie Owens?**

Jessie Owens, yeh, he wasn't prepared to meet him and he was a champion athlete and he sort of had this business of the Aryan youth, the blonde blue-eyed superhero you know. Well it just sort of went against our way of life.

**Were you hearing about all this stuff as you grew up?**

Oh yes naturally, well I'd been a reader all me

10:30 life, and you'd read papers, we didn't have TV and we didn't have radio, well I think, when did we get a

radio, I can't remember it was probably one of those little Mickey Mouse mantle models. But for instance when I was a kid growing up Sunday night was sing-song night, Mum played the piano and friends would be around and they'd have a sing-song. Friday night was mah-jong, that was a game sort of

- 11:00 of tiles, a Chinese game, I suppose after the style of chess sort of thing but mah-jong and that was Friday night at our place. And as kids, I was a young kid, I was probably under the dining room table asleep on the floor waiting to go to bed sort of thing and gone to sleep on the floor, listening to what was going on. And when you were a kid of course there was dances in the scout hall and you learned to dance there and the canvas seats, the kids
- 11:30 were always put under there to go to sleep. But no joining the army was, there was a war coming on, Australia was part of the British Empire, which was the dominant force in the world those days, well if Britain was going to be in it so were we. And Dad had been a soldier and I suppose that's got something to do with it and you've got friends that are joining and relations.
- 12:00 It just became more or less a natural thing to do. And to be in early, I suppose like most blokes I take pride in the fact that I've got a small number [an early service number]. I've got a four-figure number; well four-figure numbers meant you were reasonably early into the show. And it's nothing to be particularly proud about I don't suppose but you are proud about the fact that you've got an early number and
- 12:30 you were in early. And particularly you become an original member of your battalion that it probably doesn't mean much but to the blokes that are original it means quite a lot.

**So tell us about what happened once you had joined, what was the first kind of process, first days?**

Oh well we joined and we were moved from Miowera down to

- 13:00 Redbank [Queensland] and in Redbank of course we passed in our militia gear and we were issued with AIF gear. You were given a great hessian bag to go and fill with straw because that was your bed. You had to learn how to put various gear together because, well I was lucky that I'd had militia training, that I knew most of that.
- 13:30 But then when it came down to training, like forming into a battalion, men were picked into different sections in different platoons and then leaders were appointed to the various things. I was lucky in that respect that I suppose I'd had military training and when I went there I became a section leader, only because I could teach the other blokes how to do rifle drill and stuff like that. And
- 14:00 one of the things that early in the piece my platoon went on strike when we were in Redbank, we'd gone for breakfast and it was, well white fish in tomato sauce, herrings in tomato sauce and it was rotten. And we just walked past it and nobody ate it, we had a cup of coffee and we went down to the RSL [Returned and Services League], had a bit of a canteen there, we went down there and had a cup of coffee and probably a piece of toast.
- 14:30 When we went back to our hut being civilians gone out and joined the army we were all unionists, we thought bummer this, we were not going to cop this. So we appointed a spokesman, a bloke named Jack Foxley and when it became battalion parade time we stayed in. Well everybody from the platoon sergeant through to eventually the 2IC [second in command] of the battalion came to try and get us out and we weren't going. Anyway when the 2IC came down, Sir Charles Barton [later Major, 15th Battalion, 7th Division, QX6198] he later became
- 15:00 Comptroller General for Queensland and Charles Barton, the CO [commanding officer] was away at staff school. So Charlie was the boss and he came down and he said, "Well if I promise you the meals will improve from lunchtime will you come on parade?" And Foxley said, "They bloody better or we'll be back here this afternoon." So the rest of the battalion men had been standing out in the parade in the sun waiting for us to come and eventually turned up and paraded about an hour and a half late. But I give old
- 15:30 Charlie his due, he never held it against us and the meals did improve from lunchtime on. Strangely enough that carried over to, we jacked up again in Tobruk, not in the line of course behind the line. But yeah so that was the start of it. Anyway we did our training and the first guard I ever did on there, it was winter time you know, joined up in May and June in Brisbane was pretty cool especially out round Redbank, just bare
- 16:00 plains. And I can remember when the officer or the guard came around inspecting the guard about four o'clock in the morning and I was asleep on the Q-stores [quartermaster], on the Q-store steps and so he blew the socks off me. But that was the first guard I did and, but then we did our training and our CO Spike Marlin he was a good disciplinarian
- 16:30 and he took a pride in teaching us to drill properly, and we drilled pretty well. And we did a night march from Redbank to Ipswich and back and about two o'clock in the morning I suppose were coming past oh what was the name, one of the suburbs up there anyhow and all the women and kids had come out to see us, they wondered what was going on. They

- 17:00 were all out in their pyjamas and I don't know if you know, but in the army we had a thing called a housewife, which was a gadget that has all your needles and threads like that and a hold all that holds that and all your toilet gear. And as we were coming through this little suburb, Evervale, a bloke out of our mob Bob Desaley, bit of a larrikin he said, "Hello housewives how's your hold alls?" And
- 17:30 so everybody laughed and of course when we get back near Redbank about five o'clock in the morning our tails are dragging on the ground and we weren't a very well looking mob. And the pipe band of the 25th Battalion which was just starting to form came out to meet us and marched us back into camp and we marched in like guardsman, because the pipe you know made the difference. But from there anyhow we went from there to Darwin, we entrained on the Zeelandia,
- 18:00 boarded the Zeelandia and we went up along the Queensland coast across the Torres Strait and into Darwin. And we were greeted in Darwin by the air force and navy blokes who'd been getting a bit of a hiding from the Darwin Mobile Force. They were an artillery crowd that had been specially recruited in Australia and they had the numbers and stood over the air force and the sailors because there was only a few of them there. But we locked horns with
- 18:30 them in Darwin but we did training all round the place. We had lumps of pipe for two inch mortars because we didn't have the equipment and lumps of wood for different things. At the end of the day when we'd finished manoeuvres or whatever it is and one of the blokes had the pipe he would sling the pipe away and then be made to go and get it because that was the two-inch mortar and we'd be abused for losing the mortar. And that, it was strict training, we were in
- 19:00 Vestey's Meatworks as our barracks, but we'd get occasional leave and we met the girls from the telephone exchange in Darwin and they were really nice girls and we used to have picnics with them in the gardens and things like that. Rarely that any of us got to take one of them out, like to the pictures [movies]; if we went we went as a group. And those kids were killed in the bloody Japanese bombing
- 19:30 raids, lovely girls. Oh no we got to know, we used to drink in town and the Don Hotel and the Victoria Hotel and I suppose we played 'pak-ah-pu' and those other Chinese gambling games and things like that. We went to the Knuckey's Lagoon Labour Day affair and got into an all-in brawl with the Darwin Mobile Force mob. We had lanterns
- 20:00 out on the track that night waiting for the stragglers to get home. We eventually got together, we were trained at a place called Lee Point digging trenches and wiring and things like that and we worked in shorts and that's all and we were burnt black by the sun. And then when it came knock-off time off went the shorts and into the sea for a swim, well all you saw was these black blokes with white underpants on, but they weren't underpants you know they were bare backsides
- 20:30 because we were that burnt black by the sun. And we had a bloke named Wild Bullock Barry he was our cook there and not a bad cook. Well anyhow we trained there and eventually came back from Darwin to Brisbane, the 25th Battalion relieved us up there. When our first lot came down in the boat, so probably half the battalion the first lot of
- 21:00 the 25th went up and then our blokes came back on the return of the boat. Well then from there we went on pre-em leave, that was three weeks pre-embarkation leave and that was just prior to Christmas in 1940. I sent a wire home that I'd joined the AIF and would be home tonight and when I got home, on the mail train of course, Dad was going to drag me out and I told him I'd go under another name,
- 21:30 so eventually he overcame that. And back then and onto the Queen Mary, on Christmas day 1940, left South Brisbane and trained to Sydney and onto the 'Mary' to Trincomalee, in Sri Lanka now. And from there we went onto
- 22:00 the Indrapura which was a Dutch-owned ship and oh, it was a greasy oily bloody food you couldn't eat, dirty ship you know. But anyhow we went from there over to Port Tewfiq or El Kantara, I forget. Port Tewfiq I think was where we disembarked and into trains, goods wagons, steel goods wagons, box cars. And up there
- 22:30 into Palestine into camp, I think it was Kilo 89 [near Jerusalem, Palestine]. And the 17th Battalion and 13th Battalion, the other two battalions in our brigade were already there. Now we'd seen a Bren gun [light machine gun] and we'd walked past one in Brisbane but we'd never trained on them, we'd trained on the Lewis guns [medium machine gun]. And when we got over there we had a bugle call, reveille, it had been bought over by our CO
- 23:00 and we called it Charlie Charlie cause we always reckon it was waking Charlie Barton up. But it was a different reveille to everybody else. And when we went into camp alongside the 17th Battalion, I got a mate in the 17th and he tells me they always thought the Free French had arrived, cause when they heard our first reveille. Well eventually we trained in Palestine for a while then we were sent to the desert to relieve the 6th Division.

**Wal I'll just ask you did you ever expect that you'd be going to the Middle East**

23:30 **before you embarked on the Queen Mary?**

No we were thinking more Europe, we weren't even, the 6th Division had cleaned up the Ities [Italians]

in the desert and we didn't, we thought well that's over and finished with and we were on our way to Europe. The 18th Brigade had gone to Britain not that long ahead of us. And no we thought Britain but then eventually of course we realised when we got to Colombo [Sri Lanka] and

- 24:00 had to get onto this smaller ship where we were going. But nobody at that time had a clue that the Germans were even thinking of coming into the desert, we thought we were going over to relieve the 6th Division and they'll go somewhere or other, the Germans were moving up above Greece then but we went up to the desert and we ended up at Marsa el Brega [port, Libya], up near, between Tripoli and Benghazi in the western desert. And
- 24:30 we dug in there, we took over from a battalion of the 6th Division and we had our Bren gun up on ack ack [anti-aircraft] mounting and we'd covered it with an old shirt to keep the dust out and done it up with a safety pin. The first indication we had of the
- 25:00 Germans was one morning this bomber came over and we realised it was a Jerry [German] and he was only about a hundred feet up and I raced for the Bren and I couldn't get the bloody shirt off it, I couldn't get the safety pin undone. And of course as he went over the top of us the rear gunner spotted me, down over his guns and give me a blast. But luckily they were only about a hundred feet up and his guns would be zeroed in probably a couple of hundred yards,
- 25:30 so that the bullets went either side of the Bren pit, frightened shit out of me. But that was the first indication that we had that the Jerries were coming and then the 3rd Hussars, which was a British armoured car regiment, they spotted tanks and it was the start of the Afrika Korps [German army in North Africa]. Well we were pulled out of there, we had no equipment, we had a rifle, bayonet, I don't know if we even had
- 26:00 two grenades each at that stage, fifty rounds, if you still had fifty rounds because the blokes used to fire at those jerboas, the desert rats with the long tails with the little fluff on the end of it. And we were pulled back from there to El Regima and then from El Regima back to the Barce Pass. And we were over the top of the Barsii Pass and they'd blown a hole in the road coming up the pass and the Jerries were coming into
- 26:30 Barce with the tanks and they started to come up the road to the pass, and they filled the bloody hole in with empty forty four gallon drums and were coming over the top. We had no artillery, no ack ack or anything and about two o'clock in the morning we were dragged out of there. Well we went back, I think it was to Acroma and I was then sent as advance party with Bill Cobb [Wilton W. Cobb, QX6223, KIA 23 October 1942] who was a lieutenant and our driver was a bloke named Don Keys, to make our way back
- 27:00 to Tobruk and establish a position for the battalion to come into. Anyhow it was early hours of the morning, two or three o'clock in the morning and we could see this big shape up ahead of us, big dark shape and Cobby said to Don, "Slow down Don, might I tell you turn round and go for your bloody life" he said, "That's a bloody tank up there." Well we just got half turned around and the next thing there's bayonets in the side
- 27:30 of the truck and a foreign language, and I thought, 'Jesus Christ we're bloody prisoners'. And cause I didn't know German from Japanese sort of thing and as far as the language went. And the next thing along comes a Pommy colonel, "By Jove what have we here?" I've never been so pleased to see a bloody Pommy colonel in all my life, we'd been taken prisoner by an Indian Regiment. So anyhow we ended up being damn near the last into Tobruk.
- 28:00 But while this was going on our battalion was coming down came to a spot on the coast road where there was a diversion through the desert or round the coast to Derna. And there was a British MP [military police], a 'Red Cap' there and that and he was directing them into the desert until somebody woke up that his jersey had a bullet hole with blood round
- 28:30 it right in the centre of his chest. And he, they pulled up and he went back and he spoke to an officer about it and this officer came forward and they challenged this bloke and he was a Jerry, they'd killed the British MP and dressed this bloke up as a MP and directed our troops into the desert. Well one hundred and eighty seven of our battalion got taken prisoner, they went into the desert and the Jerries
- 29:00 were waiting there with tanks. The rest of them then went round the coast way when they found out about this and they eventually got through to Tobruk. But the CO, the 2IC, the adjutant, most of our senior officers, headquarters, all most all of Headquarter Company were taken prisoner. And anyhow the rest of us into Tobruk, well not into Tobruk but to
- 29:30 El Adem which was just outside of Tobruk.

**Well before we go into Tobruk I might ask you a few questions about first getting to the Middle East, when you first arrived. What, tell us about that trip when you first started to come up towards the Suez Canal, what were you thinking on board, what was the mood on board?**

Well it was completely alien to anything we'd ever seen before, you know desert

- 30:00 and the canal was a marvellous feat of engineering but miles of sand either side and you'd see the wogs,

the Arabs in these long dresses and that, we didn't have a clue what they were called at that stage. And also the wedding ring bombers, now this was a bomber with a delousing arrangement right round the wing, this great circle and they, we were anchored while they flew up and down the canal to cause magnetic mines to rise and then they could be

- 30:30 destroyed. And the wedding ring bombers we used to call them. And yeah eventually we came up there, we were in the canal, there was ack ack and that, the first time we'd seen hostile fire I suppose, not against us but against enemy planes coming over. And then we were disembarked there and into these trains and on our way.

#### **Enemy planes, were enemy planes coming over?**

At night time apparently they used to come over

- 31:00 and drop mines into the canal to prevent, you know otherwise you had to go round South Africa which was a damn long way. And I suppose they hoped if they could block the canal they would, well it would make a hell of a big difference, number of ships and that, all that sort of thing and cut off supplies to the Middle East. And so they used to clear it with these wedding ring bombers
- 31:30 they'd bring the magnetic mines to the surface and destroy them. But thoroughly alien to anything we knew, I don't know if you know but I write poetry and one of the poems I wrote was called, 'To the Middle East' and it just describes the sort of things that Mum had taught me as a kid from the Bible about the Holy Land and that, and here I was seeing these people
- 32:00 using these wooden ploughs and camels and these long dresses and women with all the burdens on their heads and all this sort of thing. And I realised that what Mum had been telling me I was starting to see it in actual fact. I was a pretty naive kid those days, well most of us were, we were just very, very naive I think when it come to think of the way kids are nowadays.
- 32:30 But it was interesting and your eyes were wide open, I regret the fact that I was so young because I didn't appreciate some of the things I saw as well as I would have had I been older. But I still, I did see them I enjoyed seeing the things and it was so different, entirely different to what we had, and all this bloody sand
- 33:00 and not a lot of growth as far as trees and that sort of thing going on. But the canal which you'd heard about in school, the Suez Canal, you saw it in actual fact and it was something, well when you sort of had to realise that that was dug with hundreds of people with baskets,
- 33:30 carrying that sand away, there was no great machinery like we have today to do that it was a fantastic job. I even knew the name of the bloke that was the engineer or architect was a bloke named Ferdinand de Lesseps, a Frenchman. But I'd learnt enough about it in school I suppose, I must of paid some attention. Oh not that it wasn't interesting and eye opening, no doubt about that.

#### **And when you**

- 34:00 **first got there you said you got onto trains and went to the camp?**

Yeh.

#### **Tell us about that trip on the train and the camp itself?**

Well the trains were, as I say were steel box cars and it was pretty cold and we built a fire on the middle of the floor of the box car and you had blokes either end of it, for warmth. But then we de-trained at, around about Kilo 89, the camp itself was all tents

- 34:30 but Brigade camp, 13th and 17th battalions were in camp there at the same time. And it was, we were lucky in this respect that they were there because we didn't have to erect our own tents, they were already up for us so we marched into a camp prepared. You had your galleys or your cook houses, officers' mess, sergeants' mess, RAP [Regimental Aid Post], training ground
- 35:00 was acres of sand, you went on route marches it was through sand. But nearby there were orange orchards, you know some of these places had four thousand trees, I believe, this is where the name jaffa and oranges and that come from. And the wog kids would, or the Arabs themselves they'd be offering you oranges for sale, "'Orangas' ten for five"
- 35:30 which was five milles, which was like probably less than five cents of our money now. And yeah in town the other day there was big sign up, 'Oranges' and we were walking up for the start of the march for Anzac Day and I spotted this and I said to one of my mates, I said, "Hey Hank Orangas" and he started to laugh. And then there was odd little curio shops I suppose you'd call them or,
- 36:00 run by people near the camps, not right in the camps but close handy, you could go and have a look at things, cause everything's for sale over there and we'd go, when we got a bit of time off around the camps you'd go and talk to these people and we couldn't speak Arabic and they couldn't speak English but eventually you would make yourself understood. And it was something entirely new to us and we were young
- 36:30 full of go. Anyhow we did our training there and we were sent up to relieve the 6th Division.

### Well how prepared was the unit?

Oh we could march well, we could use a rifle, we could shoot quite well with a rifle, we weren't too bad with the Lewis guns, we'd thrown grenades. But we'd done a few manoeuvres but nothing sort of to prepare us, well we were taught obedience and

- 37:00 things like that, discipline, which probably is the greatest factor. But by the same token for instance when we came back to El Adem I was a corporal and I'm putting my section down into position at an aerodrome and I'm doing the thing by the book, like a good corporal should, I was out there pacing out distances, making a range card, you know
- 37:30 which you use to give your fire orders from. And when you think that later on the book went by the board, you did things by experience after that, which you did the things you knew worked, not that the book was wrong in that case because you needed a range card, you had to be able to estimate or step out the ranges as a matter of fact and when you gave your fire orders you could tell them five hundred yards or
- 38:00 three fingers left of the bush or something like that. While I was there doing that I picked up a wallet and I stuffed it in my hip pocket and I finished my range card and I walked back to my section where they were digging in and I pulled the wallet out and opened it up and here's a coloured photo of a girl that I knew but I couldn't put a name to her. And I called one of my blokes over, one of my Bren gunners Coogie Kelly, he eventually became managing director
- 38:30 of Carlton United here in Brisbane and I said to Coog, "Who's this?" and he looked at it and he said, "Malva Neville." she was the secretary of the hospital in Cairns and she lived up the street from us. And, "Where'd you get that?" I said, "I just picked it up the wallet over here." he said, "Whose wallet is it?" I said, "I'm buggered if I know, I haven't had a look yet." But anyhow went through it and it happened to be her fiancée and he was in, what was he in some transport mob or something I think.
- 39:00 But Coog said, "What are you going to do with the wallet?" I said I was going to hand it in and he said, "Oh I've lost mine." he said, "Hand the gear in but give me the wallet." so I said, "Right oh." So I emptied it out and gave him the wallet, the army stuff, or the military stuff I handed into company headquarters and the private stuff I sent home to Dad, including the girl's photo. Anyway he took it up to her and the day before he took it to her she received
- 39:30 a cable from her fiancée to tell her that he was okay, but he'd lost his wallet. And I got a letter then, oh about six or eight weeks later, I've got it here still somewhere and he was sunk with the HMAS Waterhen in Tobruk harbour and the navy divers went down and got the mail and the letter's got the corners eaten away by salt water and marked across was a big stamp 'saved from the sea'
- 40:00 but I could read the letter and she wrote the letter to thank me for sending John's gear home, and they were eventually married years later. But it seemed so, I suppose marvellous that a Cairns bloke should pick up a wallet with a Cairns girl's photo in it and I knew her face but I couldn't put a name to her. And then should be another Cairns bloke that could look at it and say who she was, cause he was a bit older than what I was and Melva was older than I was.
- 40:30 That was El Adem, well then we withdrew from El Adem.....

## Tape 3

- 00:30 **So we'll go from arriving in Tobruk, can you walk me through the environment of the place, what it looked like?**
- Yes Tobruk was an Italian fortress originally and that was taken by the 6th Division. It's mainly desert country right down to the water because
- 01:00 Tobruk is on a harbour, it's a typical Italian-style town, flat roofs, concrete places but not a big place. And cause when we got there it was deserted. The perimeter, the Tobruk perimeter which runs for some forty odd miles has concrete posts and we dug in between them, intermediate posts we called them. And
- 01:30 we held the front, oh probably from El Adem around to Hill 209, that was the 20th Brigade, 13th, 15th and 17th battalions, and then when the other Brigades came in occasionally one of their battalions would relieve us. But the posts themselves were concrete with an ack ack
- 02:00 pit on one end which was probably, well three feet deep I suppose, quite a circular thing probably, oh fifteen feet or so across, we used to call it the tennis court in my platoon. And then the others were tunnel roofed over going through to the other fighting pits. And there was quite a number of them, the numbering started from
- 02:30 Hill 209 and went, looking out from Tobruk towards the escarpment it went R to the left and S to the right. We were in; oh I think the closest I went to 209 was R10. But there was different places then from

the lines, you went back to the blue line, which was the second line of defence that was

- 03:00 being developed, as you came out of the line for a rest, you went back working all day on pick and shovel and wiring all that, it was no rest but you weren't under constant fire. And you were getting better, you were getting a hot meal whereas up in the line it was bully beef and biscuits all the time. And our refrigerator was probably a half an acre wide and about ten cases high of bully beef out in the sun and night
- 03:30 whatever. And if I remember correctly it was mainly Fray Bentos, the Argentinean bully beef and these terrifically hard biscuits. But you had the Eagle which was one junction place back towards Tobruk and what they called 'Happy Valley', where you could, if you were lucky and you got out of the line you could go for a swim in the sea. But when you were there of course, nine times out of ten you were machine gunned by the Stukas [German dive-bombers]
- 04:00 because they had El Adem aerodrome which was, oh I suppose if they took off the end of the tarmac they were over our lines, it was that close. And they used to come over, bomb Tobruk and then machine gun hell out of us on the way back, or come up and bomb us. And if you were in Happy Valley they'd come down and machine gun you there. I think we were the first place on earth to have a thousand-bomber raid launched on us.
- 04:30 But when we first went into Tobruk the 13th and 17th battalions which had remained whole and they held the line on the El Adem section in front of us, and because we'd lost our headquarters we were sort of re-organising and we were in reserve, in front of the Royal Horse Artillery, Chestnut Troop. And when the
- 05:00 Germans first attacked it was on the El Adem section and the 17th Battalion were instructed to let the tanks go through and take the infantry on afterwards, well that's where Jack Edmondson won his VC [Corporal John Hurst Edmondson, NX15705, KIA 14 April 1941 - awarded a Victoria Cross]. And the tanks came through onto us and the Royal Horse Artillery were firing at them over open sights at about fifty yards and talk about guts, Jesus they were good that Chestnut Troop. I can remember a
- 05:30 battery sergeant major standing there with his arm almost shot off at the shoulder by machine gun fire still giving fire orders. And we were in front of them they were firing directly over our heads and then the infantry came in with the tanks we had engaged. And then when they'd knocked tanks out and those that weren't knocked out pulled out and the infantry that was there went to ground and our carriers went out with 9 Platoon and rounded them up
- 06:00 so we bought home the first lot of prisoners. And from there we went up to the line to do a counter-attack in an area that the Germans had taken, part of the line. And when we got there Jerry was pulling out. So there was a German truck there with the flaps down and I can remember we'd gone though, cleaned the trenches out and cleaned the Jerries out but we walked over, well somebody walked over to this truck climbed up in the
- 06:30 back step and lifted the flap, put the flap down and came back and never said a word. And then somebody said, "What's in the truck?" he said, "Nothing." so somebody else went over and had a look and they came back, "What's in the truck?" "Nothing." So a couple of us went over to have a look and we lifted the flap and the first thing was a fist stiff with rigor-mortis in our face and the back of the truck was full of dead Germans. And this was the first really close hand experience we'd had of dead enemy.

**Well what**

- 07:00 **was that experience like?**

Oh hell of a shock, believe me. When we got down and walked back and somebody said to us, "What's in the truck?" he said, "Nothing" we thought, 'Let them get the bit of a shock for themselves'.

**Did it change your opinion of war at all seeing your first sort of bodies?**

Well naturally you just saw men lying in all sorts of positions blown half to bits and it didn't, well it made you think it wasn't a Sunday school picnic. And

- 07:30 while we were there incidentally a funny thing that happened, my mate and I, Roy Parker, were going through the trenches and we had been warned that the Germans were dropping booby traps such as thermos flasks, pens and cakes of soap. And the idea when they were dropped the thermos flask had a propeller on them which spun down and then
- 08:00 that armed the thing when the propeller came off, and it was armed when it hit the ground, if you picked it up, up it went. Anyhow we came across this good looking black pen on the bottom of the trench, the German trenches, that they'd held and Roy looked at me and I looked at him and we got a big rock and dropped it on top of it, we thought, 'Oh it's probably a booby trap'. Well about thirty seconds later Jack Sanderfer came through and said, "Anyone see a black fountain pen?" Well we never, Roy
- 08:30 got killed at El Alamein but I never told Jack until we came back to Australia because he'd have murdered us on the spot and it was a pen his mother had sent to him, we didn't know. But anyhow.....

**Just, I just wanted to ask some questions about what you were talking about a little bit earlier when you took those first German prisoners?**

Hmm.

**When the guns were firing over the top of you, what exactly were you doing at this time?**

We were in, dug in, in front of them and

09:00 we were waiting to take the Jerries on if they came through.

**And what were you armed with in the trenches?**

303's, grenades, that was it, oh we had Bren gun, one Bren gun per platoon instead of three, the equipment wasn't there. Also we had a Lewis gun which we had picked up in the swamps at Marsa el Brega, way up in the desert and Basil Burns and I had both been in, I'd forgotten about Burnsey, we'd both been in the militia in Tully

09:30 and we'd learned about Lewis and Vickers [light machine gun] guns and that. And we pulled it down and the only things wrong with it was the right hand stop pull was broken. And we pulled up the 3rd Hussars, this English armoured car mob and asked them did they have any spares for a Lewis. And of course one of these blokes was a bit of a smartie he said, "What would you blokes know about a Lewis gun?" I said "Oh we know a right hand stop pull was the only bloody thing that's stopping it from working." So when he realised we knew what we were talking about he gave us some spares and some extra magazines and we

10:00 carried that right through Tobruk and it gave us an extra light machine gun.

**And when you were in the trenches can you describe what the sound of the experience is like with this artillery being fired over the top of you?**

Oh well the artillery are firing behind us, quite closely behind us, a hell of a blast and a lot of noise, and of course there's tanks out there and the artillery's firing on them and they're firing back, there's machine guns firing, rifles are firing,

10:30 it's just a complete din. And then at that particular time, it was Easter in Tobruk in '41, we had an air battle of fighters, the closest thing to what dog fighting like they had in the First World War only that our blokes were terribly outnumbered. We had a few Hawker Hurricanes, fighters, and there were Italians and Germans

11:00 stuck into our blokes and a flying Officer, KK Jones from 3 Squadron flew through, well he had a Messerschmitt on his tail and he was trying to get away from him and our C Company had picked up a 20mm Italian Breda light anti-aircraft gun and they were firing at the Messerschmitt but Jonesy flew into their fire and was shot down and he was killed. But

11:30 whether the Messerschmitt shot him down or our blokes did, we didn't know. There was a German parachutist or pilot parachuted out, young bloke nineteen or twenty I suppose, arrogant as they come and we told him he was a prisoner he said, "Oh you'll be my prisoner in two or three days time." well it never eventuated of course, but that was their attitude, they were supremely confident. But we lost our Hurricanes one by one

12:00 until eventually we had one, the one wing was blue underneath and the other side was silver as they were repairing them with what they had left. And he was a spotter for the artillery but eventually he was shot down to and that was the last of our air force in Tobruk.

**When you were, you were describing the din of, when you were in the trenches in that sort of situation what's the experience like trying to actually keep track of what's going on and what are you focusing on?**

12:30 Well we were more or less focusing on the infantry because we knew with what equipment we had we couldn't stop the tanks; we were relying on the artillery to do that. And you were hoping to God they could stop them, but it's just a case of you're looking to knock over what you can. And one of the things I sort of, it's always stuck in my mind the fact that we used

13:00 303s and you were taught to hit what you shot at because you had to carry that ammunition. And when you look at the Yanks [Americans] they blast away with automatic fire, well the stuff wasn't there, you didn't have it, and the idea was to hit what you aimed at, which we endeavoured to do, I suppose we did it reasonably well, we got away with it anyhow.

13:30 But the artillery, Chestnut Troop they were magnificent there's no doubt about that, they were absolutely magnificent, they never faltered, they had Jerry tanks coming onto them firing at them fifty yards away and they were stuck into them and they turned 'em around and blew them to hell and turned 'em around and sent them on their way.

**And how long did this go on for the fighting?**

Oh only for a couple of hours I suppose,

- 14:00 most action or most war is ten percent action and ninety percent sheer bloody boredom. You know it's on and it's on over a period of quick smart and you think your whole life's taken place in that few hours or couple of days whatever, and then you get down to living and every day is a bonus. But oh I have terrific admiration for the
- 14:30 British troops, a lot of people like to say the British aren't good, but believe me there's no better troops anywhere. They well disciplined and if they were told say, to go to the back door and dig in, that's where they'd go, whereas our mob they'd get to the back door and they'd think, "Oh we could go down to the back fence." And they'd go to the back fence and quite often you'd find yourself with enemy on three sides. On odd occasions our blokes put themselves
- 15:00 in positions like that but they extricated themselves just as well too. But it's as I say, that's war, and you get on with the business of doing what you're supposed to be doing, that's what you're being paid that magnificent five bob a day for.

**When did you sort of go forward to take prisoners at this situation?**

Oh well when the tanks turned round and started to bail out and the other tanks had been knocked

- 15:30 out and we knew there was infantry out there, they'd gone to ground, hiding. I suppose they thought the tanks are gone and we're stuck here and our carriers went out, Bren gun carriers and 9 Platoon from C Company, went out and rounded them up.

**Did you have any involvement with the German prisoners?**

Not on that particular occasion because I was in 12 Platoon but no 9 Platoon

- 16:00 was sent there and they happen to be in the position where they could whereas we were right in front of the artillery, we were more or less, we were the sort of shall I say close defence for the artillery. Because they're using the guns, they can't use light arms to defend themselves personally so we were doing that. And it was, oh what shall
- 16:30 I say, terrifically exciting but frightening as well but you were starting to realise what it was all about, seeing people being killed and tanks going up in flames and knowing blokes were being burnt inside them. And then when you see the bloke, like this British sergeant major standing there, or battery sergeant major, still giving fire orders and badly wounded then you realise what courage is.
- 17:00 No it's magnificent to watch and as you get older you realise how bloody stupid it is, young people killing young people for what? But Tobruk was as I say ten percent action and ninety percent sheer boredom, particularly in summer time of a daytime, it was hot as hell, the dust blows, you get dust
- 17:30 storms. I had a bloke in my platoon, Ringo Carlton and we'd talked him into carrying the Boyes anti-tank rifle which we used to call the elephant gun, great damn thing, .5. And Ringo was always at me, "Hey Gordon when can I fire me Boyes anti-tank rifle?" And this particular day I was bored senseless and it was about midday and it was hot as hell and I said, "Hey Ringo why don't you
- 18:00 fire your bloody Boyes anti-tank rifle now?" he said, "Don't be silly, think I want to draw the crabs?" which was enemy, return fire, so I thought he wasn't as silly as we thought.

**At Tobruk when did you I guess realise that it was a siege?**

Oh right from the jump really because we knew, we had bugger-all in the way of equipment, there wasn't a lot of troops there and we knew we

- 18:30 were on brigade because at that time 9th Division hadn't been formed they were getting the 24th and the 26th Brigades were forming and being sent to us, but we were just the 20th Brigade with no equipment, not a lot of training, which we were getting on the job training sort of thing. And we sort of, you handle things as they came along, luckily
- 19:00 Jerry wasn't completely organised either because he chased us all the way down the desert, well then he had to organise himself and he thought he was going to just come in with the tanks and bowl us over and that was it. Well we were determined we weren't going to be taken prisoners and so it was a case of we manned the perimeter fences and held him out. And I think the big thing that was in our favour we were,
- 19:30 I'm not boasting about it but we became pretty good at patrolling, at night time, we patrolled into his lines and as far as things were concerned, we owned no man's land, because we were out there every night, and nearly all night as well. And the whole thing was that we were determined to hold what we had,
- 20:00 when Jerry launched his big attack on 'The Salient', and this was the closest he got to getting Tobruk while we were there, he hit the 24th Battalion which was alongside me, and they were almost wiped out that particular position, and what they later called The Salient. And the tanks came on with, well this particular tank with a flame thrower equipment and a
- 20:30 fuel trailer behind it, and the only time I ever saw the Boyes anti-tank rifle do anything useful, we set the fuel carrier on fire with the Boyes anti-tank rifle. They were coming for our post but we had a

dummy mine field of old Itie aerial bombs with the noses showing out of the ground and they weren't game to come across it, and they wouldn't have gone off if you'd have hit them with a bloody hammer, and it was bluff. But anyhow they turned on the 24th,

- 21:00 well we couldn't do anything to assist them except fire at the Germans as they were coming. But about two o'clock, oh all through the night the flame throwers were into these poor buggers and about two o'clock in the morning a young stretcher bearer came down from the 24th to my post looking for extra medical supplies, which we didn't have a lot of but we gave him what we had. But I said to him, "Don't go back son."
- 21:30 he said, "I've got to go back" and he went back. Well the next morning we saw probably a dozen at the most come out of that post as prisoners of the 24th and the Germans moved into The Salient. Well we were in 10 Post, we were opposite the Jerries, they were probably a hundred yards away I suppose and we were relieved
- 22:00 in that post and then I went back there a few weeks later, I took over from a sergeant in the 13th Battalion I think it was, it's getting back a bit you know. And the first morning we were there about five o'clock in the morning one of my blokes, Jimmy Arnold, came to me and said, "Come and have a look at this." and at that time I was a corporal platoon commander because as I say we were disorganised and things hadn't settled down. And
- 22:30 I went and had a look and here's the Jerries in the half dark shaking out blankets, having a wee, all this sort of thing, wandering about and Jimmy said to me, "What are we going to do?" and I said, "Nothing today but we'll be up bloody early tomorrow morning." So the next morning we were waiting for them and it was sheer bloody murder of course, when you think about it now, they didn't have a bloody clue and we got stuck into them and we
- 23:00 must of killed a heck of a lot. Because from then on it got so vicious in that particular area that we ended up, their rations and our rations were coming up by tank, because you just couldn't move above ground. And they'd fixed lines over everything, and fixed lines are where they set a machine gun on a certain line of fire and every now and again they'll put a burst over, and if you don't happen to be aware of it you can get knocked off. Anyhow later
- 23:30 on, I met this sergeant that I'd taken over from, he took over from me again some time later, probably six weeks later, and I met him when I was on leave and he said to me, "What the bloody hell did you blokes do up there?" I said, "What do you mean?" "Jesus Christ we couldn't bloody move!" I said, "I thought that was the name of the game, killing Germans." And we went from there to the bottom of the Salient
- 24:00 and we moved into there, we dug dugouts, we went back and got a sheet of iron, or couple of sheets of iron to put over the top of them and we covered that with dirt and whatever, camel bush and stuff like that and we would lie there that day and then attack up the Salient the next night. But the site was so thickly wired and mined that it was called off and that particular first night when we went in
- 24:30 on our way in the engineers had gone in and taped the area and supposedly cleared it of mines and booby traps and I came across a young signaller who was dying and we did what we could for him, a young fellow named Jack Dolmer and all he could say was, "Don't touch the phone Sir." he thought I was an officer. He said, "Don't touch the phone Sir." he thought it was booby trapped and what had happened, he'd stood on a booby trap
- 25:00 and he was mortally wounded, but that's all he could say, he was thinking of somebody else, "Don't touch the phone Sir." And I thought what a game bloody kid, only a young bloke. And anyhow we went up there and we dug these holes and we went back to get the iron and on our way back, I'd taken all of my section except two which I'd left in the hole, for security's sake.
- 25:30 So anyhow on the way back I saw this flash under the boot of the bloke behind me and while it registered on my mind that he had stood on a booby trap, at that particular time there was the explosion of the booby trap and I couldn't make up my mind whether it was a booby trap or a mortar and I didn't know whether to hit the ground,
- 26:00 to kneel down or to stand up, because normally if Jerry sent over a mortar when it exploded he'd machine gun the spot, just on the off chance of getting people moving. And anyhow I realised it had been a booby trap and I said, "Anybody wounded?" and of course Keith Weisel, who was from the ASC [Australian Services Corp] by the way, they'd lost their trucks on the way back and they'd been sent to the infantry, Keith said, "Yeah I'm wounded, I'm hit in the back of the head."
- 26:30 And I crawled over him, he wasn't badly wounded, to the next bloke who was Harry Parker, another ASC bloke and Harry was gone from head and shoulders blown off, Keith had stood on the booby trap, a jumping jack, and it had jumped up and exploded on Harry's chest. Behind him was my mate Roy Parker and Roy had been wounded and a couple of blokes behind them were okay. I'd been splattered in the back of the head with a bit of light shrapnel from the booby trap,
- 27:00 but nothing much. And I yelled out to the two blokes back in the post to bring up what bandages and that that they had, which was only field dressings, and I left them too look after the blokes there and I went forward looking for stretcher bearers. Well I crawled forward because I thought well, booby traps,

this hasn't been cleared and they say a coward dies a thousand deaths a hero dies but once.

27:30 I'm crawling forward feeling for these three prongs of booby traps and what was known as 'camel bush' is a little bush that grows oh so high, prickly sort of a thing, every time I touched it I bloody near died with fright, expecting a booby trap. But anyhow eventually, and I'm thinking to meself if I get one I'll mark it with my handkerchief, and I'm thinking "I've only got one handkerchief." Anyhow I eventually got through and got onto stretcher bearers and we made it back and

28:00 got the wounded fixed up. And that particular night out of four Parkers in the company one was killed and two wounded, and that was Reggie, and Roy and Don Parker was a lieutenant, don't know whether he was a lieutenant then he might have been a warrant officer, Don was the only one that didn't get wounded that particular night. Anyhow we went back into these trenches put the iron over the top of them and laid there all the next day and roasted in these

28:30 shallow bloody trenches with the iron over the top of them. And then the next night we were told it was off, we were dragged out of there, thank God.

**Just to go back a little bit, the occasion where you'd seen the Germans one morning and then decided, can you just describe sort of what you'd seen the first morning when you'd saw them?**

What this is the lot I told you about that early morning was shaking their blankets and that?

**Yes?**

29:00 Well they must have had some sort of a local truce with the blokes that I'd relieved in this post, because they both must have been allowing one another to get about their normal morning business of going to the toilets, things like that, having a wash or whatever they did, shaking out their blankets and that and then got back to war.

**Would this sort of informal truce be**

29:30 **common?**

Well it happened on a couple of occasions, not so much in circumstances like that, but the 18th Brigade didn't attack up after the Germans had taken the Salient, they did a counter attack up through us and they got belted back out of it. Well there was wounded and dead out there and there was a truce arranged, how it was arranged I don't know, but our blokes went out and got their dead and the Germans went out and got theirs.

30:00 And German medical officers and ours attended to both troops, not necessarily their own. Well I believe that happened in the First World War too on occasion. No it was, I suppose they realised it was common sense.

**And so how hard was it for you to make a decision that you would open up on these Germans in the morning?**

Oh I don't suppose it wasn't that bloody hard at all,

30:30 I thought "They're Germans, they're the enemy and we're here to kill them." And we opened up with everything we had. But I haven't spoken to many people about it but I did speak to my daughter about it once and I said to her, because you get older you realise how stupid it is, I said, "It was bloody murder." I said, "Those poor bastards didn't have a clue." and they didn't. But then because of that it got so vicious, as I say the rations had to come up

31:00 in tanks.

**And you said that you've thought about it a bit in later years, what did you think about it at the time?**

Oh at the time it didn't worry me a great deal, I suppose, we'd done what we were supposed to do and we had to cop the flak back of course because we copped a lot of return, you couldn't move about at all, you had to be very careful. But oh I don't know you've got to live with it later on that's when it comes

31:30 to you, you live with it, you think of the things you did, oh.....I don't know if you can say you're not very proud of it, it seems so senseless, when you think the fact that since then we've had so many migrants that have come out and they can be your next-door neighbour, they can be your fishing mate or whatever. And

32:00 they're the same as us and they believed they were doing the right thing for their country, we thought we were doing the right thing for ours. And I suppose if the whole damn lot of the young people in the world said, "No, we're not going." there wouldn't be any wars. But that's not the way we're built I suppose, that's just what happens. But I don't know if you realise I went over to, back to El Alamein in 2002

32:30 and there was ten of us from Australia went and when we went up to the international commemoration at the Italian War Memorial, we were seated above the Italians and the Germans were opposite us, and it was a tremendous affair, apparently they have it every year and of course it's only a hop across the Mediterranean for them, it's a bloody long way for us. Anyhow when the 'Ties' [Italians] realised we

were Australians oh they were

- 33:00 all over us like a rash, half of them had worked out here and what hadn't worked out here had relations out here. So we got on like a house on fire and there was one old general from the Bersaglieri there, [Italian 8th Bersaglieri Regiment] that used to wear the black roosters plumes on their helmet, and he was doing his block and of course all the old soldiers there are saying you know, he's loco. But I was sitting alongside a German
- 33:30 commander from the navy, he couldn't speak English very well but he could understand it a bit but his wife could speak it quite well and we were talking and he said to me, "Isn't it marvellous?" he said, "It takes all these years to realise how bloody silly it was." So we all get the same way, we all realise with age that the stupidity of it. But it's over there we survived and
- 34:00 lots of poor buggers didn't. In that particular position where we were, or not sure if it was 10 Post or 12 Post, the Germans had had three tanks knocked out near there and at night time we'd heard their recovery teams coming in trying to get them going to get them out, we'd fired on them naturally. But we sent for the engineers to come and blow them up so they couldn't get them. And the engineers said, no it wasn't their job but they'd send us up a
- 34:30 case of gelignite for each tank and we could do it. Well they sent the geli up, we didn't have a bloody clue about how you used gelignite, somebody said, "Well you put detonators in the stick and you put a fuse in and light the fuse and she blows the whole lot." So we went out this particular night, Don Parker, Coogie Kelly and myself and the furthest tank had a big swastika flag about twenty-four foot long which they used to have across the back of their tanks so their infantry
- 35:00 could see it and follow them, big red flag you know, the white circle and the black swastika And Don said, "I'll do that far tank." I said, "Well that bloody flag's mine." cause I wanted to do that to get the flag, he said, "Right oh." So he took his case of geli up to the furthest tank, I took mine to the middle one and Coogie took his to the right hand one and we planted them in the drivers' seats. We put the dets [detonators] in and the fuses, then we
- 35:30 came back to a shell hole and we lit a cigarette each, keep it under cover otherwise we would have been fired on, to go out and light the fuses with the cigarettes. And Don said, "I'll light mine and I'll come back and give you a tap on the shoulder and you can light yours and we'll both run down past Coog and he can light his." So anyhow we did this and were back in the shell hole waiting for them to go, I said to Don, "Where's the flag?" he said, "I rolled it up in a ball and put it alongside you on that tank." The next thing whoop away went his
- 36:00 bloody tank, boonk away went mine and so did Kelly's, if I'd have been looking for the flag it would all be in bloody rags, got blown to hell, wonderful souvenir I thought I was going to get, but anyhow.

**How had you gotten out to the tanks without being fired upon?**

Dark, night time, ninety percent of your patrolling and everything, all your patrolling was done at night because what, I mean daylight, it's like this floor, it's bare, there's no cover

- 36:30 and they had the high ground, they had the escarpment out in front and they had Hill 209 and they could see every damn thing you did. Yeah no you go out at night.

**Well can you take me through like step by step of a patrol of no man's land at night?**

Yeah well normally you go out, in every company front there'd be a break in the wire that you could pull apart, across so you could get out through it

- 37:00 and you'd have a path through the mine field so as you could go out without stepping on your own stuff, and course when you went out you closed the wire behind you. Well if you went out on a fighting patrol you'd probably go out on platoon strength, you know thirty odd blokes and you went out on compass bearings to where you reckon you were going to launch an attack on the enemy line. And
- 37:30 you made your way there in the dark, and believe me you can see by starlight because over there there's no lights to distract you, and the stars are that bright, you can see by starlight you know. But you've got to be careful, the Germans have this habit of firing on fixed lines, so they've got machine guns sort of crisscrossing their fronts and you never know when they're going to fire, but they are a methodical
- 38:00 sort of people and they tend to fire more in a fixed time sort of thing, so that we got to know where the fixed lines were. So you'd move up to that position, you'd wait for them to fire and as soon as they'd stopped you'd move across onto the next position, that sort of thing. Well then if you got into Jerry's line you had to try and get through the wire and into their lines. But they were like us, they'd have an outpost
- 38:30 with a couple of blokes in to give warning of this. And then on their wire, the same as we did, you'd have jam tins or anything with a couple of stones in so that if anybody moved the wire they'd rattle and you know it wouldn't be cattle or anything coming through, it had to be blokes. But then if you went on just a normal listening patrol which we went out a certain distance in front of your posts, you spread out and you lay there

- 39:00 watching and listening for German patrols, they used to come out and they'd be on working patrols, you might go out near their lines where they were digging, enlarging their trenches or doing wiring work and sometimes you could capture prisoners like that. You'd go out there waiting on their working party and grab a bloke and rip him out of it and take him back with you. But you went out through your lines
- 39:30 and you had a set time to come in so that when you came back, you had a password of course, they would be looking for you to come back. And if a blue [fight] went on out the front unexpectedly, well you would attempt to get a runner back to tell what was going on. At one stage I nearly became the most infamous bloke in our battalion. We were on a listening patrol one night and we saw
- 40:00 what was obviously a fighting patrol loom up out of the dust sort of thing and they went to ground not far in front of us, and you could see who was obviously the commander and his sergeant get together and speak and they posted a sentry on four corners. And then they both disappeared and I thought, "Oh this is a Jerry fighting patrol." I had no word of any fighting patrol out.
- 40:30 So I sent a bloke named Jack Anderson back to tell Don Parker that if you heard a blue going on we were stuck into a German patrol and I'd instructed my blokes two grenades each into them and follow it in with the bayonet and I had a Thompson gun and whatever we had. Anyhow we heard this bloke coming back from our lines and we rolled over, I had the Thompson, Jimmy Arnold's got the rifle and bayonet and he just jammed the butt on the ground,
- 41:00 the bayonet was pointing back that way and this fellow almost run onto it and he said, "Jesus Christ!" and I said, "Who's that?" and he said, "Col O'Brien." I said, "What the bloody hell are you doing here?" He was a sergeant from, or a corporal from C Company or Don Company, I've forgotten C Company I think, he said, "We're on a bloody fighting patrol and we got lost." I said, "Is that your mob in front of us?" he said, "Yes." I said, "Jesus Christ!" I said, "We were about to get stuck into them!"
- 41:30 I said, "If it had of been Jack Anderson come back instead of you." I said, "We'd have been right into them." "Oh bullshit." he said, I said, "Well go and tell your officer where we are." I said, "We were going to put a couple of grenades into youse and get into youse." Anyway he went and told his officer and the officer told him, bloody rot it's not there and Kyle yelled out, "Gordon, stand up!" and we were well within grenade range, and they'd got lost, they'd been out on a fighting patrol and got lost.

## Tape 4

00:35 **Okay?**

Well as I said Col O'Brien that came out he was the sergeant or the acting platoon sergeant with this patrol. But I've always been so pleased that it was him and not Jack Anderson that returned because we might have committed an awful bloody crime, well I don't suppose it's a crime, it was an accident

01:00 but you'd have never lived it down. And it shocked hell out of me, but how do you, there's no way you can determine who they are, you see a mob of blokes come up, light machine guns over their shoulder, you can't see them, they're in the dusty sort of atmosphere and you just see them go to ground and as far as you know, your information, you've had no information about a patrol going out.

01:30 And it's a touchy business, but we got to the stage where we thought we were pretty good at patrolling until you got out there and you felt a hand feeling over your shoulder for your Australia badges and that was the bloody Ghurkhas [Nepali regiment of the British Army], and you hadn't heard them or seen them and you had a good chance of getting a kukri [Ghurkha knife]

02:00 across your throat and cutting your head off, and because they were fantastic at moving through the night.

### **Well how would you communicate on a patrol?**

Well very quietly, generally by hand, when you're going out, say you're going out on compass bearing you've got one bloke on the compass there's another bloke counting paces, cause you might

02:30 be going out say on a hundred degrees for say a hundred and fifty paces and then you might be turning to eighty degrees for two or three hundred paces and you've got one bloke counting. Well then you've got to reverse that coming home. But in Tobruk in one way it was reasonably simple coming home providing the night was clear, because where we have the Southern Cross here as our dominant sort of formation in the sky, over there it was the North Star.

03:00 And we had to get used to the fact that when you looked up the Southern Cross wasn't there, it was all northern stars. Well the North Star hung over Tobruk sort of more or less and if you headed for that you were coming home. But luckily in B Company we had a bloke named Ted Donkin from Innisfail who played the saxophone; he used to be in an orchestra before the war and at night time Ted

03:30 did the playing and most of the patrols, B Company patrols would home in onto Ted, and one of the

things he used to play quite often which got to be a favourite of mine was, 'Little Star' [The Astralita Serenade] and he'd be playing this and we'd know we were going in the right direction. But you can get lost out there, I was out on patrol with a bloke named Cec Guest, he was originally an Australian Instructional

- 04:00 Corps warrant officer but then he got a commission, you know professional soldier, real soldier this bloke. And I was out with him on the El Adem Road area late in the piece in Tobruk, we were to do an attack at a place called El Duda and we were out doing reconnaissance of this place and we were right in the horseshoe on the El Adem road and we could hear, we were right in the middle of this and we could hear Jerry talking and that. And anyhow this particular
- 04:30 night, when a mortar goes off you'll hear the whoof of it going off and then you'll start counting automatically and if you get to seventeen and it hasn't exploded you keep on going till about thirty two or thirty three, because at seventeen it's a three point three-inch mortar, if you go on that's a 4.5. And anyhow this particular night we hear this whoof and I'm counting
- 05:00 one thousand, two thousand, three thousand.....I'm just about onto seventeen and it's gone off, well an explosion's gone off and Guestie started to laugh and I said, "What wrong with you, you mad bugger?" he said, "There was a clear three foot of daylight between you and the bloody ground." And what had happened the main gun, oh I forget what they used to call him, something Bill was, that used to fire in the harbour we must have been lying right in front
- 05:30 of where he fired over and he'd fired. And this bloody blast when I'm expecting a mortar and this bloody thing goes off and we both started to laugh then and the Jerry heard us. And they started up an AV [armoured vehicle] to come looking for us so we buggered off out of there in a hurry, believe me. But the 13th Battalion eventually did that attack and I was talking to them, they were left behind in Tobruk after we came out for a few weeks and they did this attack in the breakout of
- 06:00 Tobruk, at El Duda and I've spoken to the blokes since and they said, "You blokes were bloody lucky you didn't go in there." We knew it was heavily wired and mined you know so it must have been a real rough spot. Yeh but I've never forgotten Guestie that night when he started to bloody laugh and we were both laughing and the Jerries could hear us of course, and we buggered out of there in a hurry.

**Well you mentioned a fighting patrol,**

- 06:30 **listening patrols, were there any other sort of patrols you'd go on?**

Yeah well you go out, what would you call them, you're looking for information sort of thing, reconnaissance patrols which is you might only have a couple of blokes go out cause you're going out looking for information about certain areas. And also you go out on patrols, working patrols where you go out to lift mines, you know you go out to Jerry's lines into his mine field and you're lifting his mines

- 07:00 so that if you need be you can go into his mines at a later time. When the Poles came into Tobruk the only thing they wanted to know was where were the Germans, and I had a couple of them sent to me in my section and one big bloke was like a big dog, he'd go out there and you'd be going to lift mines and he'd be in there digging, pelting dirt hell, left and right. And I used to tell him to bugger off because he was going to blow himself to hell
- 07:30 and everybody else near him, he was dangerous. Oh they were just dead keen to get to grips with the Germans, we never had the same reasons, what I mean they had, they definitely had the reasons, we were only there because we were supposedly sticky beaks [curious] and thought there was going to be a big show on and we wanted to be part of it.

- 08:00 **And how would you do something like collect mines?**

Like you go out and normally they were an anti-tank mine called a teller mine, possibly about that round and so thick, and they've got a detonator on top, a heavy brass arrangement and it's got a sort of a key piece on top that you can use a screwdriver or

- 08:30 a coin or something and you turn that from white to red which is armed, turn it from red back to white and it's safe. But when they realised we were lifting them, then they would attach a detonator to the bottom of the mine so that after a couple of blokes had got caught, then you started to dig round, feeling. And it ended up at the end there'd be about five
- 09:00 different detonators attached to the one mine and you were digging around in the dirt with your hands, softening it up with the point of your bayonet so that you could dig the dirt out, feeling around for these detonators. And they've all got a, well ninety percent of them anyhow have got a little hole where you can stick a nail or something through so that if it fires it can't hit the detonator. Well we used to carry nails
- 09:30 in our matchboxes or things like that and you'd feel round, you'd slip a nail through them, and then you'd cut the wire, whatever it was attached to. Sometimes they'd have trip wires and you'd hit the wire and that would detonate it, but they did all sorts of things to try and prevent you from lifting the mines, and that was a risk you had to take, if you were going out lifting mines.
- 10:00 Normally an engineers' job but in Tobruk it was a case of your job, the infantry, because as in most

cases with the infantry you more or less have to learn to do whatever needs to be done. You've got to learn to handle enemy machine guns, their weapons sort of things, become familiar with them because you never know when you might be in a position where you have to use them. And

10:30 learn how to defuse their stuff.

**How did you feel about doing a job like this?**

Oh it was a job that was the thing I suppose, well now it's a long time ago and I don't know how I felt about it, I suppose I had the wind up like anybody else, but you're very, very careful believe me, very careful.

**How would you move on patrol, like how would you physically move?**

Well depending on the

11:00 night, generally you walk upright, you're watching for the fixed lines and things like that. If they sent up flares you either hit the dirt or you stopped dead still and if you're not moving it's hard to pick men up at night, even with the flares. Sometimes if you got close or you're near their wire and that you'd be down on your hands and knees,

11:30 or you'd crawl forward. It's amazing how a tin hat and a bit of camel bush on a little bit of sand makes you feel bullet proof, you know if they're firing at you, you're lying behind it. I suppose it's a false sense of security but that's the attitude you get, you think you're under a bit of cover.

12:00 **What kind of stops you from thinking you're just going to get killed or you're going to die out here?**

I don't know, it's hard to say I suppose, well my mother taught me right from a child to believe in God, which I do, I might say that I pray every night, I always have, Mum died when I was fourteen but at least

12:30 she had taught me that, and I believe. I've got sons that say to me, "We know you believe but we don't." and they've all been sent to church and of course that's their own choice. But not only that, well it's a faith, trust, I suppose for me ninety percent was trust in God, the other part you trust your luck and of course you trust to your mates,

13:00 they warn you of danger, or they protect you in case of danger. There's more decorations won that are never awarded than ever are awarded because it happens so bloody often. A bloke might see something fire and you're not sort of looking in that direction and he'll push you over,

13:30 or he'll say, "Look out, get down, there's something coming!" he's heard it and you haven't. No you look out for one another plus you look out for yourself of course. I have a young friend that was in the air force, Air Field Defence Regiment went up to East Timor and I wrote to young Ken and always on the bottom of the letter I'd say, 'Watch your back', which is what you learn to do.

14:00 So you've got to look after yourself and you can't be bottle-fed sort of thing, no it's faith and a bit of luck.

**And especially when you're patrolling early on how did you learn what to do exactly, how did you know what to do exactly?**

Experience, just by mistake I suppose error and recovery. You get into trouble

14:30 naturally, if you're lucky you get away with it. For instance Jerry hears you and they fire on you and if you're lucky you don't get hurt and you learn something, you learn where they are and where their machine gun post is. And you get to know, oh I suppose you get to know how close you are to their lines and you start to get very cautious then and you get in as close as you can and

15:00 you start to learn the areas that you're particularly stationed in. I suppose it becomes force of habit you just, you're watching, you're using your eyes and your ears, your eyes aren't a lot of good to you at night over there but your ears are. And that is one of the reasons that we didn't wear tin hats or felt hats out on patrol, you had a knitted beanie because the wind,

15:30 any wind or that blowing through them made a noise and you couldn't hear, whereas with a knitted beanie you didn't get any noise. And the tin hats rattled like bloody hell and probably in lots of cases give your position away. Not only that they're bloody uncomfortable, most blokes stuck to, if you're getting barrage you'd probably have a tin hat on but most of them stuck to their felt hats. Oh no it's just a case of,

16:00 it's like everything else, it's on the job training and you learn to do it.

**Well talk us through what happened after, at the end of a patrol when you'd come back to your lines?**

Well you'd come back and you'd go to your platoon commander and give him a report on what you'd seen or what you'd done. The blokes would come back, they'd probably have a drink of tea, they'd put

their weapons away and get into bed

- 16:30 if they could or if necessary you might bring some bloke that's seen something particular, get him to tell what he'd seen and that. And this is the sort of way you get intelligence and information and then that all is forwarded by your platoon commander to company. And quite often operations are based on the information they get from patrols.

**Well tell us how would you record some of this information, especially if you'd removed a mine or**

- 17:00 **mapping mine areas?**

Well just in your mind, for instance you're stationed here say in 12 Post and out there in front of you is the fig tree feature or whatever and you might say, alright on a compass bearing of such and such we lifted so many mines over say thirty yards wide, or something like that. So it wasn't pinpointed but it was a reasonable estimate of where you were.

- 17:30 Some blokes weren't worth two bob with a compass and just the fact that a bloke was an officer or a sergeant or something didn't mean he was a bloody genius, if you had a bloke there that was a bushman, he was the bloke you had leading you.

**And after this briefing what would happen then, say after a patrol?**

Oh well you'd settle down, particularly in Tobruk you'd settle down and

- 18:00 you'd be coming onto daylight because all your patrols were done at night and you'd just smoke, clean weapons, load magazines, sleep, read, play cards. As I say it was sheer boredom for ninety percent of the time. I always reckon that after I left Tobruk I'd never play cards again, if it wasn't poker it was bridge and soon as you sat down to have a meal it

- 18:30 was a bloody resume of what had gone on at the bridge, "What did you play that for?" and you got that damn bored with playing cards I reckon I'd never play cards again. Anything to pass the time to stop you going crackers.

**Would you get much sleep?**

Oh not at night time you didn't, but through the day you'd sleep, flies and dust and heat and that if you could, I suppose

- 19:00 you got enough, you never got an overdose of it because there was always explosions, you were being shelled or bombed or machine gunned, some other damn thing. And there was always somebody putting up a racket of some sort or rather, that you got what sleep you could, just sort of part of the course.

**Well what were you sleeping in and what were you sleeping on, like what were your sleeping**

- 19:30 **quarters like?**

Oh well you didn't have any sleeping quarters, you had a concrete floor in the main post, in the intermediate post you had the dirt because in Tobruk there was a blue metal cap and you could dig down about eighteen inches and then you'd build a few sandbags high, but that was it, you couldn't build them too high because then they become too noticeable. And you just laid on what you had, probably a ground sheet and a blanket if you were lucky or an overcoat.

- 20:00 And night times would be cold, daytimes as hot as hell. I remember one bloke, a bloke from the ASC, a bloke named Cec Twinning, we were in an intermediate post between 11 and 12, which was a dirt dug post and anyhow Cec was lying in a crawl trench which was about, this was so you could move from one defensive position to another, probably that deep, what twelve inches deep or eighteen inches deep in dirt and

- 20:30 then two or three sandbags high. And he's laying on his back and he probably had a bit of canvas across the top or something to stop the sun and this particular day he said, "Hey Gordon, look at the bloody stones falling out of the air." I said, "For Christ sakes don't move Cec!" and there bloody mortars and because he could see them they were right onto our position. And at that particular time a Jerry had got stuck into our position and mortared hell out of us for about half an hour but Cec could see the bombs coming down out of the air and he's saying, "Hey Gordon look at the bloody stones coming

- 21:00 out of the air." He was an ASC bloke and of course I'd had a bit of experience by then and I said, "For Christ sakes don't move Cec!" I knew what they were.

**Well what's the humour like in these kinds of conditions?**

Humour?

**Yeah.**

That's the only thing that keeps you sane, oh there's some funny buggers amongst them believe me, they are some funny bloody men. This is a funny thing to say about the Pommies [English], they all tend to run the Pommies down a bit, but with the Australians

- 21:30 we were the most untalented bloody mob you'd ever met, you get three Pommies together and you've got a bloody concert party, they can sing, they can dance, they can play some instrument and they were fantastic, and it's a fact, you get three Pommies together and you've got a concert party. And our blokes, oh Christ, odd ones of them can sing but they tell yarns, lot of them write poetry or they say poetry, they read but as far as artists go, well our mob weren't...
- 22:00 anyhow, no way. But you talk about Roy Rene [Australian character actor and entertainer] and Amos and Andy [American radio stars, 1930s-40s], oh yeah there's some bloody funny things happen, there's no doubt about that. I can remember one bloke, Jimmy Arnold, the bloke I was telling you about, my Bren gunners, he went up to the toilet this particular day in daylight, and the toilet was a little thing about that big and it was down a bit of
- 22:30 low ground but not thinking when he finished he stood up to pull his pants up and the Jerries dropped a mortar damn near on top of him. Anyhow four blokes raced out with a stretcher and grabbed him, dumped him on top of it and they held the stretcher above their heads like that and run with him to company headquarters to the RAP and Jerry machine gunned them all the bloody way. Not a one of them got a mention, not even an MID [Mentioned in Dispatches] out of it.
- 23:00 And Jimmy died later on, not in that particular case, he got killed. Yeah those blokes were, who was it Bert Columbus, Coogie Kelly, Pipe Passmore, I don't know who the fourth bloke was but I can remember seeing them that day, yeah and they raced
- 23:30 out with the stretcher, dumped Jimmy on it and run with him up above their head and Jerry could see them, you know broad daylight, machine gunned all the way, never got hit luckily. I was almost, oh I'd say I probably was the youngest in my platoon, I had blokes all older than me and when we first came back to Tobruk,
- 24:00 or 9 section had been taken prisoner so that in 12 Platoon we only had 2 sections left. And Jack Kelly was my lance jack [lance corporal] and anyhow eventually after we started to get things organised and Jack was given his second stripe and given 9 section. And he said to me, "Who can I have?" I said, "Anybody you like Jack except Coog." he said, "You bastard!" he said, "You knew I'd want him."
- 24:30 that was his brother. I said, "Take a bloody fool's advice Jack" I said, "You'll have enough trouble on your own without worrying about Coog." Because when I went out on patrol and I took one of them the other bloke was toey all the time until we got back, irrespective of who it was. And, I was only nineteen but I'd had enough of it to know that you're better off without any extra worry, and
- 25:00 bugger me dead about three weeks later 9 section got badly mortared one day and that evening I had to go back to company to pick up mail and orders, that sort of thing, cause the first thing I wanted to know was how did 9 section go. And Jackie Kelly had been killed, he died of wounds actually. Anyhow I went back to my platoon and my particular mate Roy Parker met me and he said, "How
- 25:30 did 9 go?" I said, "Jackie got killed." he said, "Jesus Christ who's going to tell Coog?" And I knew there was only one silly bugger who was going to tell Coog. And I told him and Coog not long after that put in for a transfer and he went to the 2/3rd Anti-Tank Regiment and got away from our mob. And I always felt right up till our fiftieth anniversary that Coogie had blamed me,
- 26:00 although I knew him in Cairns and he was the manager of the brewery and that, I always felt he blamed me. Anyhow at our fiftieth anniversary Jack Foxley who had been the corporal of 9 Section, that got taken prisoner, he'd been prisoner for four years, Jack used to have the pub here at Stanford. Jack and I were talking and I said this to Jack, I said, "Have
- 26:30 you seen Coogie?" I just said to him I said, "Look have you seen Coogie?" He said, "Yes he's straight across there looking at you." And there was a little ceremony going on and I said, "I always felt Coog blamed me over Jack being killed." "Well." he said, "You know that Coog and I were as thick as thieves." they were really good friends he said, "And believe me he never ever did." And it wasn't until our fiftieth anniversary, all those years I always had it in my mind that Coog blamed me for
- 27:00 Jack being killed because I'd separated them. But I felt it was the right thing to do cause otherwise Mr. Kelly would have been getting a letter saying both his sons had been killed. Oh I don't know, I suppose you dealt with these things at they came along.

**Was it hard for you to deal with this supposed thought for all those years?**

Oh yes, yes you live with it, it's always on your mind.

- 27:30 A few things like that. I know my kids have got hidings, my eldest boys, that they should never have got because of my nervous condition, what I mean, I expected that when I said, "Jump" they would say, "How high?" I'd been used to blokes doing as they were told for five and a half bloody years and I just expected things to be done as they were,
- 28:00 and my first wife quite often said to me, "You forget the boys haven't been in the army." But this is the thing that no one appreciates, these women that we married, what they put up with and how they supported you. What I mean there's no use saying one thing and meaning another, we were pretty

bloody hard to live with when we came back,

28:30 you come back entirely different to what you went away, you've had experiences that have changed your life completely. And your whole being has got to have change, and how do you, you don't come back and, for instance like when we came out of the army you were discharged, you walked away out of the army depot, you were expected to go and get a job,

29:00 keep your wife and kids, or get married whatever and carry on as if nothing had happened. Well how the bloody hell do you forget five and a half years of you being out there committing murder? Because after all if you get down to tin tacks, you're in the trench and you're shooting some poor bastard across the road, if you did it now, you'd be in the peter [gaol]. And

29:30 you've got to try and overcome it, nowadays they get counselling and all this assistance and those days they never expected, you were supposed to have nerves of steel and if a bloke's nerves went, a lot of them got committed to mental institutions, they never went into why it happened or how it was affecting the poor buggers. Like when we were in New Guinea I was in hospital and when I come out of hospital, or when I was walking

30:00 I went down to the theatre one evening with one of the sisters from the ward I was in and here was a young bloke about eighteen or nineteen standing on the corner of what they used to call 'the bomb happy ward', his hat on the ground, singing his heart out. And I was only twenty, twenty one, I turned twenty one just after I finished. And I'm thinking to meself, "You poor, young bugger." I'm only a young bugger meself. But this is a boy there eighteen

30:30 or nineteen and he's mentally affected, and he would have got a dishonourable discharge quite possibly. What they called lack of moral fibre, you were a coward. Christ, he was only doing the most natural thing in the world, he cracked up! It happens and you can do nothing about it, it's just something you've got to try and overcome and get back to

31:00 living. And I know that the wives and kids paid quite a high price for it in lots of ways, I know I was no angel to live with, I realise that now, probably still not, oh Trish probably tell you I'm not.

31:30 **Well just going back to Tobruk tell us we were talking before all that a little bit about the humour and stuff, do you remember any black humour or jokes that would be said about the situation?**

No not really you know,

32:00 well this Ringer Carlton I was telling you about we used to think he was a bit of a nut and we got relieved in this particular position by the 43rd Battalion, early hours of the morning. And this particular joker was coming up and he said, "Who are you?" or one of our blokes said, "Who are you?" "We're the f....., f..... 43rd" and he said, "Who are you?" and from our place a very, very tired

32:30 voice said, "We're the f.....15th." But anyhow this Ringer Carlton we were coming out that night and he fell down a shell hole, and Jerries are only a hundred yards away and Ringer's yelled out, "Oh me leg, me leg, me leg!" and we're saying, "Shut up you bastard!" So anyhow we end up putting him on a stretcher and carrying him back to company headquarters and he gets up off the stretcher and walks away to have a leak [urinate]. So I wonder who the bloody fools were, but this is the sort of thing that.

33:00 Then another time one of the few hot meals we got up the line, we were up near the Salient and Jack Anderson and Jack Sandler and I'd had gone back to get these dixies of food and I'm in the middle and I've got a hand on a dixie this side and hand on a dixie that side and Jack Anderson's that side and got a dixie full of tea or something and Jack Sandler's got a dixie full of something there. And anyhow Jerry mortared us,

33:30 were coming up over this ridge and the track through the mine field and he mortared us, so we hit the dirt and Anderson panicked and skied [threw] his dixie and took off. And Sandler and I are lying there and Jack said to me, "Don't move your foot." I said, "Why?" he said, "It's lying on top of a Gypo [Egyptian] mine." and his head's alongside me bloody boot. But anyhow we often laughed about it afterwards, very carefully I sneaked me boot off this bloody mine

34:00 because things were made in Egypt and they had a habit that if they run out of these semi-lead shear pins they'd put a wooden match in there. And Jack's head's lying alongside me and he's saying, "Now don't move your boot." And that was the bloke we rocked his bloody fountain pen. Oh I don't know they'd put things over one another.

34:30 We had a bloke named Keith Craig, 'Count Isenglass' we used to call him because he used to wear glasses and Craigie was later near bloody killed at a show at El Alamein and taken prisoner but Craigie was a funny bloke, I don't know if you've ever read, We Were The Rats by Lawson Glassop. Well there's a bloke in there called Gordon Hardacre who was a financial wizard sort of thing, or he thought he was,

35:00 well he was Craigie to a tee and that section in that particular book I always thought that was Craigie for sure, but the bloke that wrote it was from the 17th Battalion, one of our Brigade. Oh no the funny things that happened, for instance we got sent to Tobruk on water, getting water, we're back on the blue line

- 35:30 and we'd taken all the drums and water bottles, or water cans from the various platoons and we'd taken our own particular little white water cans and we'd been told there was a sweet water well, which was a fresh water well behind where the brothels used to be in Tobruk. And we went there and filled ours up and when we get back to the company, the company commander demanded that we
- 36:00 split our own platoon cans with the rest of the company. We told him to go to buggery and he demanded, so our blokes took the caps off and poured the water out on the ground in front of him, and he wasn't very impressed. At that particular time we were up on a Sunday, we'd worked all day and then about six in the evening a runner came up and said
- 36:30 there's a church parade on, would we attend. So I was acting platoon commander at the time and Billy Devonshire from Rockhampton was my runner and I said to Bill, "Hey Bill slip round and tell the section leaders to send a couple of men each to church will you?" He said, "You know what they'll tell me don't you?" and I said, "Well never mind, go and tell them." So they told him, so I got my back up then I said, "Right oh, tell them that the parade is on." and I marched them down to company. And I knew that they couldn't
- 37:00 be forced to go to church and they knew it too. And one bloke went to church, and he intended to go in any case and the rest of us turned round and went back to our platoon positions. So the next thing there's a runner up there, "Report to company headquarters." so I went down and reported to company headquarters and the commander said to me, "You put those men up to that." he said, "I'm going to have you charged with inciting a mutiny." I said, "Come off it Captain Strains." I said, "You've got to be bloody joking!"
- 37:30 I said, "All of those men are older than me." I said, "If they want to make up their minds about going to church they'll do so and you know they don't have to go." and I just turned my back on him and walked away. So I went down to company the next morning and the 2IC said to me, "You made a job of things last night didn't you?" I said, "What do you mean?" he said, "The company commander's up there seeing what charges he can lay against you." So I said, "Look Len if that's his attitude tell him
- 38:00 he can take these two stripes and stick them up his jack as well." Anyhow I get sent for about one o'clock and I go down and this company commander said to me, "I think we'll forget the whole affair." I said, "You please your bloody self Captain Strains." and I just walked away and left him to it. But he and I. we just never hit it off, I don't know why whether it was, probably my fault but I
- 38:30 just couldn't stand him and we locked horns a few times. Still in all, I'm not the only one.

#### **Well what did you think of some of the leadership in Tobruk?**

Generally a hundred percent. As I said we lost our CO and I've often wondered how we would have gone with old Spike, I think he'd have been a bloody good commander in action. But we got a bloke from the 17th Battalion

- 39:00 called Bob Ogle and he took over and our blokes would have followed Bob to hell, he came and he had a completely, oh different attitude. I'd been out on patrol all bloody night when he first, he come up the line, it was early one morning and I woke up and I heard this bloke say, "Don't wake him up." I thought, 'Who's that?'
- 39:30 it sort of run through my mind, I wonder if that's the new CO, I thought, gees he'll do me, not going to wake me up. So anyhow I staggered out half asleep and he put his hand out and he said, "My name's Bob Ogle, I'm your new CO" he said, "I'm from the 17th." and I said, "Oh. my name's Gordon Wallace." we shook hands and away Bob went. And unless it was official I never called him anything else but
- 40:00 Bob ever after, if I had to I called him colonel. But he took us through into El Alamein and he got badly wounded there at the Limbur show that we did and I corresponded with Bob off and on right till the time he died, and he was a marvellous bloke and all the blokes that knew Bob in our mob thought he was just something out of the box. And we had two others; we had a lot of good officers.

## **Tape 5**

- 00:35 **Okay can you describe for me the general set up of the trenches that you were living in, in Tobruk?**

Yes, as I said before the main setup were concrete trenches that the Italians had built, they consisted of

- 01:00 a certain amount of firing positions for riflemen and machine gunners and then a circular pit for anti aircraft work. Part of the passageway between the anti-aircraft pit and the main fighting pits were covered over and that's where your sleeping quarters and whatever, your living quarters. They were nothing flash believe me, just pure concrete and concrete floors. In between we had intermediate posts built
- 01:30 naturally because there was too much room between the big posts to allow troops to get through or

patrols and things like that, so we dug an intermediate post into the dirt and you couldn't get down very far because of the rock cap and then you built up with sandbags. And you couldn't go up too high because it drew too much attention. And of course over those, you might put a ground sheet or something to keep the sun off you, you had no other cover. Meals were what you could do

02:00 with bully beef or biscuits, for instance you might soak the big biscuits overnight so that in the morning you could mash them up and make a type of a porridge with them. We used to pick up small lumps of vegetable, sort of extract made something like a Vita-Brit, these were Italians

02:30 but we were picking them up out of the dirt of course, but they had a lot of garlic in them and that added a bit of taste to your bully beef when you made a stew or whatever. And then at night time when you're on piquet if you got some of these smaller biscuits that were probably two and a half inches square and probably quarter of an inch thick if you were on piquet or sentry of a night on your own and it's quiet and you're there and you're looking out and listening you'd be gnawing away on these things

03:00 and they become addictive, so you'd end up you'd probably go through a packet of them before you'd finished your shift and you wouldn't realise it.

**You were just telling me what those biscuits tasted like?**

Well, they didn't taste a great deal like anything much, they weren't any particular flavour, they were just a biscuit because we didn't have any variety of stuff to eat, or very rarely

03:30 it was just you gnawed away at them for something to do more or less. Not very often, we did get down to a, not an ordnance depot but a supply depot at one stage, we went down there one day to do some work there when we were out on the blue line and the first time we'd seen any oranges, we saw a crate of oranges down there. And we knocked off a bag of flour,

04:00 it was dumped on the side of the road to pick up on our way home so we could see what we could do with that. But you got odd meals supplied but not many and by the time you got them they weren't hot anyhow. It was pretty much a, the menu was very, very plain, a la carte but sometimes sounded like 'carta-tation'.

**And what would you**

04:30 **do during the days out there in the trenches?**

Well providing there was no action taking place, laid about, you might talk about the next patrol you were doing or what you were going to do that night, you might write letters, some blokes wrote poetry, you read, played cards whatever, just talked, or slept.

**Did you write poetry out there?**

Oh well anything I wrote was on scraps of paper cause you didn't have much in the way of pens

05:00 pencils, I've got scraps of paper there, like Red Cross bits of paper, Salvation Army and that that I'd scribbled down thoughts and things like that that I had. I had little poems that I wrote, one about when we were leaving Tobruk. Oh just odd bits and pieces, I'm sorry, had I been older I probably might of realised the value of a diary but I wasn't a diarist and I didn't keep it,

05:30 I'm sorry that I didn't because there's lots of things you don't recall. My memories not too bad but there are some things that took place that you probably, well I suppose with a diary you could put a story together but I did mine with poetry, so it's just the way it goes. But by and large it was an experience and

06:00 I suppose we created a bit of history, the longest siege in history and our blokes, our B echelon blokes like drivers and that that had nothing to do and they got old enemy artillery pieces and created what they called the Bush Artillery. And they weren't trained artillery men or anything but they got old enemy weapons and ammunition and they fired on the enemy

06:30 and they apparently made an impression from time to time to, which is all a bit extra and we needed all the help we could get.

**And during the day in the trenches would you actually have to stay down with your head down?**

Generally yep, yeh well you could take the risk, what I mean, we've had a German officer's diary that recounted the fact how good our snipers were and we didn't have any snipers. But they had a habit,

07:00 if they were observing our lines they had hessian hanging down in front so you couldn't see movement and things, but they'd lift the hessian to look out without thinking that the reflection of light on white faces showed up. And if you saw it, well quite often somebody would pick up a rifle and have a shot at the reflection and apparently they were pretty good shots because we caused quite a few casualties that way and it came across in a German officer's diary.

07:30 But we never had any snipers as snipers.

**And how would you, obviously you were patrolling at night, but being sort of stuck in the trenches for weeks at a time did this affects your fitness?**

Well naturally you didn't get a great deal of exercise as far as that goes. The thing was we were young, we weren't over-eating which meant you were getting sloppy, matter of fact we were very lean. But as the opportunity

08:00 got out, your shirts were always off sort of thing, you lived in shorts in daylight anyhow and you got what sun you could. Oh a bit of horse play and that, they'd wrestle with one another and things like that, but you didn't get any real exercise as far as track work or specialised training or anything like that. It was just the fact that we were young and fit, or healthy should I say and whether we were fit or not remains to be

08:30 seen.

**And what sort of things would you talk about in the trenches during the day?**

Everything, those days of course you must realise of course those days the average Australian bloke was pretty naive, what I mean we weren't up on sex or anything like that, like the kids are nowadays, probably what we learnt we learnt from watching animals, nobody taught you anything like that.

09:00 We didn't race around with photos of half nude sheilas all over the place, there might be odd ones and that but generally speaking you had photos of your family or your girlfriend in your wallet. You would show them to one another, if mail came in normally speaking you'd get the news from everybody, somebody from a different town to yours would say, "Oh such and such happened." "What's that?" and they'd tell you all about it. You'd talk about different places and of course

09:30 you knew blokes from different towns, some of us came from the same towns, but then you got to meet blokes from all over and you heard a lot. I used to tell people I came from 'Bluelo'o and I didn't know there was such a place until years later and I was looking over a road map one time and here's Blueloo up near Jondaryan way [Queensland], and I thought well I'll be buggered. You know it was just something, somebody would say, "Where do you come from?" I'd say,

10:00 "Blueloo."

**Where had you made it up from?**

Oh I don't know just dreamed it up and I didn't know there was such a place but in only reading a road map years later, and I had a mate come from Jondaryan and I said to Sid one day, I said, "I'll be buggered" he said, "Didn't you know?" I said, "No" he said, "I always did." but these things happen.

**And you were a sergeant?**

10:30 No I was a corporal, I was a sergeant at the end but I was a corporal there.

**And did you feel I guess different levels of responsibility towards some of the men below you?**

Oh naturally you must, you're responsible, the buck stops here sort of thing. I only ever had real occasion though to use

11:00 it seriously once, I was out on patrol one night with the Jack Elliott I told you about was killed earlier. And I'd left his brother and a bloke named Lally in the trenches for when we came back. So anyhow when we came back from our patrol we approached our position and we weren't challenged, so we hit the deck and I sent Jack

11:30 round one side and I went the other and we came in from the back and they were both asleep. So I said, "Who's got the watch?" cause my watch was the only one in the platoon that was going and I'd given it to them so they could relieve one another and Lally had the watch, I said, "Right pack your gear." he said, "What do you mean pack your gear?" I said, "You're not stopping here mate." I said, "You'r egoing back to company." And of course he huffed and puffed and he wasn't going back to company and I said, "Pack your bloody gear mate."

12:00 and I took him down to company, that was about three o'clock in the morning. And the company commander I woke him and he said to me "He's going back." I said, "No bloody way." I said, "Any bastard goes to sleep up there on me is not stopping there.." And anyhow that boiled over until when we went back to Palestine he threatened to shoot me one night and I had, we were guarding an ordnance depot at Berbara and each NCO [non commissioned officer] had

12:30 four or five blokes on a shift. And what we used to do is wake them and then they'd go out and relieve the bloke that was out there and then you'd go round and check that they had relieved them and everything was going okay. Anyway this particular time he didn't turn up one night, he was woken and when I went out to check the post this post hadn't been relieved and

13:00 a chap named Harry Denby out of 11 Platoon and I said to Harry, "When you go back wake Lally and send him out." I said, "I'll do your shift until he gets here." so he never turned up. So the next morning I went to company headquarters and I was going to charge him and there was a bit of backfire went on and a bloke, acting sergeant major was trying to cool things down, I said, "Right, if he doesn't turn out tonight I'll come and wake you and you can do his bloody shift."

- 13:30 So that afternoon he got full somewhere or rather and came up to where the NCOs were stationed and "Where's Wallace?" so I walked out and said, "What do you want?" and he went on with a lot of abuse and I was going to hook him [punch him] and Benny Denman from Mareeba said, "Don't touch him, that's what he's after, he's going to get you to punch him and then he'll charge you." And I thought Benny was older than I was and had more sense I suppose. Anyhow he said, "You come near my bloody post
- 14:00 tonight and I'll bloody well shoot you." and I said, "Are you finished?" he said, "Yes." I said, "Well don't bloody miss." So that night I went and woke him and the other blokes on the shift, I went and checked everybody else except him and I went out to his post last and he was there. And I slapped the bayonet on the rifle and I said, "Anytime you like mate." and if he'd have moved I'd have killed him, and he knew it. Anyhow some time later
- 14:30 than that somebody said to me, "What did you ever do to Lally?" I said, "Why?" they said, "He'll do anything you like." I said, "I called his bloody bluff that's all." But that's how things boil over, but that's the only time I had to seriously use any authority I had. Most blokes you, they know they've got to do their job the same as you do.

#### **Would any of the men under you**

#### **15:00 come to you for advice or with problems?**

Oh sometimes they would yes and you know I was only very young and I didn't have any experience in life to tell them, only sort of what you pick up along the road that you think you're doing the right thing. I'd go and talk to other blokes, older blokes than me. You know Jack Kelly and I were particularly close and good friends and Roy Parker who was my particular mate was a lot older than I was and Roy was in his 30's, but we'd both come from

- 15:30 El Arish where I'd worked as a lad porter and he was an adult. But I could go to Roy and talk to Roy and we got on well, if I had any problems or that I'd talk to Roy. And we had a bloke named Horrie St Halar which wasn't his real name apparently, I didn't know this till after the war, but if ever there was a blue went on Horrie used to say to me, "Get up 'em Hooker." he used to call me hooker because I had stripes,
- 16:00 he'd say, "Get up 'em Hooker." But I was like everybody else you get testy and do your block, they realise it the same as you do it's just the pressure of what you're there and boredom, you get just sort of sick and tired of the whole affair sort of thing, wished to hell it was over, but that's how it goes, part of the course sort of thing.

#### **And out in**

#### **16:30 the trenches would people come and visit you, for example padres, Salvation Army?**

Oh yes occasionally, well we didn't see too much of the padres, I don't think they think we had a high regard for most of them, but yep the Salvo [Salvation Army] blokes were great although I don't recall any Salvo blokes in Tobruk but I suppose there was. But you got blokes from different units that you knew. For instance as I said to you earlier about the 18th Brigade doing an attack up through us

- 17:00 well when they got belted back I was a corporal, acting platoon commander, at the time and I had a mortar section in the post as well and Jerry was putting in counter-battery work, you know that is they were shelling the area as they were coming back. And they went to ground around our post and we knew these blokes, a lot of them came from Cairns and that area and we knew them personally. Anyhow my blokes are doing their blocks [getting angry] at me because I wouldn't
- 17:30 let them into the post. And we had too many men in the post, if Jerry counter-attacked we had to fight the post and if it was overcrowded you couldn't use your weapons to your best advantage, and I said, "No way, they're not coming in." You know we took in who we could, wounded and that. And one bloke was Henry Boland from Gordonvale who'd I'd gone to school with and we were, Henry was laying outside and I was in the tennis court, there's no cover there of course and we were talking
- 18:00 about school days and the fact that Henry was sweet on a girl Valmai Lanskey who we went to school with, her father was the saddler in Gordonvale. And Henry Boland and I think the officer in charge was Vince Donelly if I'm not mistaken. But a lot of them Cairns boys or from around that area, from 18th Brigade, my wife's father was in the 18th Brigade in the 2/9th Battalion. And
- 18:30 yeah so it puts you in a dicky [difficult] position, you don't want to see blokes lying out in the dirt when they're being shelled but at the same time you've got to look at the sort of, what shall I say the realistic side of it that you have to fight that post if they counter attack, which they didn't thank God. But it puts you in a dicky position and your blokes get cranky with you because, and you were young, I'm only nineteen and all these blokes are older than me
- 19:00 and I'm telling them I'd not letting these blokes in the post and there getting really cranky with me but I got backed up by like different blokes in my mob realised that what I was saying was the right thing and the section leaders knew that, oh we get over it. I suppose we'd better leave Tobruk had we?

**Well, tell me how they pulled you out of Tobruk?**

19:30 We came out on the HMS Abdiel it was the latest thing in the British fleet, fastest thing in the navy, thirty four knots, it was a mine layer. And the most marvellous thing about it they had fresh water and they cooked their own bread on board and I can remember standing under the showers and drinking it because our drinking water was about thirty three percent salt. And

20:00 eating fresh bread and butter was absolutely marvellous.

**How did they get you out of Tobruk without getting bombed?**

Well we came out at night.

**How was that all organised?**

Well the Poles came up and relieved us and we withdrew from there, they relieved us at night and we withdrew from our positions and then walked down to the harbour. Oh I don't know if we were trucked down I don't recall,

20:30 and then across onto the Abdiel and away. And of course the harbour's in darkness all the time, it used to be shelled regularly and there was a lot of wrecks in there and it was quite a feat for the commanders of the various ships to get in and out. But, yeah and then the main thing was to get out and get as far away as you could in darkness before the Stukas [Junkers Stuka Ju-87 dive bomber] woke up to the fact, because they came every morning looking for ships and try and catch them between there and Alexandria [Egypt],

21:00 which is three hundred-odd mile, Stuka Alley they used to call it. And they also used to call it the "spud run" which was done by the Scrap Iron Flotilla which was the Australian ships [the V- and W-class Australian destroyers, HMAS Vendetta and HMAS Waterhen for example, were built on antiquated, World War I designs and were nicknamed the Scrap Iron Flotilla]. No, that was marvellous, that fresh water showers and fresh bread and butter, best thing that happened.

**How did the British on the ship treat you?**

Oh they were great,

21:30 well sailors are always good, navy, you know the old saying the navy is here, well thank Christ they were because without them we wouldn't have lasted in Tobruk. They supplied us, ammunition and food and they bought in reinforcements and took wounded and that away, and without the navy I can image Tobruk would have been a very short siege. No they were wonderful and more

22:00 particularly when I think about that letter when they went down and bought the mail up and I got that letter that had been under water and salvaged from the sea, you know, I'll have to dig it up it's here somewhere. But it's such a marvellous thing for them to do.

**And how long did you have on leave after you came out of Tobruk?**

Oh not actually, we didn't have a lot, I think the most I got was a three day trip to

22:30 Lake Tiberias [Sea of Galilee, Palestine] that was a bus trip, the padre was on that trip with us and we had a case of grog on the bus and he was trying his best to persuade us not to get too full [drunk]. But we got to Tiberias so I was out on the Sea of Galilee in a fishing boat, had a little romance with a little Jewish girl or Arab girl, I've forgotten what she was, up there.

**What kind of a romance?**

Oh you know

23:00 just a, well I was only there for what couple of days, she was a nice girl, that's a long way ago, I don't even remember her name. They were nice people over there, this is one of the things that I don't understand that when Israel wasn't a state the Jews and the Arabs lived side by side, worked together no troubles,

23:30 they must of known it was coming though and since Israel become a state of course, politics came into it and now they can't stand one another. But I can remember a Jewish chap that run a little curio or souvenir store along the end of our camp and he said, we used to talk about everything and he said to me one day, "It will be a good thing if they left a division of you blokes over here." I said, "What for?" he said, "There's going to be trouble between the Jews and the Arabs."

24:00 and he said, "You blokes kick arse indiscriminately." which meant that we got on well with both sides, we treated them all alike. And I often think now that's probably why our kids are so good as peace keepers cause they're like us, they mixed with the people and got on with the kids and if you get on with the kids the parents trust you. And we played with the kids, if we had spare tucker we gave it to the kids, we used to get our washing done by the women in the villages and we just treated

24:30 them like people. I used to go into the bazaars or anywhere like that and watch them doing leather work, silver work, weaving rugs and my blokes used to sometimes say to me, "You'll end up with your throat cut." like I couldn't speak Arabic. they couldn't speak English. but we made ourselves

understood. I drank a million cups of coffee, little tiny ones and I got to see things that they didn't and thoroughly enjoyed myself. And I used to love mixing with the people,

25:00 I just sticky beak I suppose, even to one stage where I thought I might of won the heart of a French girl but her father didn't mind but her mother wasn't having any Australian. That's water under the bridge, that's a long time ago.

**And how did you sort of get the orders, or how did they move you into the El Alamein area?**

Well we had moved up into

25:30 Syria and Lebanon and then onto the Turkish border. We did a march right across the top there and we'd never seen snow most of us. and the first night out about three o'clock in the morning we woke up and we were under four inches of snow. And you know the officers used to have these folding stretchers and they were all under them instead of on top of them. But then we marched from there to Aleppo [Syria] and then into a little place called Idlib and it snowed quite a lot while

26:00 we were there and we thoroughly enjoyed it and snow fights and things like that. And having never seen snow before it was marvellous. And then we were up almost on the Turkish border, we had a little bit of interchange with Turkish troops up there, you know just talking and that. And then the word came that Jerry was on the move after the Suez Canal and we were told we were to, we were making our way down there by truck, but we were told

26:30 we were to take off anything that would identify us as Australians.

**Why is that?**

Well they didn't want them to know the Australians were coming into the show.

**So what did you take off?**

Well we wore tin hats instead of felt hats, we took off all our badges except our, well badges of rank but Australia badges, rising suns and that. And anyway when we were going through Cairo in convoy the kids are yelling out, "Hey Aussie, Hey Aussie." And somebody said,

27:00 "How do you know we're Aussies?" he said, "Tan boots." we were the only troops that wore tan-coloured boots, so, so much for security. But anyhow when we got up there of course Jerry knew we were coming because they had spies all over the place. Actually when we were in Aleppo I was relieving a sergeant of the guard in the barracks there and there was a Captain Redman from the

27:30 Scots Greys Regiment who was a field service security officer and they had the postmaster from Aleppo who was a sheik in jail as a spy, he was the last person to have control of the mailbags before they went into Syria and word was getting through. And he was belting Christ out of that poor bugger, and anyhow he came one day and Mick Mead was the other sergeant of the guard,

28:00 and Mick, I took over from Mick this particular morning and he said, "Oh for Christ sake watch Redman." he said, "He's in a bloody foul temper." And I said, "What's wrong?" and he said, "Somebody's got word to that sheik of his family." and he was keeping all word of his family away from him. And I'm standing at the front door a little while later and Redman had come in and I knew he was very cranky and I didn't have much to say to him, but I'm looking down the side and they had a batch of Arabs building an exercise yard

28:30 and they were raking all this rubbish and that up towards the side of the building. And I just strolled down, I didn't have a clue what was going on and I'm just watching them for a while and I just happen to glance up at the window of this blokes cell and there's a little triangular piece broken out of it and I'd realised it hadn't been before. And I walked over and stood on this pile of rubbish and I could just reach the thing and one of these blokes cleaning the yard had bought

29:00 information for him and slipped it through this hole in the glass, they'd broken the thing, so cunning you know. So I called Redman and I said, "Come and have a look at this." he said, "What's that?" I said, "That's where he got his information." and he said, "Jesus Christ the cunning so and so's." And, but that's what happened. Anyhow this fellow and a woman that was a prostitute in one of the brothels there, a blonde woman

29:30 she and he were both executed by firing squad, by British firing squad, they were both spies.

**For the Germans?**

Yep. So anyhow as I say we moved down from there up to El Alamein and I was only talking to Doug about this the other day that I, when we got into the position there and Jerry wasn't really set up there at that stage, he was pushing our blokes back, the British

30:00 and these big shells they hadn't exploded there and I thought to myself, 'Jesus Christ they're not fooling this time', they were big. And so anyhow we get dug in there and from then on things proceeded, like people forget that we were there for months, everybody thinks about the battle of El Alamein as the 23rd of October but they forget we were down there in June and blokes were getting killed and wounded everyday,

- 30:30 and we were still carrying out our normal duties, patrol work and that. And when, on the 1st of September our battalion did a battalion raid into the German lines, as far as I can gather it was to facilitate some plan that Montgomery [British Field Marshall Bernard Law Montgomery, commander 8th Army, North Africa] had to draw attention away from the south end of the line where he was going to attempt to break through there. But when they realised, we went in early in the morning
- 31:00 and we come about eleven o'clock, midday and we'd lost about a third of our strength, we took a few prisoners, killed a few blokes. And I think they realised then, or he felt they weren't ready, that he didn't have the strength he wanted. So things carried on then until the 23rd October and because when we went up that night at that stage it was the biggest barrage that had ever taken place.
- 31:30 And the night we walked up, they had a Bofors gun firing on our line of advance, tracers so that you could follow, they had those old white torches in beer cans facing back our way on stakes, green and red on either side to show you where the mine field had been cleared so you could walk up. And the artillery behind us, there was thirty miles of guns wheel to wheel and when they let up
- 32:00 ten o'clock at night it was just this one, just the whole horizon was lit up and these bloody shells going over to top and I thought to myself, 'Thank Christ they're going the other way', cause they started to come back to when Jerry got back into it. But we went up and my battalion took all their objectives in every attack we went into. I don't know whether we were lucky
- 32:30 or what because some of the battalions got a fearful hiding a couple of times and we had to go back in, whether we were lucky. But anyhow we were there from go to whoa and eventually we drove forward and then swung towards the coast and that was to try and encircle the Germans. And when the Jerries decided to run I was sent up with,
- 33:00 I had the anti-t platoon at this time, I'd changed into, within our battalion. I was sent up with four guns to straddle the coast road behind the Germans to catch them as they were withdrawing. But they didn't, they withdrew through the desert and left the Italians behind and took most of the transport for the Germans. By the same token during the different battles that took place we took hundreds
- 33:30 of prisoners, actually and I took a hundred and seventy two back to Alexandria, to the cages back there at one stage during the show with my platoon. And we put them into this cage, outside Alex and we spent the night in the Egyptian Army trenches there, got a chance to wash our clothes. We hung them out on the barb wire and then somebody yelled out, "The wogs
- 34:00 are pinching our clothes!" so they got the Bren gun out and dropped a burst alongside them and as every time they dropped a burst they dropped some more of our clothes, so over a period of about a hundred yards we got all our gear back. But we went down that evening to these German prisoners and we went to put them in a cage with the Ities and the ranking bloke was a young corporal with these blokes, blonde, typical Aryan youth, the ideal
- 34:30 Aryan youth and anyhow he said, no they weren't going in with the Italians. Well we didn't give a bugger, there was another cage there so we bunged them into that one. So he organised things and got them, blokes working and doing things. So that evening we went down just to have a look and the Italians had built a large globe of the world with all the countries on it in white and the seas in blue, probably oh about six or seven foot high I suppose.....

**What had they built it out of?**

Concrete

- 35:00 and see they do these things to keep them occupied. Anyhow we were watching them and had a look at that and then we walked over to where the Jerries were and they were sitting down, it was just on dusk and this corporal was sitting there and one of our blokes said, "Hey Jerry, were you in the Hitler Youth movement?" and as quick as a flash it came back a Yankee accent, "No son, I was in the Salvation Army." and our bloke felt about that big. And it turned out he
- 35:30 was an American that had been with his grandparents at Heidelberg studying engineering and had got bunged into the German Army. So I'd imagine he'd be repatriated, if he wished it that way, as far as he was concerned he was a Jerry he wasn't interested, didn't say, "I'm an American or anything" but he had a Yank accent and that's where he'd been, how long he'd been in Heidelberg I don't know. But it came back so quick
- 36:00 when this bloke said, "Hey Jerry were you in the Hitler youth movement?" and he said, "No son I was in the Salvation Army" and we laughed like hell. And that was the sort of feeling you got with these blokes, you could go and talk to them and you didn't look on them as the enemy, they were prisoners right oh could have been the other way about. And you knew if you were taken by the German front line troops you got treated the same way as we treated them, there was no abuse, it's only when you got back to the B echelon troops
- 36:30 that you had trouble, sort of Military Police and that sort of thing. But no they were just soldiers like us and young blokes. Anyhow we went back up the line and.....

**Well just to go back a bit to the barrage when, how was the information being given to you about how you were to make your way through the mine field?**

Oh well prior to the attack

- 37:00 the brigade commanders are called in by the divisional commanders and they're called in by Montgomery and that and all this planning takes time but it goes down to the very basic and comes down from your battalion commanders to your company commanders then to your platoon commanders and your platoon sergeants and corporals, until every man is told exactly what is going to happen. And that's why if a sergeant or a corporal or a captain got
- 37:30 knocked there was always somebody, a private could hop in and take his job up because he knew what we had to do, and they were quite capable of doing it, not that they wanted the responsibility but they could do the job. And that's how it happened that everybody was told what was going to happen and generally speaking the organisation was good and baring unforeseen circumstances it did happen that way. You know what I mean you might get to a position where Jerry was terrifically strong
- 38:00 and he held up an advance of one mob, which did happen on one occasion that we ended up for a few days, two or three days I think it was our battalion had the enemy on three sides of us, cause we'd pushed forward and taken our objective but the other blokes alongside us hadn't. And then they drove in alongside us again and took the position and it made things easier for us. But.....
- 38:30 **What sort of things would you objectives be that you'd have to take?**
- Oh a rise in the ground, might be just, they might say Hill 23, which was a rise in the ground two or three hundred yards ahead. Or it might be an area that was occupied by the enemy that was causing trouble and they wanted to get rid of them, or a place that you needed to get rid of the enemy because you wanted to turn your attack towards the coast and try and get behind the Germans and cut them off,
- 39:00 divide their forces. And as they say divide and rule. These things were always worked out by the generals and that and it was up to the soldiers to carry it out which they did. But you know you've got to look at it from so many different ways that, I think our blokes admired Rommel [German Field Marshall Erwin Rommel, Commander of the Afrika Korps] as much as the Germans did, he was a good general and a gutsy bugger. He landed
- 39:30 on the clover leaf feature in the German front lines in a Fearless staunch [?] and the 2/7th Field Artillery could normally put a shell on a sixpence couldn't bloody well hit him, I don't think they wanted to and he flew away from there. But he was well admired, it's the same way with Lily Marlene became the hit song for both sides, the things you can't put your finger on, they just
- 40:00 happen. Like I got sent back in the middle of this, I was in the 10 Platoon and I got sent back in the middle to Berka [RAF base, Libya] which was a British Air Force advanced field to have a look at the new anti-tank guns that were coming out. So while I'm back there there's a NAAFI canteen [Navy Army Air Force Institute] there so Archie Paton was my sergeant major, when he came back to pick me up with the Jeep I said, "How much money you got Arch?." "Why?" I said, "Well what money we've got we can have grog for
- 40:30 mate." So what money we had between us we loaded the Jeep and split it between company headquarters and my platoon and we put it into the Bren gun pit and blokes would be sneaking over to get a beer, and I think Jerry must of thought it was General Headquarters because he put a fixed line over the top of the Bren pit, because the blokes were sneaking over to get a beer, until the beer ran out. It was a dangerous occupation.

**We'll just have to pause there cause we're at the end of the tape.**

## Tape 6

- 00:38 **Just interested in the day to day work you were doing in that period before the main battle so to speak began, what kinds of things were you doing?**
- Well you were in your normal trenches, defensive positions and you were strengthening them all the time. In behind you there was a build up taking place of what equipment was coming
- 01:00 forward that Montgomery wanted for when he eventually attacked. Besides that there was a lot of bogus tanks, artillery pieces, occasionally Jeeps or trucks going back and forwards across the line creating a hell of a big dust pool, as if there was a lot of stuff coming up, with the idea of deception to the Germans that
- 01:30 we were getting more stuff than we were getting. Continual artillery drills, not a lot of infantry work apart from patrolling for reconnaissance points of view, they were sort of settling in getting ready to attack to break through because Rommel was pretty confident that he was going to get to the Suez Canal. And there was a change of commanders in our side of it and they bought Montgomery in.
- 02:00 And of course Montgomery wasn't prepared to go until he reckoned he had the strength and the weight of numbers to create a break through and maintain it. And the 8th Army wasn't only Australians; we

were only one small part of it, one division. There was New Zealanders, South Africans, Scots, British, Indians, the Jews had, I think there was Greeks there even in part of it. But the main thing was

- 02:30 general sort of static warfare where you were holding your positions and trying to improve it and at the same time trying to get what information you could about the enemy, and deceiving him into thinking you were a lot stronger than what you were. And then when Montgomery was sort of creating an impression that his main attack was going to come from the southern end, down near the Qattara Depression [Egypt] and that, and there was quite a bit of work
- 03:00 went on there, as a matter of fact a few tank engagements took place down there. Well then on the first of September when we lodged this show they called Operation Bulimba, that was because Bulimba beer, we were a Queensland Battalion. That was a probe, a battalion raid that became an all-in go, that was a probe to test the German strength. And it probably could have
- 03:30 succeeded more than it did had the Pommy tanks gone in, but one tank got knocked out and they wouldn't go in so our blokes were left without tank support. But it was a tactical turnout and of course the ordinary common soldier doesn't always get that. For instance you'd have various officers coming up to the various units along the line
- 04:00 to find out what was going on. Moreshead [Australian Major General Lesley J. Moreshead, commander 9th Division] came up at one stage to my position and we saw this tall thin bloke and this little nuggetty bloke come up, and we knew the tall thin bloke was our brigadier from battalion headquarters and we just took it that the nuggetty little bloke was his batman or his runner or something. He had a tin hat on and he came over to us and he was sitting there talking and a
- 04:30 couple of days before they arrived we'd had a bit of a show on right on our front there and there was still the framework of the cab of a truck there, and they were ranging on that and shelling, giving us a fair sort of going regularly. And anyhow Sid Blinko was one of my blokes and Sid and I were in the same hole and Sid said to this bloke, he said, "Hey mate you'd better hop down in here. he said, "We get shelled pretty regularly. and he said, "And if he sees somebody up on top moving
- 05:00 about. he said, "He'll probably give us a pating." So anyhow this bloke hopped down into the pit with us and Jerry shelled us for about twenty minutes and we were talking about anything and everything, so eventually he said, "Oh well I'd better go over and pick up the brigadier." So he hops up out of the trench and said, "Oh well I'll see you blokes later." "Yea right oh." So he takes his tin hat off and puts his cap on, and
- 05:30 it's got a red band around it and away he goes, and I said to Blinko, "You know who that was?" he said, "Who?" I said, "Moreshead. he said, "Bullshit! he said, "Generals don't come up here. I said, "Well that's who he bloody was." We didn't recognise him and he didn't say a bloody word and that's who it was, it was Moreshead alright and he went over and picked up the brigadier and away they went. The sort of thing that went on, this couple of nights before this happened I was the only one
- 06:00 awake just after dusk and I could hear these engines, I thought they were bloody tanks, and I was up on the flank of A Company. And I was going to wake the blokes and I thought, he changed gears and I thought, 'No it's not it's a truck'. Anyhow he came over the top of this rise and when you've got an anti-tank gun your usually set back from a rise so that when they come up you can get a shot underneath they, they
- 06:30 come up over the rise. And the truck, this particular truck pulled up about, oh thirty yards away I suppose and he couldn't see me and I could see the truck because it was a mass, and I was just about to yell out, "Hey Butch what the bloody hell do you think you're doing out there" because I thought it was our ration truck had got lost. And two blokes got out of it and one bloke's walking towards me and he's saying "Hello, hello." I thought, 'Bloody
- 07:00 Jerry' I thought, 'This is lorried infantry'. So I grabbed the batman, my officer had got knocked and I had his batman with me, and I grabbed his bloody rifle and typical batman's rifle, I drove three shots into these two blokes and the bloody magazine platform jammed down and I'm kicking Charlie around the bottom of the pit saying, "Give us the Thompson quick." And I eventually got the Thompson and put a couple more into them and
- 07:30 I yelled out to the section leader of the next section, Alec Elch from 7 Platoon, or platoon sergeant he was, I said, "Alec quick, Jerry!" So I got stuck into the truck with the Thompson gun and my blokes woke up and they were stuck into it with rifles and we didn't use the anti-tank gun because it creates such a bloody flare that the Jerries are right on you and you want it when tanks are coming, you know you want
- 08:00 the surprise element. Anyhow the truck started to explode and I went out to this first bloke that had come out and he wasn't dead, he was screaming his head off and I went up to go through his papers and things like that. Anyhow I'm alongside him and the poor bugger is screaming his head out and he's dying and Blinko yelled
- 08:30 out to me, "Finish him off!" and when he was up walking about it was okay but when he was on the ground, for me it was murder. And the bloody truck started to explode and I laid out there for two hours waiting for that bloody thing to explode over our heads, I thought were going to be blown to bloody hell

any minute, and how the Christ it didn't I don't know to this day. But it left the shell of the cab left there and this poor bugger eventually kicked his life out

- 09:00 and the other fellow I must have killed outright. And then Jerry ranged onto that and he shelled Christ out of us, and from what we can gather it was a relief crew for an 88mm gun, a German gun but we must of overrun during the night, either our battalion or somebody in that area, had overrun during the night and they were a relief crew and didn't know they'd been overrun, and he was lost. I
- 09:30 suppose if I had of done the right thing I would have gone out and rounded him up but as soon as I saw him I thought, "Lorried infantry, truck load of infantry, well, going out to round them up." I wasn't going to take the whole bloody truckload on, and that poor bugger. And I've got his ribbons there somewhere and a photo of his wife and two twin girls and.....I lived with
- 10:00 that bloke, I've lived with him ever since, for fourteen years he nearly drove me mad. I ended up writing a poem about him and it sort of got him a bit out of my mind but I've always had the feeling that I should have had enough courage to put the poor bugger out of his misery but I didn't, I didn't have enough guts to do it. But to me it was murder once he was down and I couldn't do much to
- 10:30 revive him, to resuscitate him because he was too badly wounded. And I just had to lie there and listen to the poor bastard and I lived with him for so bloody long, I still do, I never ever forget him, that's one of the reasons I hate bloody war.
- 11:00 I don't know it's upset me to buggery I can tell you, I don't think I ever recovered from him, and it's not as if he was the only one but under the circumstances it was a horrific way for some poor bugger to die. But still I suppose that's what happened.

**Do you remember what, any words that he was saying or anything?**

Oh yeah he said "Camarade, muta, muta." he was calling for his mother and

- 11:30 me, his comrade. I suppose when you think about it later I should of, had I been a bit more astute I probably would have said, "Commen ze here." while I can't speak German I knew enough to say, "Come here." whereas I might of drawn him in closer but you don't think about those things then, all you're thinking is they're the enemy
- 12:00 and they're coming in and he may of lived but he didn't. It really, I never, I've never ever gotten over him, I've never forgotten him.

**And what did you do after this?**

Oh I handed in the papers that I took to company headquarters and

- 12:30 we moved on from there the next night or the night after that into another attack, another phase of the attack.

**Why did you keep onto his photo, why did you hold onto those?**

I don't know probably a souvenir or whatever, my Dad bought home an Iron Cross from the First World War that he took off a Jerry and when we took this pile of prisoners there was a lot of officers

- 13:00 amongst them and I said to my driver, "When these blokes go back." I said, "Get us an Iron Cross will ya." So anyway I saw Don a couple of days later and I said, "Did you get me that Iron Cross" and he said, "No." he said, "And how would you like it if they took your medals off you?" I said, "You silly bugger." I said, "The bloody Provos [Provosts, military police] will get them." which they would have. But I just would have liked to bring it home just for the sake that Dad bought one home too, but anyhow I bought the ribbons home instead and he happened to have the photo and I probably kept the photo because I think
- 13:30 in later years I had ideas about returning it but the way Germany was how would you ever find out? But there was a competition ran in a newspaper looking for a poem about Cairo and this was fourteen years after that, this was 1959, or fifteen years whatever it was. And I wrote this poem Cairo but I never ever sent it in
- 14:00 because it just centred about this joker, this German bloke. But little things like that happened, I suppose all over the place, that was only my bit of it. I can remember Blinko saying to me at the time, "Finish the poor bastard off." and I didn't have enough guts to do it.

**Do you remember any bits of this poem?**

- 14:30 Oh it's in my book there.

**I might get you to read it later?**

Oh right.

**Read it now, okay, just pause for a second, okay were rolling now so we were talking about that poem?**

Oh right well I called it Cairo it was written in 1959.

\n[Verse follows]\n 'Cairo I once went there, a young Aussie soldier for those who remember\n You helped pay the fare,\n The trip wasn't wasted after all we did win,\n Or did we, I ponder,\n It now seems a sin to kill fellow humans,\n

15:00 Young boys, just as we,\n

There for the same purpose and maybe kill me,\n One face I remember, I dream,\n He carried their photo, his wife and two girls,\n God, they'd both be mothers and have boys of their own,\n And I killed their father, how could I have known\n My thinking would alter I'd mellow with age,\n How futile the practice, how stupid the rage,\n We were both boys, who should have been friends and shared woe and joys,\n Cairo, no thank you, the memory still stays,\n

15:30 I dream of the desert and those far off days,\n

I grieve for a German I killed as a boy\n and memories are bitter forgive me my friend\n

And the bastard still gets at me.....

16:00 **Do you want to pause or anything?**

I'll just wipe my eyes.

**Do you want me to take the book? I'll ask you just a question about some of those reconnaissance patrols then, what kind of things were you seeing out there at El Alamein?**

Well I didn't do reconnaissance patrols at El Alamein I had

16:30 the anti-tank platoon, they were done by the infantry companies and platoons. But they were going out onto the Germans lines and finding out where the strengths were, testing. Quite often there were blokes got killed and that doing it. We had two particular officers Lance Bode [Captain Frederick Lance Bode, QX6225, KIA 1 September 1942] and Bill Cobb [Wilton W. Cobb, QX6223, KIA 23 October 1942], Bill won the MC and Bar [Military Cross] and Lance won the MC and they used to, they were particularly game

17:00 and they used to do patrols and their blokes always had the win up, that if Cobby got out and won the MC Lance Bode blokes were thinking, 'Bode's going to be after one to' which he was and got it. And then in that show on the 1st of September, the Bulimba show [operation], like I think everybody in the battalion never ever thought Lance Bode would get killed but he was and it threw his company into a hell of a tizzy there.

17:30 And then Bill got killed at, on the 23rd on the opening big attack and they're buried side by side in the El Alamein cemetery. But they were both westerners, out Western Queensland and two particular fine officers both of them.

**Well tell us about your role, what kind of tasks were you doing?**

Well as the anti-tank platoon, I had

18:00 No. 2 platoon, there was two anti-tank platoons and what happens when the infantry go up to take a position and then you go into a defensive role, you go up to support them with four guns, the forward companies, and you have to go up and do a recce [reconnaissance], you go forward with them and you do a recce to where you're going to put your guns and things like that. Then you've got to send back somebody

18:30 to bring the guns up and put them into position. And one occasion, I spoke about Bob Ogle earlier in the piece who was our CO and also about the officer, my platoon commander was blown up on a mine with the commander of both platoons, Captain Ross Jenkinson [122/QX6274]. And they hadn't come back; they'd gone forward to do a recce and hadn't come back so I went

19:00 looking for them and I came across the CO Bob Ogle, he said, "Who's that?" I said, "Gordon Wallace, Sergeant Wallace." he said, "Gordon, quick get up and take a recce. The platoon commander and Captain Ross Jenkinson have been blown up in a jeep, go forward and get a recce and get your guns up." Which I had to race up, I was with A Company and do a quick recce and then send a runner back to bring the guns up and put them into position, which is what I did.

19:30 And this is the sort of thing you did. Luckily we didn't get a severe tank attack on our positions, the 13th Battalion did, the other platoon of our mob did, they often used to throw off at us and say, "The only think we knocked out was a Don R [dispatch rider]." which they did with one of the guns. We took the part of

20:00 infantry when there was an attack of, we used our part as infantry because as I said using an anti-tank gun you're giving your position away by the blast and you want in there in the case of tank attacks, and that's what it was for. Then eventually as I say, I was sent forward to straddle the coast road and I had been getting a bottle of scotch

- 20:30 every now and then from the canteen sergeant and our blokes were getting a couple of bottles of beer and I was due to turn twenty one and we'd saved our grog up. So when the Jerries tossed the sponge in [retreated] we got on the scoot and I turned twenty one, it was a couple of days after the Jerries run. We had reinforcements come up because for some strange reason you've got to be full strength
- 21:00 leaving the field of battle, we were being withdrawn and being sent back to Australia at that moment. And they sent reinforcements up and they got into the German trenches where they'd never seen a shot fired and they were using these German weapons and that and firing tracer and all that into the air. And we were up behind where the Germans lines had been and were looking back and saw this and somebody said, "The silly buggers. Jerry will get into them shortly." Well the next thing planes come over and bombed them and I believe there was fifty one-odd killed
- 21:30 and they'd never seen any action. But this was pure stupidity of course; I suppose they thought it was a wonderful opportunity. Our blokes had been there that long they weren't interested in firing anything off. But we were, well I was bloody pleased it was over. Anyhow when we came out I got sent back to do an anti-tank
- 22:00 school on the seventeen-and-a-half pounder after being up there for what six or seven months with anti-tank guns. And then I came back to the battalion from there and there was a Middle East Camouflage School on and I got sent to that, actually what they were doing they were giving us a break because one was in Alexandria and one was in Cairo, which meant that of a day I was at the school but of a night you were on leave
- 22:30 and you were having a ball. After bloody months of up there it was terrific. And one of the funny things that happened, I had taken a British Wren [Women's Royal Nursing Service] to a theatre one night and the theatres over there have a bar in the lobby and at interval I said to her would she like a drink or anything like that, no she didn't. So I went down into the bar and I'm having a beer and in come this bloke with these mushroom coloured pants and chocolate coat,
- 23:00 gold braid, two rows of ribbons and I thought, 'Christ he's got to be a bloody admiral or general at least'. And he said, "Hey Aussie have a drink" and it was a Yank Fairy Battle pilot. And here I'd been over there just over two years been through Tobruk and El Alamein and I've got one lousy little ribbon and he's got two rows of them, they'd just gotten into the bloody war. Anyway I had quite a few drinks with him and I'm sorry to say I don't know how the British Wren
- 23:30 got home, because I never made it back to the theatre, but that's... But they were sort of rewards, just breaks away, anything like that they tried to get blokes and send them to these different things.

**What kind of things would you get up to on these Cairo breaks, you mentioned going out with a British Wren?**

You went, you know if could pick up a girlfriend

- 24:00 you went out the clubs and that, you went drinking or you went to theatres, or you went to see the sights of whatever was there to be seen. We were outside Alexandria at a place called, or Cairo at a place called Helwan, it's only a short run into town. But oh there was a lot of parties within the, for instance in the anti-tank school we went to we were eating in the,
- 24:30 and drinking in the officers' mess, there was only three sergeants there and that was one from each brigade of our division. And during a competition in getting a gun into action we just flogged the field and we had a driver of a porte, which is the thing that carries your anti-tank gun on, a Pommy. And we wised him up to what we wanted, they were getting into ground action
- 25:00 and there was a Pommy sergeant major was in charge of this thing. So anyhow he gave the go and we got into it and number one gun, "Ready for action Sir." and he couldn't believe his eyes, we were so quick. Anyhow he said, "I know you blokes have put it over me somehow." he said, "You bloody Australians." he said, "I don't know how." he said, "I
- 25:30 must admit you're in ground action." he said, "I've never seen it done so quick." but he said, "I know you've put it over me." Anyhow he's walking back and he's looking along the line of the trucks and our truck was about five feet out in front of everybody else's. So what you're supposed to do is lift your gun and put the wheels on and, you run it down the slides and put the wheels on to drop it into ground action then you'd got to take the wheels off and drop it onto the spades.
- 26:00 Well what we did, we wised up this Pommy driver that we would bring it back to the slides, he would drive the truck forward and we would drop the gun straight onto the spades without the wheels going on, which meant we were way ahead of everybody. But the fact that the truck had moved that's how he woke up that we'd, but he said, "I know you've put it over me." which we had. But luckily he took it as a joke.

**I was interested also in what you saw when**

- 26:30 **El Alamein was raging, like when the battle was raging, what did it look like through the night?**

Well flashes of light, explosions, you can see material flying up, you can see tanks on fire where they'd

been hit and on fire. You can hear people yelling that have been hurt, wounded or you can hear fire orders being given

- 27:00 and directions of where to fire and that sort of thing. You are looking all the time watching for Jerries coming in to attack, or if you're in attack of course you're looking for the Jerry that you're going onto. But it's just a terrifically confused, oh I don't know how to say it,
- 27:30 a terrific mess of flashes and explosions and men walking, you see them silhouetted, you see silhouettes of men behind machine guns, it's a really confused business. But you have a rough idea of where you're supposed to be going.....
- Oh yes, and it's total confusion expect that you've got an idea where you're going and you realise by how the battle is going forward if you're gaining ground, that you're getting to your objective. And then firing will die down, when you've sort of taken your objective and firing gets desultory, you know you get the odd shot that you,
- 28:30 probably heard about that Graham Kennedy [Australian comedian and actor] movie The Odd Angry Shot [set in the Vietnam War]. Well that's how it develops because your enemy is withdrawing, he's attending to his wounded, getting his equipment out and you can't see him, it's dark, when you're in close contact you can of course but once he starts to withdraw. You're busy attending to your wounded, you're trying to dig into a new defensive positions, get rid of any mines
- 29:00 or stuff or whatever might be left there, you're trying to put up wire and reports have got to come in from every section and platoon and that. So as you're trying then to reorganise your front until the next stage, which could be the next night or might be the night after or whatever, how the action develops. But it's total confusion really, you often wonder how the hell you know what's going to happen,
- 29:30 because you can imagine, you get into the middle of a trench of Germans and a mob of opposition troops and you're killing one another, or trying to. And they realise they're overdone, well they're trying to get out of it and you've got to be careful that you're shooting at the right blokes because it's quite easy, you can have one section of yours get ahead and you could think, "Oh that's not my mob." and it could happen.
- 30:00 But it's confusing and you've got to wait then till you're reorganised, until you settle down then you walk round your guns or your platoons to check out how they're going. For instance we did one show one night and I had my guns in and then early the next morning I went round to check on them and I'm walking across from one gun position to the other and it's just on dawn and
- 30:30 I saw this body on the ground and it sort of flashed through my mind, "Another Jerry." And as I'd glanced down it was a bloke I'd been on leave with, not long before we went up there, and you know, it stops you in your tracks, he'd been killed through the night. And one little bloke, a bloke named Billy Allen out of my mob when we were going in one night he was riding on top of the porte and he got hit and knocked off the top of the porte and we didn't realise till later that he was missing, so we went back looking for him and he'd been
- 31:00 killed. But it's to a great degree it's total confusion.

**Well how did you individually cope with this confusion, like how did you manage it?**

Well you knew where you had, well you're supposed to be and that's where you went. You went forward and you were looking for A Company "Right oh this is A Company. What platoon?" And so on, then you go looking for the flank that you're supposed to be on, because

- 31:30 normally we were on the flanks to give them protection. And you're setting up your guns so you get a crossfire across the front of you, your troops and also that your gun's fire is interlocking, so that one gun supports the other. Well I suppose it's practice that you're doing it and you know what you're supposed to be doing. And your gun crews know where the guns are supposed to be and giving covering fire
- 32:00 and you've got Bren gunners with you and they're setting their weapons up because you've got to have your own local protection as well, from infantry. And because when you're using a gun, say there's a crew of four or five one blokes firing the gun and your gun commander is giving orders and pointing out targets, you've got loaders and ammunitions suppliers, they're not looking for infantry attacking them, which it happens.
- 32:30 And infantry, enemy infantry can come through and if you're causing any strife they're going for that gun, well they'll just come in and stitch you up unless you've got your own local protection like a couple of blokes on a Bren gun or something, you've got no protection at all because you're totally taken up with what you're doing. And not only that, if you have to fire, the muzzle-flash blinds you, the layer who's firing the gun he's on the scope but
- 33:00 he wouldn't be blinded but the other blokes are, and you're trying to get your sight back again, your night vision. So that you're preoccupied with what you're doing that you tend to forget there's also blokes on the other side that are looking to knock you out. Of course once you fire their artillery or their tanks think well that's a big piece there, a big flash

33:30 and they dropping stuff over your way to, or mortar crews or whatever, which are probably the most frightening things of the whole damn thing are mortars because you don't hear them coming till they're right on top of you, you hear the whoosh and bang. I don't know I suppose it's a state of utter confusion.

**Well once you did fire a shot and there's a flash did you move the guns or**

34:00 **did you take cover?**

Oh no because you're dug in, you can't, that's the position you're in, you can't just. I do know that they have alternate positions and we had to, you'd dig an alternate position but we never had occasion to pull into one.

**So what's that feeling like, you've flashed of your guns and you are kind of almost expecting mortars to come your way?**

34:30 Well I don't know, there's a feeling, it's more a state of you know you're going to get a hit back if they're in position to do so, and I suppose you've just got to cop it, there's nothing you can do, you can't run away or hide. You can't suddenly be like a mole and dig underground and wait until it's over, it's just something you've got to cop and

35:00 put up with it. And it's nothing you're looking forward to but it's just, that's how it works.

**And you were in command of four others?**

Four guns yeah.

**What was your crew like, the group?**

Oh mighty blokes, mighty blokes. You know early in the piece when we went up there we had porters as I say and there was

35:30 German and Italian trucks knocked out on the area between our lines and theirs, in no man's land. And our lines were in amongst these trucks and you'd get a company commander or a platoon commander that you knew would come and say, "Any chance of you blokes going out and dragging that truck out of our place, they're ranging on it." that means they've got.....yeah right oh we'd get out with

36:00 the porte and hook up to one of these trucks, one bloke would get in the other truck to steer it and we'd drag them in at night. Once Jerry heard the noise he'd open up on you with every bloody thing. But it got to the stage where we had just about cleaned out all our area and Bull Angus from A Company came to me and he said, "Are you blokes still dragging in trucks

36:30 from out there?" I said, "Well the CO's put out an instruction that we're not to go out under any circumstances." I said, "Why?" he said, "Well we've got a bloody big diesel out there that's right in our position." he said, "And they're ranging on it." he said, "Do you think you can do anything about it?" So I went along to one of our drivers Norm Rider and I said to Norm, "How do you feel about going and pulling a truck out of Bull Angus' company area?" he said,

37:00 "Oh right oh." he said, "Bull's a good sort of a bloke." he was a captain. I said, "Well alright you know bloody well we're not supposed to be going." he said, "Yeah I know." he said, "Are you game?" I said, "Yeah come on." So as soon as it was dark we off, anyhow we got this truck and dragged it out and it's a great big seven-ton diesel Fiat and our company commander, Captain Jenkinson, had given us the strict instructions from the CO.

37:30 So when we dragged it in we parked it near his 'douver', that's what we called our trenches and that you know and Norm, the windscreen was covered with dirt and stuff and this Captain Jenkinson never swore, everything was "cuss it all, cuss it all." and Norm writes across the windscreen, 'cuss it all' in with his finger you see and this is in the dirt and that. And oh the next morning wasn't there a to-do, who dragged it in, nobody knew anything about it.

38:00 But I've often thought about that, Ross Jenkinson and Ross never ever swore and here Norm picked him straight away and put "cuss it all" across the windscreen. It was a, you know it was a battle of going forward once the main attack started, that every other night you were attacking again and because after all the show didn't last for that long,

38:30 from the 23rd October until about the 3rd of November, 4th of November I think it was, and it was over. And in that time two massive armies had engaged and one had been defeated over a great area of land. It was the first ever victory, apart from Tobruk holding out, was the first ever victory over the Germans in the Second World War. And of course it made Montgomery's

39:00 reputation, as much as the Yanks tried to shoot him down later on over that "bridge too far" claim. That was an unfortunate set of circumstances when the gliders went in. But we.....

**How far away were the Germans when you were like doing these kind of truck manoeuvres?**

Oh couple of hundred yards I suppose, few hundred yards depending on the position of the ground.

39:30 **What goes through your mind when you're say, in the truck and you start hearing them open up?**

Well you hope to Christ they don't hit you that's all, you're thinking, 'Go for your bloody life Norm and lets get out of here!' Because you know the porte starts to roar when you're making the noise of dragging another big truck, and you're thinking, 'Lets get out of this bloody place'. But of course this is part of the thing that you do things for

- 40:00 one another and what I mean we could probably alleviate casualties even if a couple of us had got hit, you could alleviate quite a lot of casualties in A Company area. You do what you can and quite often you have to, not necessarily counter command orders but you've got to sort of slide around them a bit to get things done the way you want. It doesn't always work like the parade ground it's,
- 40:30 out there it's a case of you get blokes that have a feel for it, initiative and that and they make bloody good commanders and bloody good soldiers and there the kind of blokes you want. And of course they use other people to obtain their objectives and the other blokes, if they've got any sense, will hop into give a hand, because it makes it easier for everybody.

## Tape 7

- 00:35 **Take me through how your time in El Alamein ended, how you were taken out?**

Well when the show ended I was sent back to that anti-tank school and when I came back to the battalion they'd been withdrawn and were back in Palestine in camp and we were getting ready to come home. And when I came back from

- 01:00 that particular school I was sent off to the other one, and because to me before we came home was a holiday. But then we embarked on the Aquitania and came home on the Aquitania, quite a big convoy. I got into trouble on the way home I was taking photographs of the convoy and I was told to put my camera away and I did and

- 01:30 twenty minutes later I went back to get it and it was gone, it had been stolen. I had some wonderful pictures of the, the sea was rough you know with these ships. But anyhow we came home to Sydney.

**Well what had you heard about what was happening in Australia at the time?**

We knew the Japs had come into the war and naturally we were anxious and just incidentally some of our blokes got white feathers, not my battalion particularly, but white feathers were sent to some of our blokes

- 02:00 in the Middle East because we weren't home defending Australia. They forgot we'd been there for over two years, the Japs weren't even thought of, well they might have been thought of but there was no menace. And anyhow we came home and we were definitely anxious, we heard that people were leaving the north and as far as we were concerned they were running away. And anyhow we came into Sydney and the

- 02:30 Queenslanders on our ship were watching the New South Welshman and Victorians disembark and they were going to go on leave and my girlfriend who became my first wife was in Sydney and her father worked at Garden Island Naval Base as a matter of fact, and I wanted desperately to start my leave in Sydney and wasn't allowed to, I had to come to Queensland before I could be allowed to. But when we were at the wharf and we were watching these blokes go off and this

- 03:00 Provo sergeant came up, I was up on about the third deck I suppose, he said, "I'm looking for a Sergeant Gordon Wallace." I said, "That's me. What's wrong?" he said, "Mate there's a bloody good sort down there on the wharf looking for you." And I broke records getting down to the wharf and it was Elsie. And I saw her there for a couple of hours there and then I was sent to Queensland, had my leave in Queensland, couldn't go back and

- 03:30 from there I went to the Atherton Tablelands to Kairi to train for the New Guinea show. We did jungle training, built our own assault courses and did jungle training there. And we went down to Palm Cove, not Palm Cove, Trinity Beach in Cairns to do our ship-to-shore training with the American 5/32nd Shore Battalion. And from there we went to New Guinea,

- 04:00 New Guinea we landed at Milne Bay, or that was our first landing there, Milne Bay of course was behind the lines then. We did manoeuvres, getting used to the country and that sort of thing, and totally different from what we'd come from, a desert to a jungle where it was raining, there was any amount of cover and all that stuff and we'd been used to stuff as bare as this

- 04:30 floor.

**Well just before we talk about New Guinea tell me about the ship to shore training that you had in Australia?**

Well we had these small assault barges, you had to, you'd go out onto the, outside you know they were sort of making pretend that there was a ship there and we were loading into those barges from the ship

and then we were heading for

- 05:00 the beach, and then when the ramps dropped down and you were out and onto the beach and take up your positions and advance into the shore. And the 5/32nd Shore Battalion, American group which we got on pretty well with and we trained with them. Well then eventually they worked with us in New Guinea. I was sent down ahead of my battalion to,
- 05:30 I did some advance training and then I was down there putting other battalions through, with a number of other blokes of course, through their training. And while I was there I got friendly with a young American lieutenant and he said to me, "Don't you live in Cairns?" I said, "Yes I do." "Why don't you go in?" I said, "Were not allowed to." Cairns was off limits to Australians, to our mob. And he said, "Have you got any of those light coloured
- 06:00 khakis?" and I said, "Why?" he said, "Well." he said, "If you have." he said, "I'll lend you a cap and I'll take you in and bring you home of a night." And I thought this will bloody well do me and so anyhow he said, "As long as you remember to salute our provos at the Barron River Bridge." So anyhow I did and I was going in and out a few times. And so anyhow this particular night I'm going in and there's a convoy coming down and I look straight into the face of this captain, who was now a major
- 06:30 who I'd locked horns with early in the piece and I thought, 'I'll be for the high jump when I get back tonight'. But anyhow when I got back that night one of the blokes said to me, "You'll be interested in the news." I said, "What's that?" he said, "Bruce Strain shot himself." I said, "You fair dinkum?" he said, "Yes." So I don't know to this day what it was over, but he shot himself.
- 07:00 But anyhow we went from there to New Guinea.

**Well how prepared did you feel for what you were going to face in New Guinea?**

Well I suppose as prepared as you can be without going into a realistic landing, because you don't know, what I mean, the Japs and the Germans were two different ends of the earth, like chalk and cheese to us.

- 07:30 And we were, what shall I say I don't think we ever thought we couldn't beat the Japanese, you know we were quite experienced troops, we were professionals by then and we had never been beaten and I suppose we were confident that we could do the job when it came to it, that they were just another enemy. But it meant having to learn
- 08:00 to handle the jungle which was completely different, absolutely entirely different and we I suppose, we were as sure as we could be that we were alright. And it was the first landing, sea landing since Gallipoli when we landed at Lae.

**Was this talked about, that fact?**

Oh not a great deal I don't think, it was just another operation.

- 08:30 But the 7th Division went into the Ramu Valley and I don't know if you realise but one of our artillery mobs jumped with their guns by parachute and they'd never jumped by parachutes in their lives before and landed in the Ramu Valley. I think they might have lost one firing pin from one gun, that was about all. But anyhow the 7th Division came in from that side and we came in from the sea. And the landing
- 09:00 at Lae for us was, there was practically no opposition, we were very lucky.

**Well before you went to New Guinea what did you know about the fighting that had already taken place there, how were you briefed about the situation?**

Oh we had a fair idea of what it was like, the kids that had gone up there, the young kids like we were when we first started with little training, bugger all equipment, had gone in and had turned the Japs around.

- 09:30 And what I mean there used to be a certain amount of friction between the choccos and the AIF ["Chocolate soldiers." derogatory term for the CMF or Militia forces that were the first to encounter the Japanese in New Guinea before the AIF troops came back from the Middle East to help them]. But believe me we smartly learned to respect what they had done, because they had done a marvellous job. And once we got into it we realised what a wonderful job they had done. And we worked with a couple of battalions of the militia boys, or the CMF
- 10:00 or whatever they called them those days, and we got on as good as gold, as far as we were concerned they were just soldiers the same as we were. For instance the 62nd Battalion was disbanded and most of them came into our battalion, and they were treated just the same as everybody else, as far as we were concerned they were part of the 15th Battalion. And on top of which the older hands in our mob were getting thin on the ground and with
- 10:30 wounded and illness and stuff like that. But we went there into Lae and then it was a case of get into Lae to take Lae and really the 7th Division beat us to it by about fifteen minutes, and they were strangely enough Queensland battalions from both sides. And if I'm correct in remembrance, the 7th Division commander sent a radio message to our mob to

- 11:00 stop shelling his troops, because we were still shelling Lae when they were moving into it. And then we moved round, we re-embarked because the Busa River was in flood and we couldn't get across it, so we re-embarked and went round then to the Malang air strip near Lae and went into defensive positions there. But from there that sort of fizzled out
- 11:30 the Japs, why we didn't take a lot of Japs in Lae, we did take a certain amount, they withdrew into the mountains and our next job then was to go up the coast to Finschhafen and land there, which was another sea-borne landing, which we carried out. And this time we were opposed and there was a bit of a,
- 12:00 well quite a bit of a mess up with the actual landing that the 17th and 13th battalions were suppose to land ahead of us but they were landed in the wrong position. And so that when we hit the beach we had to take the beach because it hadn't been taken. And in actual fact there was three companies, one from each battalion that got together there and because of the fact as a brigade we'd worked together on our
- 12:30 training very well and go on well these three companies melded in together very well and carried the position. Well then the Japs counter attacked behind us, they came in by barges behind us. But they were beaten off, not only by our troops by, there was a young American on a 50mm gun,
- 13:00 he earned the Congressional Medal of Honour for it, he got killed in the attack. But he blasted hell out of these Jap barges that were coming in. And then from thereon we, the battalion started to get together and we moved up the coast toward Finschhafen and there was several actions on the way up there, but eventually, matter of days we'd taken Finschhafen.
- 13:30 And the 17th Battalion moved up into the hills to a place called Sattelberg, where a number of VC's [Victoria Cross] were won there later on in the 48th Battalion. But the maps we had were twenty one years old and the information that we had that there could be from two to two thousand Japs in the area. Well in actual fact there was many thousands of Japs who had come from Lae up over the hills into Sattelberg. And we were
- 14:00 at Finschhafen, we'd been out in Japanese collapsible dinghies dropping Jap mines over the side blowing up fish. And we had a big fire going and we were cooking fish and we got moved at half past ten at night to go up and give the 17th Battalion a hand, who were in trouble. Well then they held the position and they were relieved by the 48th Battalion I think it was and there was quite a big battle brewed in
- 14:30 Sattelberg. On the coast, we were in small actions, nothing really major, company action and platoon size actions that sort of thing. And when it was all settled down we then moved up, chasing the Jap up the coast, towards Sio. And we had native bearers with us.
- 15:00 In the jungle one thing we did suffer was this weeping tineia, so that at one stage I was covered from my waist to my feet, just this complete black scale. And you'd go down the RAP and they'd paint you with Whitfield Tinea Paint, a green thing which stung like hell. And you'd be standing there with your hat fanning yourself to try and cool it off. And
- 15:30 it was taking some effect but not enough so the Doctor said, "I'm sending you down to B echelon for a couple of days, get your clothes off, run round naked in the sun, sea and sun." And in a matter of thirty six hours the bloody stuff was falling off me. And I was down there one night, about the second night I was there and a Jap submarine beached itself there to drop supplies off, they didn't know Finschhafen had been taken,
- 16:00 and we didn't have a bloody thing, other than rifles to hit it with. We hadn't taken anti-tank guns in there because there wasn't any tanks to worry about, and we only had light weapons. And here they are, were trying to do something about this thing and they'd pushed off these waterproof bags of rice for the Jap troops and then realised they were in hostile territory. And they were scraping over rocks and things dragging out, and they got away of course
- 16:30 but we didn't have a damn thing to do anything about it with. But it was an unusual and exciting sort of thing to happen, something right out of the blue a submarine coming up on the beach. But anyhow I went back up to my mob and we were engaged actually, my platoon as mortar's headquarters, battalion headquarters defensive
- 17:00 position. And then of course we took our turn leading, or going up the coast, at one stage I was the lead platoon and we hadn't seen many Japs but we smelt this fire, terrific fire. We're going up the track and I've got my platoon stretched out and we came across this Salvation Army bloke with a
- 17:30 fuzzy wuzzy [New Guinea native] with a Jeep, and a big boiler boiling coffee, which he was going to hand out to the troops going past, and he was the forward troop for the whole division, and how the bloody hell the Japs didn't get him we don't bloody know. Because I was the leading platoon for the whole division and we come across him, how he got through our lines I don't know but here he was with the boiling coffee there to hand out to the blokes. That will tell you what the Salvos were like.
- 18:00 And anyhow while I was doing this we came across a Japanese RAP what we called, a Regimental Aid Post. But they use to carry their wounded on sticks like pigs, tied to sticks whereas we carried them on

stretchers or over your shoulders, whatever. And there was a number of them dead in this particular position and they were in this creek and there was maggots in some of them. Anyhow I went down then to report

- 18:30 to our leading company, what was ahead and what we'd come across and they all had billies of water out of this creek and were boiling their billies for a cup of tea and that, and we didn't say anything until they'd made the tea then we told them what was in it up the road, and of course we weren't very popular. But of course they'd boiled the water, it wouldn't have made any difference, but they were having a go at us cause we'd shut our mouths until they had their tea made,
- 19:00 and then we told them what was in the water. Then we moved up there and on Christmas day 1943 we were sitting in the kunai grass and I was eating tinned pineapple, that was Christmas dinner and these troops were coming past and I looked up and this bloke and he smiled at me and I looked back down again. I looked at him again and I thought, 'I know that bloody joker',
- 19:30 it was a young bloke from El Arish [Queensland] where I'd been working. "What the bloody hell are you doing here?" and he'd been driving for a colonel in Townsville and he'd pinched the car and gone home for the weekend so he got sent to the infantry and he landed in my mob. And then not long after that, just around about Sio I got malaria bad and I was taken out, well I don't remember going out, I don't remember anything about five days after that because I came to in hospital.
- 20:00 And as a matter of fact there's a bit in that poem about the nurses that sort of gives you some idea of what it was. But anyhow from the hospital I went up to a place called Kokutai in the mountains outside Port Moresby, a convalescent depot, beautiful spot. And while I was there I went up with a bloke from New South Wales called Ken Campbell and when we got up there all these blokes
- 20:30 are running round with butterfly nets and Ken said, "We've been sent to the bloody bomb happies [shell-shocked soldiers]." And when we realised what they were doing, they were catching these big blue emperor butterflies, putting them under a bit of Perspex or whatever and selling them to the Yanks for five quid. And Ken said to me, "Christ!" he said, "If I'd have known that I'd have pinched a bloody mosquito net before we left the hospital." And but anyhow when we got there, there was a concert put on, they had this big
- 21:00 thatched open sort of theatre thing and there was a lot of blokes at this convalescent camp. And this particular night this show was on, in came these American nurses with the camouflage pants and jacket and there's a little bit of talk about women coming in and that. And then shortly afterwards in came our nurses in the grey dresses
- 21:30 and red caps and you should of heard the talk, I've never been so bloody proud of being an Australian in all my life. They looked wonderful and they were our girls and the talk you could hear it, all the blokes felt the same way. Anyhow in this concert party there was one bloke, what was the song, 'As long as you're not in love with anyone else why don't you fall in love with me' and he's pitching to one of our nurses and God she was as red as a beetroot.
- 22:00 He embarrassed hell out of her but the song was so good and everybody was right on it to, she was getting a real chiacking [teasing] out of it, but as I say I'd never been so proud in all my life with the fact that our girls they looked so great. And they of course eventually went into the slacks and stuff too. But then I went from there to a place called Bootless Bay which was a return to unit place and another bloke from my mob called
- 22:30 Smacker Bridges and Smacker had got onto the cooks and got a bit of lemon essence and potato peelings and things like that and made a brew. And he'd bottled it and about two o'clock one morning we hear this pop, pop and the next thing Smackie yells out, "Get into it. She's ripe!" So grog was pretty short up there. And then from there I was returned to Australia.

### **Well I might go right back**

- 23:00 **to the beginning of your time in New Guinea and ask some questions and I'll get you to sort of take me through what your first impressions of Milne Bay were like, when you first arrived in New Guinea?**

Well Milne Bay was mainly an American camp, was quite neat and tidy. They had a picture theatre there, or open air sort of thing and we were stationed there for a few days and we went to the pictures one night and there was an air

- 23:30 raid and the Yanks all left so we got the pick of the seats, cause we stayed, they'd had the pick of the seats because they knew all about it, we didn't. But they cleared out, or most of them did when the air raid went, siren went and we dived in and we were sitting pretty then for when the show started again. But it was, oh we did a few manoeuvres there, and it was our first real taste of New Guinea, jungle and stuff like that but
- 24:00 it wasn't thick with mud like the kids [the militia] had had on the Kokoda Track or like that because it hadn't rained that heavily when we first got there. Well we got our share of mud and stuff later on but in Milne Bay it was more or less had been developed as a base camp. The one thing we did do we got into trouble when we were on manoeuvres there because we went through this Yank camp and they lifted everything that wasn't nailed down,

24:30 stuff to eat, Yank hammocks which had the waterproof top and mosquito net that you could zip up, and all this and everybody wanted one of those and there was a hell of a lot of trouble over that. But our blokes got away with a hell of a lot of stuff. But anything that wasn't nailed down they took with them. But from there we went up to Buna I think it was before, on our way up to Lae and Finschhafen.

**Well take me through**

25:00 **the landing at Lae, how did they, describe the landing crafts and how they got you onto them and off them?**

Well we were on these landing ships and then we, it was the early hours of the morning when we landed there and the small barges were lowered and you went down and landed in them and you were put ashore on them. And then course your ramps dropped at the front and away you went. But in

25:30 my particular instance, no at Finschhafen I should say I'm getting ahead of myself. But we landed there and as I say there wasn't a great deal of opposition. We had a bloke on our barge with a bulldozer and he'd been showing some pornographic photos that he'd been tied up with, with an air force bloke and some girls here in Brisbane, in colour. And they

26:00 were in his wallet and he's showing them around and I just said to him, "Are you taking those in with you?." "Why?" I said, "If anything happens to you" I said, "And your wallet gets sent home to your parents" I said, "You ever think about that?" "Oh Christ." so then he was trying to give them away. But anyhow I give him his due though when we did land, and there was a little bit of opposition, he came ashore in this bulldozer dropped his blade and ploughed the machine gun post that was firing on us into the dirt. And I don't

26:30 think he ever got a mention for it though, not that I know of, but he certainly had it where it was needed.

**Well take me through the landing, how does it actually work, how do you?**

Well you landed on the beach and you run out of your landing craft, when the ramp drops and you go ahead to the positions, not the positions actually but to where you've trained to be within your company you know. Well you don't know, I'm trying to tell you.

27:00 To where your company is going, you know what more or less an idea, a rough idea of what your objective is, you can't actually see it, like a picture or that, they've given you a rough idea. But then you've got to deal with the country as it comes up. But we made our way inland with very little opposition and settled down as far inland as we were instructed to go. And when they realised there was not

27:30 much there and they started to think about moving into Lae along the inland and along the beach and that. And of course we got to the Busa River and it was in flood and we couldn't cross it. I think some platoons did wade across it, but they couldn't get across in significant strength to do much good. But the Japs were withdrawing into Lae ahead of us. And then we were re-embarked to go round

28:00 to the back, to this Malang strip and by that time of course the 7th Division were into Lae, as I told you. And it was a case of settle in there and wait for the next operation.

**Well tell me about the little bit of opposition that you did met when you landed at Lae?**

Well a couple of machine gun posts, that I saw and a few Jap infantry men but they more or less withdrew

28:30 ahead of us, the machine gun fired upon us but as I say this bloke with the bulldozer drove one of them into the ground and the other one was overrun by troops. I don't recall any of our blokes getting hit, not in my particular platoon anyhow. Whether other members of other units, other companies or that got hit I

29:00 don't know. But we more or less saw nothing. And while I will say this the Jap planes did come and bomb us as we were landing on the beach, they come along and drop bombs, well they didn't do a great deal of damage, they knocked one barge out I think, but not a great deal of damage that I saw anyhow, and I'm only can say from what I actually saw.

**And how do you move sort of up the beach, what sort of**

29:30 **formations?**

Oh in your normal, you spread out, dispersed sort of thing to put distance between you and your mates so that if they're firing at you one shots not going to get two of you, extended line they call it. And you move up the beach on your front and take whatever's in front of you.

30:00 **And then how do you, I guess secure the beach?**

Well once you get inland and we go in there as far as what is recommended and we dig in. Well then were in far enough to protect the beach and then they land supplies onto the beach behind us. But you're inland into the jungle and that and you're digging in and you're with contact of one another, each

platoon or each company and you're sort of

- 30:30 covering as much ground as you can because in the jungle visibility is not good, you can't just look across and say there's a hundred yards that's clear because it's not. Your probably, with a bit of luck you might happen to come across a place that you're far enough into the jungle and there might be a small clearing well you'll dig in. If you get the opportunity you'll get out and clear a
- 31:00 firing area so that you've got some space between you, if the enemy comes they've got to come across a certain amount of open space that you can get a chance at shooting at them. Because you're not going to leave bushes and things up there if you're going to be there long enough for them to sort of work their way through. And it's more or less like, I suppose if you're going hunting,
- 31:30 which is what you're doing actually I suppose. But as I said before we were, oh I don't think we were over confident we were just confident that we could handle the Japs alright and we did. When Lae was a push over but then Finschhafen was a different matter it got to be a bit
- 32:00 nasty in different places and we had one position, Koitaki, A Company got into a bit of strife, lost a few men. Up at Cunaway was a place at the top of what they called Easy Street, was about six hundred feet up in six hundred yards and mud and slippery as it comes, you know. And
- 32:30 we had landed there with a mile roll of signal cable between two of us on a stick and we had a big bloke named Alf Potter, Alf was with the signals. And we were struggling with this mile roll of sig cable, actually we come off the landing ship without barges in this particular time, they dropped the ramps, not the ramps, the sort of stairs and we came down them and they dropped us into about eight feet of water. And we were hitting and bobbing
- 33:00 up to get air and one of our lieutenants, a bloke named Jimmy Kay he got up onto a rock and he was sitting there laughing his head off at us, tin hats appearing above the water like bloody turtles, because we had this mile roll of sig cable that we had to take with us. And we staggered out of there and made our way out of it. But when we got to this Easy Street
- 33:30 oh well I know, when I was going up I was doing three steps forward and two back and the bloke on the other end of the stick was doing the same thing with me. And big Alf walks up there with a big roll of mile roll of sig cable on his shoulder and looking back at us as much to say, "What's wrong with you mob?" And this was the same bloke that escaped from the Germans in Derna [Libya], he laid under the gutter on the roadway
- 34:00 into the prison camp and got away at night and walked across the desert to Tobruk and he said the hardest part was getting into our lines at Tobruk. I'd forgotten to mention that about Alf, but big bloke, good soldier. And yeh he walked up Easy Street with this mile roll of sig cable as much as looking at us as much to say, "What's wrong with you mob?" and were struggling believe me.

**What exactly were you doing with the cable?**

Well it had to be

- 34:30 taken ashore for the signallers to use so they could run communication.

**Were the signallers already ashore?**

No, but they would be coming ashore and they had to extend communications from battalion headquarters out to all the companies and it takes a lot of wire. And anyhow we could drop it once we got up Easy Street. But anyhow I found out about a fortnight ago that at the top of Easy Street at this place near Cunaway where

- 35:00 there was a small action and some of our blokes were killed, there was a little monument about so high. You know you see those things at cemeteries with the sloped face on it, a little concrete thing like that with a sloped face on the, marble on there. Well on that sloped face was the rising sun carved out of soap stone, a beautiful job. And I found out about a fortnight ago who did it, we were at a
- 35:30 club meeting and a bloke named Garth was, said to somebody, "Anyone remember Easy Street?" and course a few of us said, "Yes we remembered Easy Street," I said, "The thing I've always remembered about Easy Street," I said, "The top of Easy Street there's this little monument," I said, "With the rising sun carved on it," he said, "I carved that." I said, "Be buggered!" I said,
- 36:00 "Doug Garth." I said, "I've been wondering all the years who did that I thought it was such a good job." I said, "I wonder if it's still there?" he said, "I don't know but it was done in soap stone." And it was a thing that always stuck in my mind, and yeah about a fortnight ago I found out actually who did it. But as I say we went up there and there was a small action took place there. I wasn't engaged in much
- 36:30 fighting at all with the Japs in New Guinea because I was defending battalion headquarters and we weren't with the companies. And we got it pretty easy, we only had a few Japs that we come across, we never had a really heavy engagement with them, some of our companies did. And Sattelberg was major engagement and there was a couple of VCs won up there.
- 37:00 In my particular case, in my platoon we never had a, we had a few close things with them but not a,

what shall I say a.....oh a determined action, it was a case of I ran into one little blue, I was sent out on a patrol to investigate

37:30 one area and we ran into Japs there and had a sharp short little action of about half an hour with them. And I had a Papuan Infantry Battalion sergeant with me, a coloured bloke and I was told under no conditions was I to commit him to action, he was up there learning. And what do you do when you run into action and blokes start shooting at you and you've got a bloke there that's a soldier

38:00 and he got shot in the stomach. And we carried him back and the poor bugger, what he wanted was a drink of water but all they could do was moisten his lips because stomach wounds you can't get them to drink. And we carried him back, as far as I know he recovered but the Papuan Infantry Battalion mob that were there thought we were marvellous because we'd carried one of their mob back, well white blokes carrying their bloke back. Well they were carrying our blokes

38:30 and he was a soldier.

**How had you come under fire?**

Oh we ran across a Jap, probably a Jap patrol the same as we were and they were looking for information to and they opened fire on us. And we fired back and of course he got into it and he got hit in the stomach and he was the only one that got hit and he was the one I was told not to commit to action. But we carried him back

39:00 and as far as I know he recovered. But really in New Guinea I never had any really heavy action at all, I was bloody lucky I suppose because the companies did, the infantry companies had quite few serious, they weren't major engagements because the Japs were on the run. We were pushing them up the coast towards

39:30 Sio and anyhow when they got to Sio they withdrew to, or just beyond Sio. And we came back to Australia to have a couple of weeks leave and then went to Ravenshoe [Atherton Tablelands]. And we were there for a long time, well nearly twelve months and I was classed as B2 at that stage and was sent to 7th [convalescent unit]

40:00 in Cairns to wait discharge. But then they kept pressing, the Australian Army kept pressing for actions for our mob so then they were sent to Borneo, and of course I can't tell you anything about Borneo because I wasn't there.

**Well just on that note we'll pause.....**

## Tape 8

00:37 **We were just talking about the landings, the Finschhafen landings, were there any particular problems with those landings?**

Yes, as I said earlier the 17th and 13th battalions were landed quite a long way away from where they were supposed to be and when our battalion came in we had to take the position. Well then the mix up of course also

01:00 came under our lot and it ended up with three companies from three different battalions working together as one unit to overcome the opposition in that particular situation. And it said a hell of a lot for the fact, the way our three battalions had trained together and the feeling between them. And these three companies assisted one another in their tasks

01:30 and overcame it. Well then the rest of the battalion of course landed in and what opposition was there they forced inland and then to a place called Kakapo where they had to attack across a creek and up a steep slope. And they were hanging onto vines making their way up this slope and the Japs were on top

02:00 and rolling grenades down on them. And they overcome, took this position, there was some story about it being a Jap hospital in that area but I couldn't give any credence to that because I didn't know. But B Company went in there and they, a particularly fine chap, a good friend of mine was killed there, Wes DeSalley,

02:30 very top line soldier. And, but then from there on that sort of crumpled the resistance to Finschhafen itself. And as I say we'd been out in these Jap collapsible dinghies dropping mines over the side to get fish and we were having a feed of fish that evening when the 17th Battalion got into trouble. The Jap little light plane used to come over,

03:00 "washing machine Charlie" we used to call him, and they'd throw out small bombs. And one of my chaps was killed one night through this bloke, I'd been on piquet this particular night, the rest were asleep and I heard him coming and I yelled out, cause we were sleeping on top of the ground, so damn hot. Anyhow all the blokes had taken cover except the next morning

03:30 one bloke, we went to wake him and he was dead and he had a little mark about as big as the head of a

wax match of blood on his chest and shrapnel from this bomb, which had exploded in the trees, had killed him. He must have sat up and hadn't got out of it, when I woke them, yeh Billy Furlonger.

04:00 But from there we moved, as I say we moved into Finschhafen and then there was various small actions took place in places like Koitaki and Cunaway, these are all little areas around Finschhafen. And then we were called up to assist the 17th Battalion and then we did a bit of supply, taking supplies up to different units in different positions

04:30 because we weren't engaged in any particular action at that time. But when that Sattelberg was finished then the move was up the coast to Sio and pushing the Japs ahead of us. And we didn't see a hell of a lot of Japs on the way up there, odd pockets you'd find. You might go out on a job and you'd run across a few Japs and there'd be a bit of a short sharp engagement for a matter of minutes

05:00 at times, and they'd withdraw ahead of you again.

**Well you mentioned that you weren't going on many fighting patrols or any fighting patrols yourself?**

No I was doing defensive of the battalion headquarters.

**What would that involved, what would you do?**

Well wherever battalion headquarters was settled in we would dig in around that and we were their immediate defence. And whereas the companies were deployed

05:30 in forward positions.

**What kind of defences would you set up around a headquarters?**

Well normally you'd just dig slit trenches and you'd have it so your sections were covering one another with defensive fire, and just a normal defensive position with slit trenches, which of course you didn't occupy unless you had to because the bloody things were half full of water. And

06:00 we slept on top of the ground. If there was an area where you were there for any length of time and you had toilet position away from, which you endeavoured to do. If you wanted to go there of a night there were these type of fungi that used to get onto the sticks which was fluorescent and you could lay a track with these things to

06:30 there. But the Japs at night were pretty good through the jungle at night, but as I said we didn't strike a really, what shall I say concerted numbers of Japs after Finschhafen. Sattelberg really put the kibosh on that [put an end to that] and they started to move up the coast

07:00 and we were just pushing ahead of us. But it was relatively small brushes and that's about all you would say.

**How would you transport like a headquarters from place to place?**

Well jeeps could run through, they could cut tracks and jeeps would carry a lot of stuff. Your signallers carried your communications. Most of the stuff you did

07:30 on your back or things like that, with heavy equipment or supplies and things like that naturally they'd have to be used by Jeeps and if the tracks were good enough by truck. We had a pretty good rapport with two Boomerangs [Australian-built, one-seater fighter planes, into service 1942], they turned out to be a fighter plane as Australians but they were too

08:00 slow, very manoeuvrable class. And they used to act as artillery spotters and eventually after the show was over I believe they landed and the pilots were presented with a samurai sword each. But they used to call them Pat and Mick, you know typical Australians, Pat and Mick and these two Boomerangs they were supplying artillery

08:30 positioning or spotting for them and giving what information they could about Japanese positions. And there wasn't a lot of Jap air force opposition, you know we had this light bomber used to come over at night and throw bombs out but never any heavy stuff like that. No it was relatively easy and then of course when our battalion went to Borneo as far as I can

09:00 gather there wasn't really heavy engagements.

**Well tell us when you were moving about would you come across former abandoned Japanese positions?**

Oh yes, positions.

**Describe them for us, what kind of sites would you find there?**

Well normally they were similar to us in this respect that they would dig in, in the ground, they weren't a very clean or tidy thing. They didn't have

09:30 a lot of supplies as far as food was concerned, they were starting to show the effect of being pushed out

all the time. But as I said earlier we came across this aid station of theirs with these bodies left there, they'd been tied to sticks because that's how they transported their wounded. While we must have come on them and they'd cleared out and they'd left these

10:00 blokes there and they were dead when we got there. But they didn't have any facilities to ship them out whereas with us if somebody got knocked or ill or that they could be shipped out by barge back to Port Moresby or Buna or whatever for treatment. You'd probably go to a forward aid station and then from there, if you were bad enough back to the hospitals. But it was a,

10:30 well I suppose I'm sort of comparing it to the Middle East where terrifically heavy actions where it was something completely different to that altogether. You know you're in the jungle and if you're on patrol naturally your eyes and your ears were the best thing you had because the Japs, you'd come across and your forward scout would get knocked out, or they'd let the forward scout go

11:00 and get into the rest of you as you came behind. But we didn't have a terrific amount of that, not a really, what shall I say major sort of development at all.

**This maybe a bit of a strange question but which did you prefer the Middle East or...?**

As far as I was concerned up in the islands

11:30 was a bloody sight easier because you couldn't always been seen, you couldn't come under terrifically heavy artillery fire, we weren't bombed from the air as heavily or anything like that. You didn't have, you had no tanks to worry about, the Japs had mortars, they had this, the Woodpecker [type 94, 7.62 mm heavy machine gun] it was dangerous bloody thing. They fought

12:00 when they had to but they were realising that we had the numbers and we had the equipment and we were just pushing them ahead. And eventually when they went beyond Sio some other battalion took over from there, or some other units and our lot were withdrawn back to Australia.

**Well tell us also, I was talking to you about coming across Japanese positions and that and finding dead bodies and stuff.**

12:30 **What would be done with the Japanese dead bodies?**

Oh they'd be buried to overcome diseases or anything like that, it was the same with anybody because you don't want bodies lying about the place rotting and disease and stuff like that. But the Japanese had sort of developed a pretty fair system around Finschhafen where they had

13:00 the meris [native women], the black women working for them in their gardens, plantation sort of thing with bananas, paw paws, yams that sort of thing, working for them. And occasionally you'd see a meri that was pregnant and some of the native boys we had with us would say, "Japan man." they'd pat their stomach and say, "Japan man" which means she was pregnant to a Jap.

13:30 But which I suppose was natural enough, they were there for quite a while and the natives were in no position to resist them really with the equipment they had. I suppose it was to be expected. But they talk about yams, yams make bloody good chips but if you boil them up like potatoes they're like glue. We often thought

14:00 that we might be able to use them in that way. I didn't realise until a long time later that the only way to cook them was, as far as I was concerned was roast them or, and we had no facilities for roasting, or make chips out of them. But we used green paw paw as a vegetable, you could boil it and that and you were getting some greens. You weren't getting a lot in the way of good rations

14:30 we had M & V [meat and vegetables] and that sort of thing. That's one of the things about being on the barges, they had these marine diesels and the V-shaped engines and the Yanks got a bit of a surprise because when we were on the barges we used to get the tins of M & V and stick them in the V of the engine and heat them up, instead of eating them cold. They got the idea pretty smartly too, often beat us, how the hell they didn't

15:00 wake up to it themselves, but our blokes woke up to it pretty smartly, the round tin of M & V would sit in the V of the engine and heat up quite well. We had a good relationship with the Yanks of the 5/32nd, Shore Battalion we have a bloke that occasionally writes to our battalion newsletter from America, he's from the 5/32nd and he always remembers his good relationships with our mob. But

15:30 oh you know, compared to the Middle East for us it was a hell of a lot easier. I'm not denigrating the New Guinea campaign by any means because had we had to do the Kokoda Track the same as those kids did we would have suffered the same way as they did. We would have done it alright, the same as they did but it would have been just as bloody hard and just as dangerous.

16:00 And Buna and Gona, Milne Bay, the 7th Division came into Milne Bay and they gave a hand to the militia blokes, but we would have had just as tough a job. We weren't any supermen but we were, by that time we were old soldiers and professionals and the blokes we were bringing out of our unit were being trained by blokes that knew what they were about and had been under fire. And it makes a hell of a big

16:30 difference because when you take a mob of lads that have got no training, bugger all equipment and

you throw them in against an army that's been running over the world without being stopped, and those kids had the goods they stopped them and turned them round. And what I mean they were the first to do so irrespective of what the Yanks might like to tell people, they were the boys that turned them round. And we were the blokes that turned the Jerries around for the first time in the Second World War. So between us we'd sort of

17:00 didn't do a bad job.

**I think so.**

You know I admire those kids that went up there greatly and we have a good relationship between the veterans from the 15th Battalion and CMF blokes, we have committee meetings or normal club meetings, they come to our meetings, some of their blokes, we got to their funerals they come to ours sort of things. And we've developed a really good relationship, between us we foster

17:30 some of the school cadet corps, we offer award or prizes for weapon training and marksmanship and that sort of thing and we have a really good relationship. And then on Anzac Day we have, at the Cenotaph in here we have a combined service for the three 15th battalions. But of course there's none of the 1/15th Battalion [from World War I] left but we do get their relations coming.

18:00 We had two daughters from a bloke from the 1/15th this year. So that the business, the sort of animus that was there early in the piece between the AIF and the militia in the days of the choccos, I was a chocco myself one time, that's long gone, they are professional soldiers the same as

18:30 we were.

**Well how was that camaraderie in New Guinea in comparison to say what you were talking about earlier in the Middle East?**

Oh just the same, just the same, you relied on one another. And up there blokes got dengue fever they got malaria, they used to call me "Japan man" at one time because when we got the Atebrin tablets, and we'd been up there six weeks or two months before we ever got them, and I used to,

19:00 the yellow used to come out on me and they used to call me "Japan man" [Atebrin turned the skin yellow]. No the relationships never changed in that respect.

**How was your interaction with the locals now that you're talking about them?**

The natives in New Guinea?

**Yeah.**

Oh good as gold, good as gold. I'll tell you a funny thing about the, oh not a funny, rather a thing that rather impressed me, when we were pushing up the coast at the end of the day we'd strip off and into the sea,

19:30 they would to but they'd hold their hands over their genitals until they got under water, much more moral shall I say, not prudish, but aware then we were, like we didn't give a bugger who saw us, it was just a case of strip off and get in the sea, there was no women to worry about. But they didn't, they would cover their genitals until they were under water. But we got on with them well; you could laugh and joke with them, if they were humping stuff

20:00 and they needed a hand they got a hand just the same as they'd give us a hand. Or you'd get them to even carry your rifle while you were doing something else, you might be humping stuff and no we had a good relationship with them. But I always admired them for that, the fact that there was no modesty with our mob but there certainly was with them. Everywhere we struck they natives they were good,

20:30 I know that since the war they have developed a sort of, but being brought into civilisation without any actual training, just chucked in at the deep end.

**Well did they talk about the Japanese occupation at the time?**

Oh yes.

**What did they say about it?**

Oh that they were cruel and they had mishandled them in cases, and as I was saying about the meris they were saying how the meris were pregnant to the Japs and they

21:00 used them as gardeners and that sort of thing. And they used them as bearers too but I think with our mob, where they were under fear with the Japanese, with our mob they weren't, because they knew, well the average Australian soldier is a bloke doing a job for you, so what's the difference, and never ever worried them, they were prepared to share what they had with them. They realised that,

21:30 if they wanted a smoke they'd ask for a smoke and they got it. Really the relationship, well all I can say about the Australian soldiers as far as I've ever seen them wherever we went they managed to strike up a friendly relationship with the people of the area. And particularly with the kids

- 22:00 we sort of, I suppose we were half kids ourselves, we'd teach the kid three-legged races and sack races and all these sorts of things. For prizes you'd give them half a loaf of bread or whatever you had over, that sort of thing and the kids loved it, and wheelbarrow races and all this sort of thing. One place in the Middle East where we were one of our boys was courting a girl from the local village and he got killed later on at El Alamein.
- 22:30 She was a lovely girl and the mother used to come up and sit while Jimmy and Helena were talking. And she had a younger sister and a young brother, I don't know what the boy's Arab name was we used to call him Tommy but we always gave them food stuff and that. If you were friendly with the natives, or the Arabs you'd get women and that, your washing
- 23:00 came back there'd be a rose on top of it and this sort of thing. And this was the same with the natives in New Guinea we had a good relationship with them, it was no sort of looking down your nose because they were coloured, they were there doing a job and putting up with the same conditions you were, and probably more used to it than you were. By and large, you got on with them well and that's all you expected from them.

#### **Well how**

- 23:30 **hard were those conditions say of a night time or sleeping?**

Well you knew it was going to rain just about ever night, quite often of a day. You were sodden most of the time, your boots were sodden, your socks, you didn't have the clothing to change, well just a waste of time changing and get dry. But we'd be without our shirts as much as we could but as I said to Naomi [interviewer] a while ago

- 24:00 I ended up with this scaly tinea from waist to feet. No it was just uncomfortable, I do remember one position we were in, I've forgotten where it was actually, I got hold of a desiccated
- 24:30 potato tin, about twenty litre now I suppose. And I got another bit of flat stuff and put a shelf in it and put it over a little hole I dug in the ground and used a two pounder shell cover, a cardboard thing for a chimney, made an oven and I cooked some jam rolls when
- 25:00 we were up in the line. And Don Cecil was one of my corporals and Don always thought that was marvellous, that I'd cooked jam rolls somewhere up the line. But you use wood fires for everything you did, that sort of thing. We were in one position where Major General Moreshead who had been our divisional commander in the Middle East became our corps commander over here and Wootten [Major General George Wootten, CBE, DSO, NX7/352001, Headquarters 9th Division] became our divisional commander.
- 25:30 Wootten originally came from the 18th Brigade and he never got the respect that Moreshead had from our fellows and they both came up in two separate Jeeps. Moreshead came up in a soft top cap, no weapons and Wootten came up with a tin hat on and a 45 on either hip. And they ho ho hoed Morsehead and they booed Wootten,
- 26:00 and he was their divisional commander. But Moreshead had won such respect from them, and that's something I never told you about either, the ho, ho, ho business with our division. I know I'm going all over the place but.

#### **That's okay.**

When we came to Kairi to train before we went to New Guinea in the first place one day the brigadier was going past

- 26:30 one of our camps and we were out on manoeuvres and there was only cooks and that left in and anyhow one of these cooks ho, ho, ho, barking like a dog. And Windier pulled up and came back and he walked into this cook house and he said, "Who barked at me?" and this bloody cook had enough guts to say, "I did." And he said, "Well get up on that bloody table." pointed with his swagger stick [baton], "Get up on that table and do it again."
- 27:00 And this cook did and he said to Windier, "We're not getting a go, we're not getting any leave, we're not getting into Atherton to the pictures or anything like that." Anyhow he got up and barked and Windier must have grinned and walked off. But after that we started to get into Atherton to the pictures and they developed this ho, ho, ho which became a divisional cry. And the people in Atherton half the time used to go to the pictures because as soon as the National Anthem went
- 27:30 the whole theatre would erupt with ho, ho, ho and it stuck with them all the way through, ever since then, people used to go to hear this. When our blokes get together now sometimes you'll hear a ho, ho, ho.

#### **Would it happen out in the field sometimes?**

Oh it all depends what was on, if things were reasonably quite or that you'd probably, somebody

- 28:00 sort of breaking the boredom would start it up and it would probably go through, if you were in camps it would go through from one camp to the other, through the whole bloody division. If you were in action of course a certain amount of tommy rot [silliness] went on but it all depended on circumstances.

Generally they were pretty serious about that side of it; well they knew they had to be.

**Well you've actually raised boredom, what was it like,**

28:30 **like a day out in New Guinea out in the field?**

Well you were walking most days, as I said earlier it was something like hunting, going hunting because actually that's what we were doing. You were walking with a haversack on your back, we didn't carry pack, with a 303 or an Owen gun, or whatever you happened. If you were lucky you got one of those Yank 30 calibre carbines, the small ones

29:00 but getting the supply of the ammunition was the only trouble there. And well you just walked along looking for Japs sort of thing. When night came you would bed down, you didn't necessarily dig in every night because if things weren't sticky at all there was no sense in generally wasting energy. We used to sleep on top of the ground.

29:30 I had a mate Dave Stockham and I can remember the rain was that persistent at one particular stage of it that we had a piece of canvas that was just the width of the two of us strung on a stick across a bed of small sticks to keep us up out of the mud. And it was just the width, as long as neither one of us rolled either way, yeh that.

30:00 **What kind of places would you hole up for the night, what would you look for?**

Oh you'd look for something with a field of fire, you know somewhere where you had a certain amount of relatively clear area around you so that you couldn't be approached, or whatever would make noise. For instance tins with stones in them and that onto strings across from

30:30 one place to another so as if somebody hit it, it would jangle so that you'd know there was someone about. You listen for sticks cracking when people stand on them, cause at night time you don't know where you're putting your feet, you can't see. You took what precautions you could but you didn't sort of go into, what shall I say a really defensive warfare state of thing, you took

31:00 what precautions were necessary under the circumstances, but that was about the whole context of it.

**Did you have any particularly close calls during this period?**

Oh not in New Guinea no. No I had a pretty, I suppose pretty easy war there the only, as I say we

31:30 had this little engagement with this PIB [Papuan Infantry Battalion] boy got shot in the stomach but I suppose bullets flew past me but I, was nothing that you could call perils or that.

**Well did you have any fun or any particular things that you would get up to for entertainment or fun?**

Oh well I suppose I smoked in those days, I started to smoke when I was in Tobruk, but

32:00 oh not necessarily, by the end of the day I think you were probably buggered, you weren't getting the type of rations that maintained a high level of energy and strength. By the end of the day you were feeling buggered, you'd get into the sea for a wash, you'd boil up a billy and cook up what you could to eat. And you more or less did for yourself and then see if

32:30 you could get a dry spot to camp on. As I say we pinched these Yank hammocks when we were doing manoeuvres in Milne Bay but you couldn't hang them up of a night because if anything happened and you're firing well that's where the line of fire would be, you'd be up in the line of fire instead of down the ground. We used to lay on them, you used them to cover you but

33:00 it was, the mosquitoes we didn't have any mosquito nets, well we did at times but generally speaking we were exposed to malaria and mosquitoes long before we got that sort of equipment.

**Well tell us about getting malaria?**

Well I don't recall, as I said earlier I got malaria and I passed out

33:30 and that's all I know about it and about five days later I came to in one of the wards in the hospital in Moresby. I'd been probably taken down by barge, but I'd been out to it for about five days and then I come good. Well then once they start pumping quinine and that into you and you come good pretty quickly because you start to get good food and your recovery rate is good, you're young

34:00 and you're relatively healthy, that sort of took care of it. And of course the nurses looked after you like babies, there were blokes there that really needed treatment, all you needed was treatment for malaria. Some blokes got black water fever which was a very bad, where your water starts to... you pass black water you know well you've got it really bad then.

34:30 And of course then you can get dengue fever or scrub typhus which are very, very serious.

**So what happened to you, what decision was made about the condition you were in at this stage?**

Well as I say I was taken back to Moresby and I was in hospital there for what couple of weeks I suppose then I was sent up to Kokutai to a convalescent camp and from there to the Bootless

35:00 Bay to, the return to unit camp.

**Did you return to your unit?**

Oh yes and we came back to Australia and from there I trained in Ravenshoe and right up till not long before they went to Borneo. And I was waking up most mornings

35:30 passing out, vomiting and that and it wasn't, sometimes it might have been from grog but generally speaking it wasn't. And they, I was sent to Rocky Creek and they made me B2, they thought I had ulcers but then they couldn't pinpoint ulcers and I was B2 and then sent down to 17th [convalescent unit] in Cairns to wait discharge. Well I was there until the

36:00 end of the war in G Branch and I applied for a re-board when our mob came down to go to Borneo but the deputy assistant of medical services, a Colonel Viviane said, "No way you've had your war." he said, "What do you want to re-board for?" I said, "Well this is the only show my blokes have done that I haven't been in." he said, "No way, you've had your war." So

36:30 that was that.

**How did you feel about that decision at the time?**

Well I couldn't do anything about it, I was disappointed, not that I'm any bloody hero or anything but I'd been in every show with them and I thought well I'd just like to finish it, this is the last show they were going to be in by the looks of it. And I thought well seeing I was there from day one I would have liked to have been there for the finish. But I wasn't and I can't, couldn't

37:00 do anything about that, not many of the old hands did make it to Borneo because of attrition over five and a half years. You don't realise how many men pass through your battalion, there's literally thousands and thousands that you don't realise. But when you look around and you see how few of the old blokes that you joined with are there then you start to

37:30 realise. "Jesus Christ we're getting thin on the ground." which we were.

**And what was it like to return to Australia after this period?**

Well for me I was coming back to be married and it was wonderful. Although you couldn't go anywhere from Cairns except either to Kuranda or as far south as Tully, so our honeymoon was at Kuranda, which wasn't a bad spot,

38:00 for a honeymoon you know up at Fitz's Pub up there, it was good food and you'd have a few beers and we walked to the Barron Falls, all over the place to everywhere. And we were both young and healthy and in love, what could be better.

**Well tell us how you proposed again?**

I wrote to propose, I wrote to her mother first to ask permission to marry her

38:30 and then I wrote and asked her to marry me. And she accepted and I sent her the money for an engagement ring which she bought, she selected for herself. Then when I came home we were married and then when I was at Ravenshoe in camp occasionally she used to come up by train for the weekend and if I could get, I didn't always get the weekend off, but if I could

39:00 I'd get in and we'd go to the pictures or we'd just have the weekend together. And a lot of my blokes knew my wife very well, she used to send me a parcel about fifteen inches long, ten inches or so wide and a couple of inches thick which was shortbread, marshmallow on shortbread biscuits. And my jokers knew these parcels and I'd come down

39:30 from dinner at night or something and they'd say, "Hey Wattie come down here you want any of this?." The buggers had got the parcel and opened it and they were eating it because they knew what it was. One particular bloke a friend of mine Terry Stains, one of my corporals, Terry was a hell of a nice bloke and he thought Else was just something out of the box [special].

40:00 And I took him down to Cairns a couple of times when we got sent down there for something, and took him round to see my wife. Yes she used to think Terry was something out of the box to. And a funny thing you know during the El Alamein campaign I had bloke named Guy Phillips in my platoon and when we were going up for the big attack

40:30 this Terry Stains was one of my corporals and he came to me and he said, "Big Guy's not going." "What do you mean he's not going?" "Well his back there in his 'douver' and he reckons he's not going." I said, "Bullshit he's not going I'll be giving him a kick in the guts." I said, "Get up you big bastard." I said, "If I'm going up there you're coming with me." and up he got and he come with me. Anyhow the first Cairns Show after the war

- 41:00 we're walking through Side-show Alley and Don was about three I suppose and you know how Side-show Alley used to be those days, well you wouldn't know you're too young, but the places were close, like the width of this room, there were shows either side and they're yelling their head off and you tune out. And Elsie said to me, "Someone's calling your name." so I started to listen, I thought, 'Bloody Guy Phillips', I recognised the voice.
- 41:30 And I look around and here he is he's got Peter the Boy Giant and some other side show that he's running, and he took young Don and he run him through all the kids shows around the place. And Else said to me, "After what you did to him I didn't think he'd ever talk to you." and Guy's still alive he lives up in Maryvale.

## Tape 9

- 00:36 **You got married while the war was still on?**

Hmm.

### **How hard was it to organise a wedding during the war?**

Well difficult but my wife's wedding dress was borrowed from someone else, her bridesmaid's dress, if I'm not mistaken she made, she was pretty good on the machine.

- 01:00 Catering was done at home because there just wasn't the facilities, it was rations and things like that and the reception was held under her parent's home, and of course in Cairns all high-block houses. But it was nice, a real family type of wedding. Not a lot of my close friends there because they were scattered all over the country on leave at the time. But as I was just saying to Kiernan
- 01:30 a while ago about Bull Angus our company commander spotting us in the street and saying, "Are you getting married?" and I said, "No I am married." he said, "Where's the show?" so Bull was there. And she got well known to my blokes because she used to come to Ravenshoe, she was an easy person to get on with. And now of course my fellows that I was in the army with, they know my present wife Trish
- 02:00 just as well as some of the others knew Elsie and they get on with her like a house on fire. And I've been extremely lucky believe me because she's just a marvellous person and as I said, the kids come one, two, three, four, I often used to say her, I said, "I've been through this before I was number six in the family once before." No she's just something out of the box
- 02:30 and if it hadn't been for her I would say we would have lost Fiona, she was night and day with her for about three years and she slept up in the hospital there in an old lounge chair alongside the bed. She's just been a tower of strength all the way through for the whole damn lot of us, and you don't, I've just been lucky, you don't often get two chances.
- 03:00 Well I know I'm happy, I just hope she is, but it's a wonderful feeling that the eight kids melded together so well. You know we get rings from the big blokes and Wayne my second eldest boy and I are going to Melbourne this month, next month, at the end of May to the World Cycling Championships together, because
- 03:30 when my boys were growing up they were all tied up in cycling and they rode all over Australia. Two of them were Australian champions and the youngest bloke could have been in that family but he was too lazy, he didn't train to the extent. But Trish knew the fact that he didn't always go to training when he should of, she never ever told me though. And different things that happened that she knew about but I didn't. And they come out when we have parties or
- 04:00 get together and things like that and when the Wallaces have a party it's generally a pretty good party. But she, all the different things that come out and the boys look at her and laugh and they say, "Didn't they Trish?" and I hear this all second hand. This is the sort of thing that you've got to just be happy it's that way.
- 04:30 Oh no I've got no complaints, as I often say I've got three feeds and part of a bed, so you're not doing too bad. No I've got some particularly good friends, I'm trying to take my glasses off, I've got some particularly good friends in the Battalion Association and we put a journal together every three months and we correspond
- 05:00 with quite a few people. And I had a bit of correspondence with a lady who was the wife of one of our fellows who died, Pud Bickle and her brother was on the HMAS Sydney when it was sunk off Western Australia. And she went to that Geraldton memorial, the dome of souls they call it, and she sent me all these pictures and the story about it. And I put it
- 05:30 through the newsletter and everybody loved it, and this is what we've been trying to do get everybody to contribute. Mrs Walters she went out to Roma [Queensland], they had a big Back to Roma turnout and she wrote the story about that and we got that into the journal. Just the different things that hold the place together. And Anzac Day we've always been men only and we're getting light on the ground so

this year we decided at the Anzac Day get together

06:00 that were going to have the ladies come along next time, because after all we're past the age where were telling dirty jokes, well nothing that will offend the ladies anyhow.

**Well just sort of towards the end of the war what exactly were you doing at Ravenshoe?**

Oh Ravenshoe we were training for the next show, it was

06:30 jungle training, same style of thing. Odd new weapons came out which we had to learn about, but generally it was just the same type of training. And to the old blokes it was old hat because they'd been there and done it. But they had to be kept in contact with their weapons and all that sort of thing. And the new blokes coming in who hadn't done it had to be shown how and given a few tips from the old fellows.

07:00 And not only that they had to be fostered into the battalion so that they knew it wasn't a case of oh he's an original he won't think much of me. That wasn't the thing, they were fostered in so that they knew they were part of the battalion, because that's the main thing with any unit, is the pride of unit, the fact that you belong. And

07:30 ninety nine point nine percent of the old hands, a new bloke came along they were quite happy to see him, and he was just treated as one of the boys. You know some funny things happened in Ravenshoe, for instance getting clothing replaced was terribly hard, replacements were short and we put a whole platoon through for new shirts on two torn shirts

08:00 because we got one of our blokes into the Q Store and he was passing them out under the back of the tent and the next bloke was going round with the same shirt and exchanging it for a newie. And this was the sort of things you had to do to get new gear. And early in the piece when we came out of Tobruk we went on leave in the service dress that we'd worn in Tobruk and it was quite a hell of a mess at times,

08:30 and worn out, but that's what we had there was nothing else to get. Except if you knew the padre and he happen to have some Comforts Fund stuff had come in you might be able to get a pair of shorts and a shirt off him. And this is the sort of thing that happened. But the big thing in all this is the fellowship, the fostering of fellowship and belonging. To belong to a unit,

09:00 any unit with a mob of blokes that have been there done that must give the young blokes coming in a feeling of confidence that they must think, 'Oh at least these buggers know what they're doing', and quite often we didn't. But the main thing was to keep the feeling of oneship altogether and the pride in unit believe me

09:30 that is above everything. We got a new colour patch after El Alamein, caused a little bit of hard feeling amongst the other divisions but to us we regarded it as a decoration because it was a complete change away from any other type of colour patch. And we were supposed to get, as far as I can gather, the white crusader patch that the 8th Army used to wear on their shoulder but

10:00 we weren't allowed to because of bad feeling between the other units. And eventually they come up with the T, it was something completely out of the box, whereas our old colour patch was chocolate over blue in a rectangle, because our original unit had been in the 1st Division in the First World War. And then to come up with the T which was something out of the box, but were pretty proud of it.

**And how did**

10:30 **you hear the news of the end of the war?**

I was in Sydney on leave and it came out and we were in Hyde Park, it used to be a thing at lunch time all the clerical staff and shop assistants and that, Hyde Park was a place to go for your lunch, if it was good weather. And we were in Hyde Park, Don was seven months old and we heard that the war had ended and the bloody town

11:00 filled up and people come out of shops and everything. And I'm standing there with my arms braced against a building and my back to the crowd trying to keep them off Else and the baby. But oh it was marvellous.

**Well describe the crowds, what were people doing?**

Well one bloke, well a couple of them were in the pool in Hyde Park, the memorial pool, they were swimming in there and people were just going mad,

11:30 they were dancing they were cheering, the place was thick with people. And Sydney's a pretty town particularly when the plane trees are out, I love Sydney. But the place just over a matter of minutes it just filled up with people, well I suppose they come out of the shops and everywhere, and it was marvellous. And then, was it then, no it must of

12:00 been after the war when the fireworks first came out, and the first time we'd been in Sydney on holidays when fireworks had first come out and I'd been into David Jones department store when they came out and I was on a tram with an armful, big packet and a paperboy jumped on the tram, "Where'd

you get the crackers mate?" and I told him and away he went. But these are the things that you think about.

- 12:30 Oh I can, Sydney when the end of the war was over they went berserk. And of course it was the same here in Brisbane, you've seen the stuff that they had here in Brisbane.

**Well how did you feel?**

Relieved, it was over, yeh relieved you were out of it, although I was B2 at the time but had things really got serious I suppose I'd have gone back into it. But it was over and

- 13:00 we could sort of get down to living. I wanted to take, we had training after the war as a cabinet maker, carpenter but the wages they paid wouldn't keep a wife and husband and child so I had to go back to the railways, which I didn't want to do but I had to because I had to keep my family.

**After you'd been in the army for so long**

- 13:30 **how was it settling back into civilian lifestyle?**

Difficult, difficult, I got into, oh what shall I say a few altercations with people that hadn't been in the army when I got back to work. For instance one bloke we were having dinner one night, or crib one night in the middle of a shift, this bloke's skiting about the number of cases of shirts and boots that he knocked

- 14:00 off and of course I blew my top. I said, "I was battling my bloody heart out trying to get shirts for my boys to wear." and I said, "You're pinching the bloody things." And things like that used to rattle you a bit, but you realise then it's over and you've just got to get on with living and let a certain amount of it pass overhead.

**Were there things about army life that you missed?**

Yeh

- 14:30 when the Korea War started [1950] a particularly good mate of mine came out and he said, "I'm going to Korea. What about it?" and I'd had a gut full of civvie street [civilian life] by that time, nobody seemed to know what they were doing and at least in the army you knew what you were bloody doing, and I said, "Bloody oath mate that will do me." And Elsie said to me, "You've had your war old fellow." she said, "If you go I'm not going to be here when you come back." So it was an ultimatum and

- 15:00 I suppose discretion was the better part of valour. Jack went, he was single of course and he won the MM [Military Medal] over there as a matter of fact, and yeah I stayed home.

**Well what was it that you missed about army life?**

Oh companionship, the order of knowing what you were doing. Possibly I suppose a bit of the power that you had, not

- 15:30 that I had a great deal, I was a sergeant but you do have control of the men's lives at time, possibly that I don't know, whether I was so bloody bombastic with that as to think of that, I don't think I was. But just the orderliness that the fact that you knew what was going on, you knew what you were doing was worthwhile. And I would say the comradeship, the friends that you'd been with

- 16:00 for five and a half years and as I say as you were there longer less and less of them were there and you got so very close to one another that it was difficult to have to, they'd gone to other parts of the state, you didn't see one another. You couldn't afford to go away to Brisbane to reunions because you were flat out making a living and.....

- 16:30 You can't afford it, you're battling you've got a loan to pay off. I wheelbarrowed two thousand five hundred stones in from around where my first house was built to edge my garden beds with. I dug over every inch of that yard and twelve feet all the way round outside

- 17:00 and took every root and that out of it and planted blue couch runners six inches apart. I dragged my eldest son around the yard to level it on the lump of stick and that and with a bag of sand to weigh it down. And I planted gardens, built a fence, grew my own vegetables, had the back fence covered with ti-tree poles and golden

- 17:30 orchids. And I was tied up in union affairs and I joined a camera club, I used to do a bit of fishing. As a matter of fact one of the funniest things I ever heard my eldest son and I were down in Smith's Creek in Cairns in the flattie [boat] and it's about four o'clock one Sunday afternoon.

- 18:00 Just a gentle breeze blowing, the sun had gone down behind the mangroves sufficiently far so we had no sunlight on us, we'd pick up an odd fish every twenty minutes or so, were getting a good bite or something, we've got a smoke going in the bottom of the boat of cow manure to keep the mosquitoes away. And out of nowhere Don who was about seven I suppose at the time, seven or eight said, "This is the shot hey Dad, away from Mum and the kids." talk about read your mind.

- 18:30 I've never forgotten that.

**Well was there, after having spent such a time in the army and I guess it's not really a normal kind of life with sort of action and tension, is there a certain feeling of I guess boredom or complacency?**

Yeh, I rejoined the militia a couple of years after the war, but during,

19:00 I spent a couple of years in but due to the constrictions of my employment I had to give it away, but I'd missed the army life. Yeah there is a certain amount of boredom but then when you, I was busy all the time with my yard, with my family. For instance we built in cupboards into the kitchen and we built the kitten in,

19:30 we put the base down on and we were having a cup of tea and my mate who was giving me a hand said, "Where's the kitten?" We couldn't find it, so we had to pull the base of the cupboard up and the kitten was in there. And then I had bought home a Luger pistol and a 38 [gun] and a pair of binoculars, the best pair of binoculars I ever saw in my life, I took them off a Jerry and I had to sell them because

20:00 I was broke and wedding anniversary or my wife's birthday came up. We didn't have a radio so a chap I worked with used to build them and I got him to build me one, cost me sixteen pounds. I bought a chiming clock for an anniversary present for my wife, that cost me the 38 and I forgot what, I think the binoculars got me the best part of dining suite,

20:30 which I bought for her. Oh that didn't worry me the losing that, the least, I had no use for them.

**And when you first came back what did Anzac Day mean to you?**

Not a great deal, I didn't go to Anzac Day when I first came back but we had a couple of our own blokes buried in the war cemetery

21:00 in Cairns and we decided we'd have a reunion which ended up in a brawl about three o'clock in the morning when some bloke told another one he wasn't an original. But we then decided we would have a service at the war cemetery every Anzac Day morning and lay wreaths on the graves of the blokes from our Brigade that were there. Which we did and we didn't take part in the Anzac Day march.

**Why not?**

21:30 Oh I don't know it didn't appeal to us at that stage. But then the Rats of Tobruk association was formed and I took part in the marches with them and we became a sort of semi-charity, we used to go round and do jobs like we'd work in the ambulance, the annual ambulance bazaar which used to take place

22:00 for a week and they used to close the streets near the ambulance. We'd work in there in the stalls in helping them, we painted the CWA [Country Women's Association] rest home out at one of the beaches, we got money together and put it up to the Council to put up a decent swimming pool in Cairns provided it was called the Tobruk Memorial Baths, which it still is, and that sort of thing. And that way we managed to

22:30 keep things going a bit. But then my battalion fellows up there, a chap Doug McLean and myself, Doug was our treasurer secretary and I was president, we organised our reunions for thirty years. And we ended up we were the only mob having a reunion up there and we ended up taking the lot, the Rats of Tobruk 9th Division Association, the 51st Battalion,

23:00 that was the native battalion in Cairns, we ended up taking them all and they used to all come to our reunion. And then I remarried and come down here and then Doug's wife died and he came down here and then he remarried. So that the show went on for a few more years but the other blokes weren't prepared to put the work into it.

**And since coming back from the war have there been**

23:30 **sort of memories and things, you spoke a little bit before about the dying German soldier, but that have particularly stayed with you?**

Yeah well he lives with me all the time. I never, I don't think there's a day goes by that I don't at sometime think about him. I don't know he has, yet, what I mean I've been in other engagements and killed blokes but

24:00 not under the same circumstances and I just don't get him out of my mind, I don't know why, probably there with me for good. Oh different things that strike you, they make a vast impression on you and you live with it. The thing that worried me most about the fact that his daughters

24:30 lost him and as I said in that poem they'd be grandmas and have kids of their own and that and they didn't know their grandfather.

**And having some particular memories or thoughts that do live with you how does that affect you in everyday life, or how has it affected?**

Oh I suppose I must be, I'm on an anti-depressant,

- 25:00 have been for years but I suppose I've learnt to live with it to a big extent and having this younger family has sort of bought me back to the field where I had to, my kids because I'm a lot older than most fathers, my kids, I don't know whether I'm a bloody fool or it's a compliment, but they don't think there's anything that other fathers can do that their father can't.
- 25:30 And even at my eightieth birthday when Glen got up and spoke and said, "Dad was sixty two when I was born." But I coached cricket, I coached soccer, they all played soccer including Fiona, I managed teams and I entered into life, I suppose I've been a poor grandfather because I've had not the time to put in with my grandchildren that I have put in with my second family.
- 26:00 But by and large it's worked out not too bad.

**And how about early on in the sort of couple of years after, directly after the war were?**

I was rough to live with, I was rough to live with, at one stage I hit the grog pretty heavily but I woke up to myself pretty smartly about that, I realised how useless that was.

- 26:30 I knocked off smoking because I was developing catarrh and the people giving you tobacco, in those days it was on a ration sort of thing and they thought they were giving you the Golden Casket [the Queensland lottery] so I did my block one time at the tobacconists and told him where to stick it and I came home and said, "I'm finished smoking." And my wife about three weeks later went out and she bought every cigarette and tobacco she could buy in the city and bought it home and threw it on the kitchen table and she said, "For God sake smoke that." And
- 27:00 I said, "You can stick it, I'm finished" and Wrigley's chewing gum paid dividends for about six months but I was twenty nine then, I'd been smoking for ten years and I gave it away, I've never missed it. I know I used to be at work and after work you'd go for a few beers and one of the blokes there used to say to me, "You've got me beat." and I said, "Why?" he said, "You come over here and shouting your turn,
- 27:30 then you say 'Right oh, that's it ,see you blokes later.'" he said, "I'd had two." he said, "I'm there for the night." But I had a family and they were the most important part of it, what I mean I've never been any particular success, I'm not success story but I've had a happy life. There's times you'd like to change sort of thing, I didn't let my children see their mother when
- 28:00 she died, my big boys, I didn't, I saw my mother after she died and I hated it, it wasn't Mum, and I thought I was doing the right thing. Anyhow years later I was down in Melbourne, we'd gone fishing up into the Goulburn River and one of my boys had a place up on the Goulburn and anyhow we were sitting out, we'd been fishing and caught a few trout and we'd come home, bought a slab on the way home and
- 28:30 the three of us were sitting there having a beer, my two youngest from my first family. And we were sitting there having a few beers and waiting, we'd wrapped the trout in foil and chucked it on the BBQ and right out of the blue Chick said, "I never said goodbye to Mum." I said, "Jesus Christ!" I said, "Twenty eight years for that to come out." and it had been sticking in his craw for twenty eight years that I hadn't let them see their mother to say goodbye. And, because
- 29:00 she had a massive heart attack right out of the blue, never looked better in her life. She'd worked for the last two years of her life and we were walking home this particular Saturday morning, I'd gone to pick her up and were holding hands and the girls in the shops were chucking off saying, "Come on you two, you're too old for that sort of thing." And that night we went to see a friend of hers in the hospital and we went to the high school fete and she bought tickets there, she was talking to different people, had a pain in the chest
- 29:30 and she said to me, "I've got a pain in the chest." I said, "Well come on I'll open the car up." I said, "And you can lay down in the car a bit, for a while and I'll wait to pick the kids up." But then when she got down to the car she said, "Oh God!" she said, "I've never had a pain like it!" I said, "Come on." I took her home and sent for the doctor. And he said to her, "What have you been doing today?" he said, "Your blood pressure's way up." she said, "Graham I've never had an easier day in my life." And she hadn't, she'd gone to watch one of the boys
- 30:00 play football for North Queensland, she normally used to come home and she'd do the washing, she hadn't bothered and we'd gone up to see Noreen and we'd gone to the fete. And anyway he gave her a needle and gave her a prescription, he said, "You can get that filled on Monday." he said, "And if you get this pain again just put a tablet under your tongue." She was right for about half an hour and bang that was it and my second eldest boy came home and he was giving her mouth to mouth resuscitation.
- 30:30 while I was working on her chest and it was just no good and that was that. Yeah and twenty eight years later that came out, believe me that stopped me right in my tracks. Not something I'd recommend to anyone rearing kids on your own, particularly when you're working away from home and shift work and that. But I got on and I could cook and I could sew, I couldn't sew but I learnt to use a machine cause one
- 31:00 of the boys was an apprentice and he came home one day and he said, "Hey Dad these boys at work want to know if you do welding?" and I woke up what he was at, he tore his jeans, shorts and I'd put a

patch under it and machine over the top like you should do you know. I said, "You go and tell those blokes that they've got wives and mothers and sisters to do their work." I said, "You've got your father." I said, "And yours are always washed, mended and ironed."

**Good on you.**

But I took a hint and went and bought him a couple of new pairs of shorts.

31:30 But we lived as it was and Trish's dad if he were alive could tell you when I wasn't there, he painted my house, I got him to paint my house, he was there when I was away at work one time and the boys got into a blue and was fists up and into it and Dick often said, "Christ I don't know how you handled those blokes." But, and the time they busted one of the walls

32:00 and I was away and there was a rush trip down to the timber mill on their bikes to get timber and repair the wall and paint it before Dad got home. And Trish knew all about this.

**And were just getting a bit near the end of this tape so I'll just ask a couple of more questions. Just wondering when you look back at the years you spent during World war II, what do you think**

32:30 **the greatest lessons are that you learnt during that time?**

How futile and stupid war is, it's not the answer, it's not the answer, you can go, well they're doing, they're still doing it they never learned a damn thing, every twenty five years. Were sending our breeding stock away, you don't do that, you don't send your stock to the abattoir, your breeding stock and keep the scrags and that's what were doing every twenty or twenty five years. And only through

33:00 bloody politicians, you know they don't have to go, somebody else's kids that are going and were in another one now that we shouldn't be in the same as Vietnam and they're going to come out of that with their tails between their legs, there's nothing surer. And you know I wrote a poem about invasion before they went this time [to fight in Iraq, 2003] I knew it was coming up and I just about prophesised what was going to happen that both sects [the Sunni and Shi'ite sects in Iraq] would join together against them, and they have.

33:30 And like as soon as the forces leave there the Shi'ites, who are the majority but were the underdogs when Saddam Hussein [President of Iraq until the American-led invasion] was there, they're going to massacre the Sunnies, there's nothing surer. And they don't understand democracy as we know it, they only understand, they've always been ruled by somebody who had the money or the power to control the masses and he had the power to

34:00 have bully-boys to do his work for him. And the bloody fools now, well of course were going in trying to sell them democracy and well the Russians have been trying to understand it for a long time and they don't understand it and these people certainly have never been bought up in that style of life. Islam is a different way of life, they believe an eye for an eye, a

34:30 tooth for a tooth we believe in turning the other cheek, and believe me when you do you get belted on that side to. And that is what is happening; now you're getting young men being killed and young women for no good reason. They've made the United Nations as weak as the League of Nations [the forerunner of the United Nations, created by the 1919 Peace Treaty after World War One] became, the United Nations is a laughing stock now because where they had the power before instead of the United States, Britain,

35:00 Australia and whatever backing them, backing the United Nations and letting them put the troops in. But no they're going to go over and cure everything, I don't know I don't know of any bloke that ever saw service that agrees with what's going on now. You know two hundred years the British were in Afghanistan, they couldn't beat them,

35:30 why didn't they just go and talk to the British, they would have told them. The Russians were in there for eleven years they couldn't handle them and they weren't very gentlemanly about the way they handled it and we're not doing any better. And the same thing in Persia, Alexander the Great [King of Macedon, 356-323 BC] went through there, he may have conquered them but he's long gone. And as the way it is now I'd say the Kurds [tribal minority group, northern Iraq] are probably sitting up on the Turkish border hoping they do kill one another and then they'll get their chance.

36:00 **When you look back at World War II what would you describe as your best memory of that time?**

Oh I don't know it's difficult to say, probably one of the best things was seeing Elsie on that wharf in Sydney when we came home. Oh just seeing it over I

36:30 think, I was dismayed when the Americans dropped the atomic bombs [on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, Japan in 1945, thus forcing a Japanese surrender]. I don't know I really, just the fact that it was over, we could go back to peace and Australia was a wonderful place to live in, those days was far ahead of what it is now. And we're doing such stupid things now,

37:00 we're imprisoning people, women and children for no reason, what have they ever done and all we're

doing is breeding terrorists because they must hate our guts by now. They've been in there for years and for what? For wanting to get away from somebody, some despot and they've exchanged one type of imprisonment for another. No we don't know, we just haven't got a clue on how to deal with people.

- 37:30 But with the war I was just glad it was over, when I went back to El Alamein the year before last and walked into that cemetery I just was in tears. I looked down and every name up come a face and a voice and they knew we were there, they knew we were there, there's no blue about that. And
- 38:00 oh God I thought, "What a bloody waste" and we've had sixty years of living and being married and having children and those blokes never had the opportunity to enjoy and they should have done. It's not, it wasn't a fair go, that young men like that were denied the opportunity to fulfil their life. And for all you know we might have had the cure for cancer buried there, they could
- 38:30 have been scientists or whatever, we just don't have enough sense to see that that's what were doing, sending our away breeding stock and our people that can make a world of difference to the world in general. I don't, often times you'll hear someone saying, I remember when they used to call us 'five bob a day murderers' but
- 39:00 we were certainly not war-mongers, we might be patriotic but we don't believe in war. There's a rare bloke that you'd ever talk to that, of our vintage that would ever agree with war, it's so stupid and more particularly since we've had the opportunity to have migrants come in. Admittedly we resented some of them because we were European stock and
- 39:30 we had a different way of life to these people. But they're entitled to a way of life too and we've just got to learn to live with it and it's taken so long to learn the lessons and we still haven't learnt much. And then we have the audacity to think we're the only intelligent beings in the universe, God they've got to be joking, they've got to be joking.
- 40:00 Intelligent? My God, we're too bloody silly to keep sending our kids away to get killed, I don't know.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**