Australians at War Film Archive

Reginald Worthington (Reg) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:40 **...that you were brought up?**

Well, I was born in Murwillumbah on the 17th of September 1918. That's a long time ago. We were reared on a farm in the Murwillumbah area that my

01:00 father had bought as a selection, all virgin country. He paid two pounds per acre for it. That now forms part of the development known as Koala Beach, a million dollars wouldn't buy it now. I went to school at the Round Mountain public school. It was a one teacher school.

01:30 It was about a mile and a half away from our farm. And I never went to high school although I had qualified to go to high school. Qualified at a record low age actually. And...

How did you get to school from your...

We either walked or rode our ponies.

02:00 We had horses in those days. I couldn't go to high school because it would have cost fifteen shillings per week for me to board in. Well, that was in the Depression. We didn't have fifteen shillings to spend on one child when we had eight in the family. So I didn't go to high school and I've regretted it ever since.

What was your primary school like, can you tell us a little bit about what you did at primary school

02:30 **and what the teachers were like?**

Well, yes I can because it's very vivid in my memory even now. The most kids we ever had at that school was thirty-one. Only one teacher at all times. We played cricket, not much football, our teacher wasn't a footballer, he was a cricketer, a really good one. And he taught us boys to play cricket.

03:00 We used to go swimming down to an area known as Hastings Point. It was a mile and a half walk. But that didn't matter, we were used to walking in those days. And we'd go down after lunch and spend a couple of hours in the salt water there, that was great. And from there each one of the families of kids would

03:30 head straight home without going back to the school. I enjoyed that. I enjoyed my school days very much.

What was the school building like?

It's still there today as a private home. There was about two acres of ground with the school, one acre was a horse paddock because most of the kids rode horses, at least some of the time.

04:00 And the rest of it was a cricket ground and so forth. I suppose we considered it quite adequate. I suppose really it was adequate too because well education in those days wasn't as complicated as it is today. No computers. No electricity of course. No electricity. None of the farms in the area had electricity. It was a farming

04:30 area. But no power. And then in 1927 I think it was, my father started up a cream run from that area, known as Round Mountain to Murwillumbah. He picked up the cream, milk wasn't marketed in those days, only the cream and took the cream in

05:00 cans to Murwillumbah. Brought home in the afternoon, the empty cans and the bread and the meat and the groceries, whatever people ordered, because they didn't have vehicles to get to town in. If they wanted to go to town they had to go in my father's truck. That was quite good. It gave us a little bit of

05:30 an advantage over the rest of the neighbourhood. And because of that we were the first family in the district to have a radio. An old battery job. No electricity so it had to be battery. We had a big house.

Quite a big house. The original house was only a small one and then later on

06:00 we built a big house and it had a beautiful big room in it that the local people used as their local dance floor. There was no other place to go dancing, no hall or anything like that at that time. A hall did become available later on when everybody got together and built it. So we had a lot of people coming to our place at times. And that was good.

06:30 Surprise parties, that was wonderful. We might be sitting there at the table all having tea together or maybe finished tea and having a yarn afterwards which we did a lot of in those days, no TV [televsion] to look at. And outside the accordions or mouth organs or whatever, would start up. And the local people had decided that they were going to have a surprise party at the Worthington's. And that's the way it went.

07:00 That was great. I look back on it now and realise how much better off we would be today if that type of thing still prevailed. But it's gone and it'll never come back.

What a lovely memory. What was your mother like?

Very interesting point. My mother was a lovely lady. Her name was Elizabeth Rice and during World

07:30 War I she had five brothers that went to the war and only two came back. But she was a great lady and she lived on, I think she passed away. I don't know exactly what year but she was eight six when she went.

08:00 **Did she talk to you much about those brothers that went away?**

Not much. The two that came back I became very friendly with, especially later on when I came home from World War II. I suppose you could say we had more in common then. So we talked about their days mainly in France.

08:30 The three that were killed, two were killed at Gallipoli and one was killed in France. When eventually World War II came along and I went off and my younger brother. He joined the army and he went off to, I think it must have been an ordeal for Mum to realise that,

09:00 the next stage heading off to war. Will they come home? That would have been her thoughts. but anyway we did come home, thank God for that.

Did your uncles talk to you about you experiences before you went away?

No, not that I can recall. Perhaps I wasn't ready for that type of conversation

09:30 at that time. I was busy in other ways, I was busy in sport, I was courting Iris at the time too and that probably took up all my spare time. Iris loved dancing. She tried to teach me to dance but I had two left feet. Didn't work out too well. I went and later on in life when I came home we went to dancing, quite a lot,

10:00 but I was never a good dancer. Iris was, she was a lovely dancer.

So how did you meet Iris then?

She was working in Murwillumbah and we had our own family business in Murwillumbah, Worthington's Transport. By that time we'd left the farm and moved into Murwillumbah and Worthington's Transport

10:30 ran a daily service of three trucks a day from Murwillumbah to Brisbane. And Iris was working in Murwillumbah and in my spare time I was running a tennis club which we had the hire of a tennis court and I was the ring leader of that and we were short of a girl one night, so I knew of Iris and I knew she could play tennis, or I heard that she could. "So Iris,

11:00 come and make up the team." So she came and that is where it all started. A long time ago though. A long time ago.

What was she like?

I can show you photos of her. She was a lovely young lady. She is eleven months younger than me. She was born on the 16th of August 1919. I was born in September '18.

11:30 About eleven months difference.

You would have known how to talk to women because you had seven sisters.

No, no, Iris had seven, she was one of seven girls, Iris was, with one boy in her family. Eight kids. We had eight kids in our family, five boys and three sisters. Three girls. By the way my three sisters are still alive. But only just. They're in homes. Except

12:00 for the youngest one who is, I think she might be still okay but the other two are just about on their last legs.

Where were you positioned in the family?

I was number five, yes number five I was. I had three boys and one sister ahead of me, then myself, then my younger brother and the last two were both girls. Once they found they were both girls they didn't want

12:30 any more. But that's the way it was. We were eight kids. My children have married, they've gone from the most was three, to one, none. So families are getting smaller aren't they.

Was it hard for your parents to support that many children in the Depression?

In the Depression it was very difficult.

13:00 Very, very difficult.

How did your father mange it do you think?

Well, the farm itself I'm sure could not have done it. But once he started up the cream run, as we called it, things got a little bit better. Each of us went out and got work as often as we could to help because for a start money wasn't so important.

13:30 Nobody had money. So you weren't feeling less than they were because you had no money, because they had no money. That was the Depression days. I don't want to see another depression as bad as that one. But I won't of course.

And what sort of person was your father?

Right, my father, Allen Valentine Worthington.

14:00 He was a Sydney boy. He grew up and became a bugler, went to the South African war as a bugler. On board ship on the way over he turned eighteen years old and then became a trooper with the NSW [New South Wales] bushmen. He survived the Boer War no problems

14:30 and came back home again. He had been a champion cyclist in his younger days in Sydney and well he tried to do a bit of cycling in Murwillumbah to encourage others, to help the younger fry but I'm not so sure now how successful that was. It was too long ago. But he was a great chap.

15:00 Wonderful father. He had a beautiful voice, but after we had tea at night we'd get out on the verandah and he'd sing these songs to us, or he'd tell us some of the more jovial aspects of his Boer war experience, But he'd never tell us anything about the serious type. But just the jovial aspects. No that was very interesting. A lot of it I still remember.

Can you tell us a couple of those stories that you remember?

15:30 Well, he had a great friend in the African war. A chap named Artie Mitchell. Who was a few years older than Dad was and they became friends and they stayed as friends throughout their life. No, I can't tell you the stories.

16:00 **Does he still have his bugle?**

That bugle today is in the historical section in Murwillumbah, looked after by the RSL [Returned Services League]. Now the RSL are very important to me now in Ipswich but I am a life member of the RSL, fifty years continuous membership I have the certificate there to prove it.

16:30 **Did you ever hear him play the bugle?**

Oh yes, he could play it. The house on our farm was up on a hill and he often used to play the bugle and different tunes he could play and I remember one time there was another old neighbour, a chap named Fred Towner. And next morning when Dad took

17:00 the cream run truck along to pick up this cream, old Fred said, "Allen I heard you playing the bugle last night." The sound drifted across from our hill to where he was. Yes, Dad played the bugle beautifully.

Did you have Anzac Day celebrations in town?

No, later on I believe, especially after I enlisted,

17:30 they did have Anzac services in Murwillumbah but I can't recall them having Anzac services in Murwillumbah prior to that. Only once the war started. They used our trucks as a, well up the, one was a great big rising sun badge type of thing on our truck. I have photos of that somewhere here.

18:00 But I don't know much about that because I was away.

So your father didn't commemorate Anzac Day or?

Oh yes. Well, he was very proud of his war career in his own private way. Very private way. And he had two brothers. One of them I know was also in the war but his

18:30 other two brothers were both in World War II. One became a major, I don't know what the other one was. I just don't know.

What was your concept then of war when you were growing up?

Very different to the real thing. Very different. Nobody knows until they experience war just

19:00 what war can be. It's totally different to your own imaginings. Totally different. None of it is very pleasant but we won't dwell on that.

Your father, do you know what he did in the Boer War? Or where he went?

I can show you some photos, they're over a hundred years old

19:30 and they're not very distinct now. But he was in the NSW bushmen. And they fought the wars, no I don't know much about the actual combats or precisely where he went. He mentioned various places to me. But I don't know I've never been to South Africa. I've been to North Africa.

What was your first job out of school?

20:00 Milking cows. It was all dairy farming country. So I went and worked for my uncle. One of the uncles that returned from World War I. For twelve and sixpence a week. That's twelve shillings and sixpence. That' snot very much. I don't know what it would be in dollars, but very little.

20:30 And that was seven day a week you had to milk cows night and morning seven days a week. Then later on we could see that the life on the farm was going to come to an end, economically it beat us. It beat a lot of other farmers too. And we started up a banana plantation. My younger brother and I. The older boys had gone off and

21:00 we worked hard at the banana plantation. But you couldn't make much money out of bananas in those days. A lot of hard work. But then as soon as it was, well later on I moved into Murwillumbah with the family and started driving trucks.

So did your father move into Murwillumbah? Sold the farm?

We got rid of…

21:30 I'm afraid we did not sell the farm. We walked off the farm. That's how serious it was in the Depression. If you couldn't make a living off a farm why keep it? So we walked off the farm, just left it behind us. And we've been back many times since and anyway as I've said before, that area you could not buy it for a million dollars today.

22:00 **Was it upsetting for your father to leave?**

It must have been but he never showed it. I realise now how much of a disappointment it must have been to him. Not to have made a success of that farm. But you couldn't. Economically it wasn't possible. We did a lot better when we all moved into Murwillumbah and started out transport business to Brisbane. It worked quite

22:30 successfully.

What did you do, how did it get set up that transport business?

Well, my eldest brother Jim, he's gone many years. He worked for another transport operator in those times and then eventually started out on his own and then it grew from there, from him operating it to the whole family going with him to operate

23:00 it. And that was quite successful. We had five trucks, only three that were operating continuously to Brisbane every day. I drove one of them when I was old enough to drive.

What was the road to Brisbane like then?

If Jim was able to come back now he'd get lost between Murwillumbah and Brisbane. things have change d that much. It's so very

23:30 very different. For a start we had two ferries before you got to Tweed Heads. Between Murwillumbah and Brisbane there were two ferries, the Chinderah ferry and the Bonnells Bay ferry. A toll bridge over the Logan river, just north of Bentley. Oh things were very different in those days. And the trucks of course weren't anything like the trucks of today. Semi- trailers, there were none,

24:00 you would not have a semi-trailer, they weren't allowed. They were just four wheel trucks but we were the first to operate a diesel truck on interstate transport, from Brisbane they may have operated down the NSW border but we were the first to operate a diesel truck out of Brisbane.

What was the benefit of having a diesel truck?

Well, they were bigger and stronger

and carried more. I don't know, the cost didn't come into it because fuel wasn't very dear in those days. But we had the contract of carting all the Shell, Mobil and another company operating in those days was the COR, Colonial Oil Refineries. We had the contract of carting all their requirements from Brisbane to Murwillumbah. Plus of course we had a lot of

other customers and out trucks were always pretty well loaded.

And your dad was involved in the business as well?

Yes he was involved in the business. Because he sold his cream run and the money he had from that helped to set up the transport service to Brisbane. It was very much a family show.

So how did it work then for the family? Who was in charge and who worked the books and how did the family operate the business?

The eldest brother Jim was the boss. Ray, the next brother, he did all the book work. He helped with the trucks too. But not on the road. He helped with the delivery in the Murwillumbah area. The next brother was Sid, he was on the

trucks to Brisbane and then myself. I came in as the business grew and I joined the transport as a driver. I liked that.

What did you like about it?

Every young fella likes driving a truck. "I'm bigger than you." When the cars pull up beside us, "I'm bigger than you." I suppose there is a feeling about that.

I don't know what you call it. Certainly not aggressive. We were not aggressive.

And what was Brisbane like?

I could find my way around Brisbane very easily then. I'd get totally lost now. It's so much bigger, but different . Oh yes it's, Brisbane in those days was just a rather big town, that's all it was. But that' a long time ago it's over sixty years ago.

And you were saying that the ride was really different then? how long would it take you to get from Murwillumbah to Brisbane where you would take the load?

Three hours. Loaded three hours and not much different when we were empty. We might go up empty to Brisbane and bring a full load back, but about three hours was the usual thing.

And did the older brothers talk about war? Did they ever want to

join the army?

No, they never did enlist. They were so busy with their trucks. I went off to the war. They were under, I don't know how to describe it or how to name it. They were under a form of control, they were directed, manpower I think they might have called it, take their trucks here and on construction work and all

that sort of thing. The transport it folded for the duration of the war. They did start it up when the war finished but I wasn't part of it then.

Do you remember where you were when war broke out?

Well, I was certainly still driving trucks for the family business at the time when war broke out in September '39. I suppose it was a bit of a shock to all of us.

Not as much as a shock as you may expect. Because we expected war to break out. We knew it was coming. The evidence was there that we were going to be at war. There's no doubt we were correct. We were at war. And no it wasn't a shock I suppose. It was a surprise yes.

We didn't want war. It was the last thing we wanted. We knew if war came it would destroy our business but we didn't know what it would do to us individually.

What did Iris think about the war breaking out?

I suppose she was very disappointed too. Well, for a start, once I enlisted she knew that that would make a big difference

to her life, at least while she was still with me, loyal to me. War broke out in September '39 but I did not enlist immediately. I enlisted on the 24th of July 1940. That's about ten months after the war had been going.

I sent all my enlistment papers through to Brisbane. Kelvin Grove in Brisbane was the recruiting section, sector then. Knowing that if I went to a camp up near Brisbane I'd be able to get home back occasionally on our trucks. That was my reason for sending my papers through to Brisbane. It worked well too.

Why did you want to enlist?

30:30 I don’t know. Looking back I suppose a sense of loyalty. It was drummed into us to fight for King and country. I suppose that’s about the reason. Loyalty.

Adventure maybe?

No, I didn’t look on the adventure side of it at all. I don't think I did.

31:00 It was I suppose loyalty. And my younger brother was in the army before I was. So then we were both in the army but I went off overseas before he did. So yes when I sent my papers through to Brisbane, I went up there

31:30 and I spent most of my training days at Redbank Army Camp. That was a fairly big camp in those days. And I had already been assigned as a driver to a transport unit. That was the 1st Australian Corps Troops Supply Column. I don’t know whether there was any

32:00 influence came from my brother, younger brother. He was in the army before me in the 1st Australian Corps Troops Ammunition Column. I was supply and he was ammunition. Maybe he suggested but I don’t recall that. He was down at Ingleburn in Sydney. I was in Redbank.

What was your initial training? Do you remember the first day that you arrived at initial training?

32:30 No, I couldn't say that. I don’t know what I did the first day. I know we did lot so truck work and pulling batteries out of trucks and fixing trucks up and learning how to be self sufficient on the road if we had to be. That was interesting because I’d been on trucks in the transport and all and I knew a certain amount about trucks and I had

33:00 a keen interest in trucks. And being in the army and driving trucks was just an extension of what I had been doing in ‘civvy’ [civilian] street.

What did your mum think of you joining?

I don’t know. I think she may have had her misgivings but she kept them to herself. She also had a great sense of loyalty.

33:30 If we can help our country we will do. And that was the attitude in those days. I think a lot of people had the same feeling. We’ve got try and help our country.

And your dad?

Dad was great. He did talk to us a bit about war, then, once we were in uniform. I have the utmost respect for Dad as

34:00 a father and as a citizen too. He as good, he became involved in various things in Murwillumbah. All connected with loyalty.

Do you remember what he said to you when you joined? You said he stared talking to you about the war, what sort of thins was he saying?

Well, he always impressed on me, and I recall this quite vividly,

34:30 “Never be the first to volunteer. Volunteer, but never be the first.” I don’t know why he said that. I think I do now, but I didn’t then though. But anyway that’s one thing he did say, never be the first to volunteer. Maybe that’s a good attitude, I don’t know.

And what

35:00 **about Iris, how did she react to you joining? How long had you seen her?**

Twelve months. Before I left to go overseas, we’d been going together for twelve months. We became engaged on the 16th of November 1940. And then I left, hold on,

35:30 the last meal that I had at home with my family was lunch on Christmas day 1940. And we had to be back in camp at nine o’clock at night in Redbank. So one of my brothers came up to Redbank and got me and took me home and then took me back to Redbank. We though then, we were told, “If you’re not here by nine o’clock, you won’t be going off.” We knew we

36:00 were heading for overseas then.

Was all the family at the lunch?

Yes, they were all there. Except the younger brother Kevin and he was in the army. He was still down at Ingleburn.

Reg how did you get engaged in those days. What was the process and what sort of things did you do?

Well,

36:30 you don’t go down on your knees, “Will you marry me?” or anything. It’s just a natural process, yes we’re going to get engaged, we’re going to get married as soon as I come back. “I won’t be away very long mind you, I’ll only be twelve months, we’ll beat those buggers.” Didn’t work out that way did it?

So you took her out and asked her? Just her

37:00 **on her own?**

We joined up with parties, with mobs, there were six of us, three couple. And we went dancing together, we went, there was six of us, that was great. Push bikes. Six of us heading off on push bikes. There’re all dead now. I’m the only one still alive.

So you had two mates and she had two mates?

Yes.

And you’d all hang out together.

37:30 Yes.

So you all decided around the same time to get married?

Well no, they got married. They didn’t go overseas. Or they may have gone overseas but in the early years of the war they were still in Australia I know that and that’s when they got married. And I know that because I didn’t get married until after the war.

And did you give her a ring or anything like that?

Yes. It didn’t cost what it costs today either.

38:00 It didn’t cost very much. We didn’t have much either, did we? Five bob a day in the army then. You couldn't do much on that.

Where did you buy the ring?

Wallace Bishop in Brisbane. I took the family car. I got the family car, they gave it to me for the day, took Iris to Brisbane and we bought the ring, called on some of her relations.

38:30 Quite a few were up in Brisbane at the time. And that was the start of our firm romance. We were engaged. Certain amount of pride or glory attached to being engaged. More so in those days perhaps. You just shack up these days. We never did.

Was her family happy? Did you know them very well?

39:00 Yes.

Did you have a party for your engagement?

No, I don’t think so. No, I never had an engagement party. I don’t know. Couldn’t be organised. I don’t know whether we wanted it that way.

Did the guy ask the father in those days?

No. I never asked old Steve, that’s Iris’s father. I never asked him if

39:30 I could marry her. Didn’t have to, he knew I was going to marry her. But no it was quite easy-going attitude I suppose. There were no ‘down on your knees begging’. No, nothing like that. Iris and seemed to be well suited to each other and time has proved that. Fifty seven and a half years. So we must have had something in common, didn’t we?

Tape 2

00:31 **…that you have of training for the army, did you like it?**

I enjoyed it, yes. Because I coped with it quite well. I was physically fit, young and active. I’d never smoke, never drank, still haven’t, so yes I was able to cope with training quite well. But there

01:00 is one incident I remember quite strongly. We went for a route march from Redbank to a place called Colleges Crossing. It was quite a long walk and it was a stinking hot day. When we got to Colleges Crossing, it’s out here in the hills somewhere. I think it’s formed part of the river. “Right oh boys, strip off.” We stripped off, put our clothes on the ground

01:30 and dived in and we swam around there and eventually, “Come on, time to go” So we got out, pulled our clothes on and in the inside of my pants something bit me. It was hairy grub. And that put me in hospital

that hairy grub. I was in, I wouldn't say I totally lost consciousness but I became incoherent

02:00 and they, I don’t know how they do it, the officers, they didn’t have mobile radio in those days, but an ambulance came and picked me up and took me back to the Redbank hospital. And I got two days leave out of that. So off down to Murwillumbah.

And you don’t know what the creature is that bit you, some from of hairy grub?

I don’t know what it was. They analysed

02:30 the bite or some damn thing. It was a hairy grub. That’s what they described it as. Anyway, I went down to Murwillumbah and the Murwillumbah show was on. So I went to the local government medical officer, in Murwillumbah, a bloke named Dr Smith and I said, “Doc, I want another couple of days off because of Murwillumbah

03:00 show.” And he says, “Alright Reg, no problem at all.” So he wrote out the docket. So I took Iris to the show. I’ve got photos there somewhere. And when I got back to base, back to Redbank, they said, “We were just about to send out the military cops to pick you up for AWL [Absent Without Leave].” Ever since then, God bless all hairy grubs.

03:30 Gave me a bit of extra leave and I could take Iris to the show.

Prior to joining the army, were there many men from your local town that were leaving and going off to the war?

Quite a few, quite a lot of them and I knew most of them because in those days you knew everyone everywhere. And being in the trucks and transport and so forth I got to know, just about everybody in Murwillumbah, because it wasn’t a big place.

04:00 **How did the town react to them leaving? Did they have a dance or a party or anything like that?**

Yes we did have dances. if you look at that thing there, it’s issued by the people of the Tweed in appreciation of our efforts and everyone that left that had been resident of the Tweed, had one of them. I’ve still got mine.

04:30 **Left to go?**

Left to go overseas, anybody who signed up got one of those eventually.

From the community?

From the community in appreciation. I think that is what it says.

That’s special of them to do that.

Yes, I don’t know if any other areas did it, but the Tweed did. Because Murwillumbah is on the

05:00 Tweed River. It’s the Tweed district.

And how did it effect the town having that many young men leave?

It must have effected it in a lot of ways. But I know even without transport, see the war started in September ’39 and I left in July ’40 and during that period of time the town was slowing up because

05:30 so many young fellas were going away. So it must have effected business in a lot of ways. It effected our transport a little bit too.

And can you remember when first casualties were mentioned?

Yes. I was still in Murwillumbah when I heard, this was just when I was about to sail, to go away, that one of the

06:00 local boys that I knew quite well, Jack Drylie was killed in Bardia. And I think he was the first boy from Murwillumbah that I knew that was killed in action. Jack Drylie. Obviously there were others too but I my have left Murwillumbah then

06:30 as the other names came through. Certainly we did lose troops.

And how did that effect your decision at the time?

Not at all. We were already part of the army and we were there to do as we were told. And we were quite happy to do it too.

Do you remember the farewell with Iris? What happened when you said goodbye?

07:00 Well, yes I can. On Christmas day I had lunch at home and the next day, that would have been boxing day, 1940, we marched out of Redbank with all our gear and down to the Redbank station about half a

mile, three quarters of a mile away. Got on the train and they brought us

07:30 into south Brisbane and next thing I remember we were on a train at the south Brisbane station. Ready to depart for the south. My eldest brother Jim brought our mother and Iris up to see me off. And they were at the

08:00 station there, and eventually we said our goodbyes and the train headed off for Sydney. Iris's cousin, a girl, her name was Jessie Cummins. She lied in Sydney. I think she is dead now. No, she lived in Casino.

08:30 So Iris had arranged with her to meet me on the train at the Casino station. She did she met me there, I didn't know at that time and I could see this girl there and I knew she was looking for someone and I asked her, "Jessie?" So she came over to me and she had a little bottle of drink for me and boy did I get a 'cooee' from the boys!

09:00 Meeting somebody! I had been such a quiet sort of fellow. Especially where girls were concerned. I had one girl and I didn't want any more. Anyway, that's one little thing that I remember quite vividly. So we went off on the train down to Sydney.

What was the train ride like?

Crowded. We didn't all have seats. We were just stuck in there and make the best of it.

09:30 With all our gear of course. And that's when we went out on a barge onto the Queen Mary. She was sitting in the Sydney harbour on the coast side of the harbour bridge because she couldn't get under the harbour bridge, she was too big for that. And we went on board the Queen Mary and…

What was your first impression of Queen Mary?

You big beauty!

10:00 It was a beautiful liner, there was no doubt about that. So next morning, or next day, I don't know, I think it was morning, we sailed.

Were there any people on the dock when you were going out on the barges? No one saying farewell to other family members or anything?

No. I don't think so anyway.

So how did you all get from the barges

10:30 **up onto the Queen Mary?**

The side of the ship opened up and we went in, not much above water line. Apparently there was a place that just opened up and we all just marched straight in and then up onto our allotted quarters. That was great though. On the Queen Mary.

Had you made any mates by this stage?

11:00 Oh yes, a lot of mates. Not real close mates at that stage, but mates yes. I made much closer mates later on as things toughened up a bit. At that time we were all mates I suppose. We were all heading off and as we pulled out of Sydney harbour there was two other, three other ships joined

11:30 the convoy. One was The Aquitania, an old, steam driven of course, I don't know who was on board, The Aquitania, The Mauritania. Sorry The Mauritania didn't join us, she came out from Melbourne and joined us later on.

12:00 The Queen Mary, The Aquitania, The Dominion Line and a ship, a much smaller one from New Zealand with all Kiwis [New Zealanders] on board. That was the Awatea. It was a smaller ship. And we headed off and picked up the Mauritania. It came out from Melbourne and I don't know whether we came out through Bass Strait or, you don't know, they don't tell you very much, or whether we went south of Tasmania,

12:30 I don't know. the next port of call was Fremantle. Now the Queen Mary could not go into Fremantle harbour, because she didn't have the ground clearance, needed too much water. So everything was brought out to the Queen Mary. All our supplies and all the extra fuel. Had it all brought out in barges and taken on board the Mary.

13:00 Then we left Fremantle, heading for, we didn't know where, they didn't tell us where we were going, but across the Indian Ocean and one day, I don't know what time because it doesn't matter, the Queen Mary changed. She put on speed and she leaned

13:30 over and off to the right. She left the convoy. We didn't know why. But I know now. She was heading for a naval base at Trincomalee. Called Trincomalee, naval base on the north eastern part of Ceylon. The rest of them all headed for Colombo. The Queen Mary couldn't get into Colombo harbour. She was too big. So we went up to Trincomalee, got off the Mary there and we got

14:00 onto other ships. It took seven ships, much smaller ships, to take off all the troops that had been on the Mary.

So round about, do you know how many people were on the Queen Mary?

No, I could not be sure. There were thousands, but I don't know how many thousands. There were a lot.

So how long did it take you to get from Australia to Trincomalee?

14:30 I suppose the best part of a fortnight. Everything.

And in that time, how did the troops occupy themselves?

Well, we had various exercise, physical training, PT [Physical Training] we used to call it, physical training everyday. Sometimes twice a day. We had boxing contests. Anything to keep the troops occupied. Lectures of course.

15:00 **What sort of lectures did they give you? We've heard that they talked about VD [Venereal Disease] and…**

No, not at that stage. That did, that had come in earlier, while we were still at Redbank we had lectures on those sort of things. But I don't think we had them on the Mary. Even on the later ships.

Were they shocking to you?

15:30 We were pretty broad minded. Not like we would be today. Things have changed. Attitudes have changed. No, I don't recall any sexual lectures at all at that time. So when we left Trincomalee, we went down Colombo harbour and rejoined the convoy and at that time I was on an old Indian troop ship called the Rajula.

16:00 And they were, the ships were all taking on supplies and so forth, no extra troops of course, just supplies and fuel. And eventually we pulled out of Colombo heading for, we still didn't know where, but we assumed by that time that we were heading for the Suez Canal, which we did. We went up the Suez Canal to a place called

16:30 El Kantara.

Before you go up there. When you got off at Trincomalee, did you have leave at all or any free time? Did you see any of the town, any of the people?

No, it was a naval base. We had a few hours leave in Colombo harbour. And of course one of the first things that the Aussie boys did, they go onto a…

17:00 you get into them and some bloke up front pulls you along.

Rickshaw?

Rickshaw. Thank you I couldn't think of that word. So of course some of the boys got onto the rickshaw and after a while you'd find the Indian blokes sitting up in the rickshaw and the Aussie pulling him along! The silly buggers. They did lots of things like that. We left and headed up, we were heading for Palestine at that time. Israel now.

17:30 After we disembarked from the ship at El Kantara, we went on board a train into Palestine, we were based at a place called Hill 69. It was a new camp. We had to build it ourselves it was so new. It hadn't been completed.

18:00 **What sort of things did you have to build when you got there?**

Well, for a start, the cook houses. They were only partly built so we had to finish them off. We only had tents then and we had beds, bamboo slat type of thing, that was okay. After

18:30 a while we were issued with trucks and I had my truck and we were detailed then to take supplies to… we'd go into Tel Aviv each morning, pick up a load of supplies that were being consigned to Australian units in the area. We had to cart supplies to them. And you might have

19:00 four or five different supply lots on your truck. You'd have to go to four or five different units. Somewhere in the area to deliver them. No, that was quite interesting, I enjoyed that. Virtually I was back on the transport doing the same thing, similar things to what I had been doing at home. But I loved that, I got on well with that.

Do you remember what you first thought of Tel Aviv?

19:30 Tel Aviv at that time was very much more modern than Brisbane was at that time. Tel Aviv was quite a modern city. Maybe not a big city but a very modern looking city. And certainly looked awfully modern to me. More modern than anything in Murwillumbah at that time. Or even now.

So how did you as a young guy coming from the country, do you remember how you felt being

20:00 **in such a different place?**

Very interesting point that. Because yes, there is a great change. I came from the country such as the Murwillumbah or the Tweed river district was at that time, very much a country place and here we are in a city, and once you get out of the city, you're out among the country among the wogs as we called them.

20:30 All Palestinians were wogs. Probably a bit unfair but that's the way it was. Wogs. Funny thing you'd see a farmer try and plough a bit of ground with a camel and a donkey hooked together. Now that's, we'd never seen anything like that on the Tweed! Very different.

What sort of images do you remember from Tel Aviv? What sort of things did you see in Tel Aviv?

21:00 Actually we didn't see very much as we drove along the road to the DID, Detail Issue Depot, that's where we picked up all our supplies from and once we picked up all our supplies, back out of the town. But that's all we saw.

What about the people on the roads? What did they look like?

I know the young girls, the Jewish girls,

21:30 provided they were fourteen, fifteen they were very nice, eighteen or nineteen, they'd gone off. As they matured, as they got older they lost their beauty and they put on weight. The young girls they were quite nice.

What about the men? What did they wear?

Just, normal. Mostly all the Jews had a black hat on. I can remember

22:00 that, yes. But I never saw anything of the wailing wall, that's in Jerusalem anyway. I never ever got to Jerusalem. I had the opportunity of going but I think I was only going to be given one day or something and I said, "No, that's not enough to see Jerusalem, I'll save it up." But I never ever got the opportunity again. Before I was able to get another opportunity to get to Jerusalem

22:30 they'd picked out one section, our forces supply column was made up of echelon. Number echelon, number two echelon, number three. I've forgotten. And we were C Section of number two echelon. So they picked forty drivers and an officer and his batman [servant]. That was forty-one vehicles.

23:00 And we headed off on this Hill 69 across the Sinai Desert, over the Suez Canal and up through Cairo, out past the pyramids and on up the coast of North Africa. Up through Mersa Matruh, Bardia, a few other smaller towns,

23:30 smaller places, Tobruk. And on beyond Tobruk. By this time our trucks had been loaded up with supplies for the troops up there who were still fighting the Italians. The Germans were not yet in that area. The furthermost west of Tobruk I got was a place called El Agheila.

24:00 And there I unloaded supplies I had on, I know the first load I had was anti tank guns. And we picked up a load of, each truck did this. They may not have all had anti tank guns, they had other supplies too perhaps, but I had anti tank guns. Emptied them out took a lot of people and picked up a load of Italian prisoners of war.

24:30 And headed off back the way we had come. Back through Tobruk and down Bardia and all the way to a place called Sidi Barrani.

What were the POWs [Prisoner of War] like when you picked them up?

Happy to be finished with the war. They didn't want the war. Actually, they were very poor soldiers. They may have had loyalty to their country but not loyalty to Mussolini, who was the big shot at that time.

25:00 So we dropped the prisoners there at some big army base or camp, I don't recall, then we went somewhere in the area and picked up loads of supplies, off back up the way we had gone the firs time. up past Tobruk. But it may not have been to El Agheila this time, it may have been some other town but it didn't matter we were still west of Tobruk.

25:30 Delivered those supplies to the troops. Australian troops they were and licked up another r load of Italian prisoners of war and did the same thing all over again. Took them back down, some of them finished up in Australia, possibly even working for farmers on the Tweed as some of them later in life I did meet these farmers and they had, one of them was a prisoner of war from that area.

26:00 He came out as a prisoner of war, worked on a farm here, when the war finished he went back to Germany, picked up his wife and came back and now he owns a farm down just south of Murwillumbah a little bit.

Incredible.

Absolutely incredible.

And what about the Aussie soldiers, what were they like at the time?

Well, we only saw the base troops. We did not see the fighting

26:30 troop. Because we delivered the stuff up to the base where they were and the front line might have been a few miles further on. I never saw the actual fighting troop at that time anyway. So three trips I did on that.

How long would it have taken to get from just outside Tel Aviv up to...

No, not from Tel Aviv, from Sidi Barani. We were over in Egypt

27:00 by this time. Sidi Barani is in Egypt and then you go up through Tripoli.

How long would that trip have taken?

About four days. The roads were shocking. They'd been blown apart and so forth and no maintenance or anything like that was on them. Lot of it just desert country. Oh dear, long time ago that.

What was your first impression of the job over there compared to what you had been doing from

27:30 **Murwillumbah to Brisbane, how did your job change?**

Well, when I was operating trucks from Murwillumbah to Brisbane, we never had any enemy planes up above us. We did occasionally have enemy planes when we were up the desert. Especially when we got up near Tobruk, up that way. But the Italians always flew very high, and their bombing was disastrous to them.

28:00 Never effected us very much at all. Very rarely would a bomb come anywhere near the road. Their planes were too hight. So they didn't cause as much trouble as was the case later on which I'll talk about later.

Can you remember when it first happened it must have been surprising to you, when you were first bombed in any way?

It's a big shock to the system. Believe me.

28:30 But after a while you get a bit resigned to it. I think that might be the right word. You don't like it but you know damn well that you can't do anything about it so you just resign yourself to it. Anyway, after that for some reason the same section, the same forty drivers, we were then selected to go to Alexandria harbour on our way to Greece.

29:00 The same mob. The rest of our unit was still back in Palestine. We went on board a ship without trucks in Alexandria harbour. I was on an old rust bucket called the Ozarda. The first one I got on was Trincomalee was the Rajula, but this one in Alexandria harbour was the Ozarda. I think she was an old

29:30 Greek rust bucket. that's all she was. We went on board that. the ship next door to us pulled up at the wharf, they were unloading air force personnel that they had just brought back from Greece. So we said, "What is going on here." We knew we were going to Greece at that time

30:00 and here is all our air force being unloaded. They may not have been all Australian air force, I think they were British air force. Anyway, we went off, no, I had three cobbers by that time, Jack Cross, Gordon Glanford, George Sutherland,

30:30 no he came in a little bit later, the three of us, we went down town into Alexandria harbour, knowing very well that we were heading for Greece next day. And I didn't like the look of that so we had our photos taken. I bought some stuff and I paid this shop keeper

31:00 to post these back home, knowing very well I couldn't do it. Just didn't have the opportunity. And those things I sent back home arrived in Murwillumbah and I sent a lovely purse home to Iris with engravings of the pyramids and so forth on it, not engraving, embossing I think they call that. And I've still got it here.

31:30 After all these years.

Were you missing Iris when you first got over there?

Of course you do, yes. Yes.

When did you first get correspondence from Iris?

At that time I had not been a POW, we were getting letters reasonably regularly. And I was always a good correspondent and I wrote at every opportunity while the other boys were going down to the canteen to swig grog, I was writing letters. And therefore I received a lot more letters

32:00 than most other chaps did.

Did you feel a bit left out not being a drinker?

No, I felt superior. I've always felt superior. Drink got them. It never got me. And that's been my attitude throughout life. I've never been a drinker.

Because there is a real culture of that in the, especially going into war people have no idea what they are going to expect, a lot of people…

True, very true.

32:30 But the culture as you speak, is similar to the culture of footballers. They've got to make a man of themselves by drinking, among other things. I didn't, that wasn't my kettle of fish at all. So anyway, off we went from Alexandria harbour.

Before you go, what was it like there in Alexandria, the city part like?

Well, we didn't see much of it. I didn't

33:00 see very much of it at all. We went down, I don't know how far we went, but from the ship to this shopping centre or whatever it was. It wasn't very far and…

What was the shop like that you bought the gifts from?

Very small place, I think it had three shops in it. Very small. But apparently they were very honest. I paid for these things to be sent in the hope that they would be sent.

33:30 And they were. I was very impressed with that. I didn't know of course until many, many months later that they'd arrived home.

How did you meet your cobbers [friends]?

They were my army unit fellows. We were with them day and night. I had some very good cobbers but anyway.

34:00 As we went across the Mediterranean heading for Greece, the Italian bombers came out again and had a bit of a go at us, because we weren't the only ship that was going across. There were I don't know one or two ships, I don't recall, there were two or three of us. But the bombers came and had a go at us but they were up too high and they never hit anything.

34:30 I landed in Greece, oh by the way I left Alexandria harbour on the 4th of April, 1941. A journey that should have only taken us three days took six, I think because the bombing, there may have been a sub or something like that. Took six days. I landed in a place called Khalkis,

35:00 just somewhere north of Athens on the tenth day of April 1941. And then we got our trucks off the boat and straight away into action, we had to take our trucks up to the north of Greece

35:30 or somewhere near the north of Greece, the furthermost north I got at that time I think was a place called Larissa. And that's where our troops were fighting the Germans who had broken through by that time and they had come down through Yugoslavia into Greece and they did eventually just take the whole of Greece.

What were you delivering to the troops?

We weren't delivering anything at that time. We were going up to try and pick up the troops and make the retreat.

36:00 Come back, bring the troops back a little bit of the way and then they'd dig in again. Try and make a stand, we'd drop them there and take our trucks a little bit further back. Night time came and we'd go and pick them up again and come back. Because the German army was relentless. It was coming down slowly, but without any stopping. We couldn't stop them.

36:30 And that' s what I did most of the rest of the Greek campaign, was cart troops back, back, back all the time. The Stuka, that's the German dive bomber, they gave us hell. They were so deadly accurate. They'd come down out of, any number , three, four, up to a dozen. They'd come down at our convoys with

37:00 machine guns going as they went down, drop their bombs, turn and then go up again and then the rear gunner would open up on us. And they did a lot of damage. They played hell with us. Those Stuka bombers. Oh we were scared of them. There was no way we could escape them. The bomber flew high over, didn't worry us nearly so much but the Stuka,

37:30 they were a great worry.

How often did that happened Reg?

Three, four times a day. Well, anyway that is the way it was. The German could easily say that the Stuka bombers won the Greek campaign for them. We had not a plane of our own in the air. Not one. I saw several on the ground all destroyed. The Germans had bombed them or whatever.

38:00 They were obsolete by that time. Non operative.

And what was the state of the troops that you first picked up?

They were fighting troops. I was mainly working in an area, the mob I was working with were a Victorian crowd, I forget what unit they were, I did know but I've forgotten, it's so many years ago.

38:30 They were a great crowd. But they weren't able to stop the German. A place called Argos, which is some thirty, forty, fifty mile, maybe less even, south of Athens. That's where I copped a bomb. It think it was

39:00 the second raid of the day. Yes it was the second raid of the day. A lot of Stukas came over and I was hiding in a bit of a dug out type thing, but not very much and they dropped a bomb fairly close and it didn't effect me but it

39:30 wiped my truck out. Finished. Not a direct hit but so close that it was enough o totally destroy the truck. So from there on I went with the rest of our boys because I was a spare driver by that time. I took over the driving of one of the trucks and the driver rested and I don't know what happened eventually.

With that first experience. Was that the first time you felt really threatened yourself?

40:00 There had been other close shaves, yes. But nothing compared with the attack that took my truck out. That was, they were spot on.

And when you look back there, do you worry that you would have been in the truck.

If I had been in the truck I would have been knocked off. But I wasn't in the truck.

40:30 **How did you know to get away from the truck?**

You might stay in the truck the first time, you won't stay in it the second time. You'll go for shelter, because they're after the truck. They're not after you so much as they're after the truck. And of course in this case they got it.

Tape 3

00:32 **I just want to go back a little bit to the Middle East. You described that journey across the Sinai Desert and across the Suez Canal and past the pyramids. Can you tell us a bit more about that journey and what it was like?**

Yes I can. The road from Palestine across the Sinai Desert was one long black, narrow bitumen road over the sand hills.

01:00 It was up and down and round about and so forth. It was virtually all desert country. And they had built this, I don't know who built it, whether it had been put there just for the war I don't know, this long black strip of bitumen. A long way too. Quite a long way. Until we came to the Suez Canal.

01:30 And that was at a town called, Ismailiah. And that's where we crossed the Suez Canal on the pontoon bridge. You know a pontoon bridge, can be put there and wheeled, pulled away very smartly to let ships go through. We went across on this

02:00 pontoon bridge. First time I'd ever been on a pontoon bridge. And from there we went heading for Cairo. Most of the way I know was a long or near the bank, it was a canal, I don't know what they call it, I think the white water canal. I might be wrong there.

02:30 We travelled along this business and it's a very rich agricultural area because they're suing the water from this fresh water canal. All coming down of course from the Aswan dam on the Nile a bit further up stream. A long way further up stream but I never went there of course.

03:00 As we went through Cairo I was amazed by the congestion of the place. There was enormous amount of people around and everywhere was so crowded and congested. I was quite happy when we got out and the other side of Cairo, was the pyramids. And that was a really interesting site.

03:30 I'd seen the pyramids, never on TV because there was no TV in those days, but I'd seen photos of the pyramids and here I was looking at them in reality. That was terrifically interesting. I really enjoyed that. And as we went on beyond the pyramids, we passed through various names and they didn't mean much to us at that time.

04:00 One of those names became El Alamein which was one of the great battle areas later on in the war. But at that time it meant nothing to us.

What was there then when you saw it?

It was just an area. That's about all there was there. Just an area. There may have been as I said, they're still wogs as far as we were concerned.

04:30 Palestine was wogs. Civilian population was wogs. Egypt the civilian population was wogs. Especially as you got out of the cities, with their camels and donkeys. More donkeys than camels too, by the way.

Did you have anything to do with the civilian population?

Nothing at all. No, we were totally military controlled.

And you never had any interaction? They never approached you at all?

05:00 No, nothing. Whether they were allowed to approach us I don't know, but they certainly didn't. We never had anything to do with them at all.

How long did that journey take in that convoy?

I suppose three or four days, until we reached the place called Sidi Barani. And that's where we took on a load of equipment

05:30 or supplies of whatever, that we had to take up to our troops up at a place I mentioned, El Agheila. West of Tobruk. Interesting point there. Later on in my life the German propaganda told people who they'd bombed the railway stations at Sidi Barani.

06:00 There was no railway station or even railway line at Sidi Barani. So that answers how inaccurate the German propaganda was.

Can you tell us a little bit more about the actual supplies that you were carrying? That was a huge convoy. You had what forty-one vehicles?

Forty trucks, the captain and his batman. They were in a utility.

So what sort of supplies exactly did you take?

06:30 The first load I took up, I know, were boys anti tank rifles. I don't know, I don't remember what I took up on the two subsequent trips, I don't recall what they were. Supplies of some, some… it was not ammunition, we were not an ammunition column, we were a supply column.

And what about that whole convoy of forty trucks? What were the other trucks carrying?

07:00 Look, I couldn't tell you what they had loaded. I don't know.

Were you under fire during that part of the journey. Was there any…

No, not until we got up closer to Tobruk and then we got the high flying Italian bombers came over but they didn't worry us at all they were too high. Their bombs fell anywhere at all, they had no control over them. So different to the Stukas in Greece which were deadly accurate.

07:30 **So you weren't too worried about the Italian…?**

No, the air force, they didn't frighten us at all. They were too high. It would have been just luck if one dropped and did damage.

By the time you got to Tobruk, Tobruk had already been taken by the…

We had taken Tobruk, yes.

So what did you see when you got there?

Tobruk was a beautiful little place. Badly battered

08:00 around. But all the buildings were white. I think would that be to counteract the high temperature, the sunshine. It was very white. Situated around a very pretty little harbour. Not a big harbour but a very pretty harbour with all these white buildings around it. And Tobruk was very nice. I'd loved to have seen it in peace time before

08:30 it got battered. But of course we held Tobruk even when the Germans pushed us back. The Germans came through then after a while, the Italians were doing no good at all. The Germans came in and that was a different story.

Were you there before that or during that?

I was not there when the Germans came down near Tobruk. I'd gone by that time. All Italians there. I had nothing to do with the Germans

09:00 while I was up the desert.

Can you described the scene there, you said it was battered about. What did you see?

In Tobruk? Well, there were just a lot of white painted buildings around the edges of this big harbour. It wasn't a big harbour. Sydney harbour would be monstrous by comparison.

09:30 But it was very lovely and very pretty. And of course the buildings weren't so pretty then but we could see what they had been. Very nice.

When you say they weren't so pretty then. In what way?

There had been bombing and bombs make a hell of a mess of buildings.

Can you describe that for us, what sort of mess you saw? What sort of devastation you saw from the bombing?

10:00 Well, I building can be damaged without being destroyed and I would say that was the case in Tobruk. I've seen buildings later on totally destroyed by bombing. Such as Le Havre in France, had been totally, totally destroyed by naval engagement too. In the case of Le Havre. But bombing can do a lot of damage without totally destroying

10:30 a place. A lot of destruction.

At that time then that you arrived in Tobruk, was there a sense that the Germans were coming? Were people talking about that at that point?

Not at first. I was there for a month, approximately that is. We didn't know that the Germans were going to come down from Tripoli into Libya, on their way

11:00 hoping to get to Egypt and take the Suez Canal. That's what they were after. At the start of that we didn't know the Germans were there, or even coming. But by the time I did my third trip up to there, we knew the Germans were coming but we didn't know, but they weren't close to us by then, they were still…actually as I moved

11:30 out of Egypt at Alexandria Harbour, the Germans had at that time just captured Benghazi which is a big town up the desert. But still a long way from Tobruk.

So before you got tot Alexandria, while you were still in Tobruk in that third trip up, what were people saying about the Germans? What was the anticipation about them as an enemy, say compared with the Italians?

12:00 Well, we only had what conversation may have come from our own troops. And they didn't know very much. You see normally these days you'd have a radio on your truck. Those days we didn't have radios. We didn't know very much of what was going on at all. We were just told to do this and that so we tried our best to do it.

What were the difficulties associated with doing your job there? What kind of conditions? How did the

12:30 **conditions effect your work or, what were the conditions like, the climate and the heat and the sand and so forth?**

Well, that would have been in the month of March. So March would have been the very early spring. April is the first month of spring over there. So nights as I remember was still quite cool but

13:00 the days were getting warmer.

Did you come across any sandstorms?

Not up near Tobruk. Back after we left Sidi Barani, yes. At Stanthorpe [?] a sand storm, somewhere near where El Alamein used to be, or at that time we'd call it Ikingi Mariut. And there was a, we got caught in a sand storm then,

13:30 and then we just stopped. Everything stopped because you could not see your hand in front of you, at that distance you could not see your hand. And for some reason or other, the dust, I think it's more a dust storm than a sand storm. The dust creeps into everything. Nothing will keep it out. I had my kit bag and there was dust right through it. I don't know how it got in.

14:00 But it did. It penetrates everything. And to see through it is an impossibility. You just stay put.

What were your living conditions like in the Middle East? Where did you, what was the camp like where you would camp?

No camp, the back of the truck was your camp. Now an interesting point here. On our return from up the desert as they call it,

14:30 was a load of Italian prisoners of war. We were designated to put them, each night we had a designated spot. The Italians were unloaded and they were guarded by troops. We slept in our trucks. If they liked the driver.

15:00 Next day pick up the Italian prisoners. And they would always make sure that they got in the same truck that they were in the day before. That's if they liked the driver. That's what we did, we picked up the truck the next day and off we went to the next nightspot. Because travel is very slow. You can't travel slow in the desert in those sort of conditions. Even were there was a road it was very poor.

15:30 No maintenance or anything like that, until we unloaded them at Mersa Matruh into some sort of a base camp. But they did not worry us at all. We had one Australian trooper with us in each truck and he had a rifle. And of course nobody else had a rifle so he was the boss. But I was the boss,

16:00 I was driving the truck. I was the boss, he was there to guard the Italians in the back.

So you personally didn't have a rifle?

I had a rifle that, we all had our rifles, but we never used them.

And you say the Italians didn't bother you. We've heard some stories about some soldiers becoming quite friendly with the Italian POWs [Prisoner of War]. Did that happen with you?

That would have been quite possible. Mind you the length of time

16:30 wasn't great. They were in the back of the truck and I was in the front. Time for conversation was very infrequent. But at night time we'd pull up at this area, this spot where they were going to be guarded and unloaded and they'd be out of the truck and into where-ever they were told to go.

So why did you sleep in a truck and not actually in a camp?

17:00 Well, we lived in our truck. That's all we had. We had nothing. All I had in my truck at that time was kit bags. My kit bag.

And what was in the kit bag?

Spare clothes and so forth. Just clothing.

So what about cooking and food, what did you do…?

17:30 Nothing like that, we just had bully beef and biscuits. That's all we had. There was no cooking. No tea or coffee or anything like that. Oh no.

Can you describe the back of the truck where you slept? How big it was and what it was like in terms of the amount of space you had?

Plenty of space in the back of the truck.

18:00 I think we took twenty four prisoners each. And they had their bits of gear. Not a lot of gear of course and they just had to get in there and make the best of it.

And when you say you slept in the back of the truck, what did you sleep on?

Floor of the truck.

18:30 We soon got used to that. We had no comforts. Although you had no beds or anything like that. No. It was war time.

It must have been a bit of a shock for you. you said earlier you were really keen to go to the war and you and that sort of sense of loyalty. What were your expectations before you got to the Middle East about what it would be like?

19:00 I don't think we really had any idea. Well, no we had no idea. Everything that we saw when we got to the Middle East was new to us. It was, it came as a surprise. We didn't know what to expect and that's it. We just didn't know what to expect.

19:30 **And on those long journeys where you were driving in the desert and so froth, were you nervous or concerned about your safety?**

I had no concern for safety at all. As far as the prisoners of war in the back? No. They were no menace to us at all. They were happy that their war was over. They were going somewhere, They didn't know where they were going of course. Some of them finished up in Australia.

20:00 They were no menace to us we had no fear of them.

And what about what you might encounter on the road or potential bombing, was that a concern to you?

Not very much, because as I said before the Italian bombers they were up to high. They weren't game to come down. And that was only up the Tobruk end of it. At that time there were no Italian bombers

20:30 down closer to Egypt or in Egypt.

Were there any times when you were in the Middle East when you sort of felt quite threatened?

I don't think so. I don't remember being threatened. We were more concerned with good tucker instead of bully beef and biscuits than we were concerned about danger.

That must have been tough, getting by on that

21:00 **everyday. How do you adjust to that diet?**

When there is nothing else, you have to. That is all the food we had and we knew that was all we were going to get. Bully beef and biscuits. So you accept it. Water was more of a problem. And of course tea and coffee were out. No such thing. Drink water was hard to come by.

21:30 **When you say it was a problem. How hard was it to get good drinking water?**

I don't remember where we got our drinking water from but I know that it was always a battle to get it. It wasn't supplied in great quantities. It was all supplied from a road tanker or something like that.

22:00 **So what about personal hygiene, keeping clean and so forth?**

Nobody there to smell you. So baths or anything like that were non-existent, absolutely non-existent. For the whole of the month of March, for the whole of the campaign as we fought it in the desert, we never saw a shower or bath or anything. There just wasn't any.

22:30 That's war time.

And so sort of problems were associated with that health wise? Did people have health problems at all because of lack of hygiene or lack of good food and so forth?

I don't recall nay problems coming from those conditions. No. We just put up with it the best we could.

23:00 **Were there illnesses though? Were people suffering from illness when you were in the Middle East?**

I can't recall any. We were all young and fit. You can put up with an awful lot at that stage of life. Things that would kill me now we took in our stride in those days because you were young and fit.

How important were friendships in those early days of war for you?

23:30 Well, not as important as they were to become later on in life. But you're driving a truck and the next bloke is driving a truck fifty years behind you and once you pull up at night you have a bit of a snack at night and off to sleep. No problem. Friendships you took for granted,

24:00 If he's there behind you or up in front of you, yes he's my cobber, that's it. I hadn't formed any firm friendships at that point. Later on yes.

Just going back to that trip you made to the Suez Canal. Can you describe what you saw in the canal at that time when you crossed it?

Well, the first thing you see, you come over

24:30 The crest of an area and there is the Suez Canal down in front of you. Water! You don't see any water when you are crossing the desert, when you're crossing the Sinai desert. Well, it is desert, total desert. The Sinai, much more so than any desert country we saw in Egypt or Libya. The Sinai desert is total desert.

25:00 And when we came over this crest there was the Suez Canal and there just over the other side of the canal is Ismailiah. Quite a lovely sight actually. This pontoon bridge that we knew we had to drive over. Very interesting it was.

Were there any vessels in the canal where you were?

I didn't see any moving, no. There were some

25:30 as I recall, there were a couple up on the north side, towards the town of Suez. They were stationary though and pulled into the bank. I don't know what boars they were, not big boats. More or less as we'd call today, rust buckets.

As you were heading towards Alexandria, what had you been briefed about what you were going to be doing?

26:00 We knew once we left Sidi Barani with our last prisoners, we knew then that we were heading for Alexandria on our way to Greece. That's all we had been told. We were heading for Greece.

And did you know what had been happening in Greece?

A little bit. We knew the Germans were coming down which was why we were going over to lend support. They didn't want us, they wanted our trucks there though. That's why

26:30 we went to Greece to help in the retreat. Bring our troops back a bit and back a bit and next day back a bit more. Or next night actually. You travelled by night mostly and then you dropped your troops and then you took your truck somewhere else through to try and hide for the day and off back at night. Quite totally disorganised it was. Very disorganised.

27:00 **You said that before you got to Greece you saw some of the air force people coming back and you said that you thought hang on what's going on here, what were you really thinking about that, about what was happening?**

I'll start off by going a little bit further if you don't mind? Iris gave me a diary to write. I started

27:30 on the 1st of January and I kept that diary right through the whole war and I've still got it today. And the morning I was captured I tore out all those pages preceding the 29th of April. The morning I was captured, because it contained the names of boats and ships

28:00 and so forth and places I'd been. Because we didn't want that sort of information, I realise now that they already knew, didn't want that information to fall into the hand of the enemy. And so my diary starts from the 30th April 1941 and I'll show you later.

When you saw these people coming back from Greece…

28:30 Well I had been getting letters from home fairly regularly, especially from my second eldest brother, Ray. And we had codes worked out between us. Greece, in Murwillumbah we had a [Greek] fruiterer named Steve Angus, so any mention of "Steven Angus" was a mention of Greece

29:00 and I've forgotten at this time, Egypt was something else. And he told me then before I knew that I would be going to Greece. When we saw these air force troops on board the ship. We talked to them, the boat was only ten, twenty feet away,

29:30 when we knew that they had been repatriated from Greece. I wrote in my diary then that I know this is going to be a long haul, it won't be easy. But that all got torn out.

You said that you went into Alexandria the day before, knowing that you were going to Greece the next day, you had your photograph taken…

No, we went in at night time.

30:00 Not very far, we only walked, we didn't have to go far.

You had your photographs taken and you bought that purse for Iris, what were you thinking that night then about what your future held?

We discussed it among ourselves. We knew we were going to Greece and we knew that we would be dead lucky to get out of it. Because we had no air support and you can't win a war without air support and we knew that even then.

30:30 We know it even more so now.

What did you think about the fact that you were going into Greece with no air support?

I don't know what our thoughts were. I had formed some thoughts later on but it was only a political move that sent us to Greece. Loyalty was involved. The Greek royalty and the British royalty

31:00 and that's why we went to Greece. I don't know. Very hard to make a decision on those things.

But at the time you had a strong sense that you were going into a difficult situation…?

You were going into a 'toughie.' Yes, it was a big shock to our system when we saw the air force

31:30 On the next door ship. They'd just come back from Greece. We never saw one allied plane in Greece except for those on the ground that had been destroyed. Never saw one. I saw hundreds and hundreds of Germans.

Reg, could you tell me what happened to you in Greece from the time you arrived, from the first

32:00 **day, what you saw and your impressions of what was happening there?**

I thought then and I realised that I was quite correct, that Greece was a very poor country. Agriculturally Greece is very poor. It's very mountainous, rugged, rocky mountains. A lot of Greece is very mountainous.

32:30 And fair population I suppose. Now as we went through the towns and so forth you'd see cafes and so forth, all the men, all the older men especially, they're all sitting outside drinking coffee or whatever. I think all the women did all the work over there. I think so. At that time it appeared so to us.

33:00 These lazy buggers they won't do anything. Maybe they were just old men that were too old and the younger men were off fighting. But we didn't think very much of Greece as a country.

And where did you first travel to when you arrived in Greece?

Thebes, the town of Thebes. It was the first town I went into,

33:30 after I left Khalkis. The next town that I can recall is a town called Levadi. Not much of a town, right at the foot of a range. The next town was Lamia.

34:00 And the last town I can remember was a place called Larissa and that's where we really came in first contact with the Germans there. That's where we had our first actual bombing by the Stukas, took place at Larissa. And from there on it was never ending and everyday we had Stukas at us.

So prior to arriving in Larissa,

34:30 **when you were in Thebes and those other towns, what were you doing during that time?**

Well, I don't recall exactly but somehow or other all the army kit bags from my

35:00 unit, maybe from my echelon, I don't know. They finished up on my truck. I don't recall just how that happened. But it did. And I had quite a lot of kit bags, there might have been several hundred of them, I don't know. We pulled up on a bridge in front of a big canal and acting under instructions from this captain

35:30 that was with us, we ripped open every kit bag, emptied the contents into this canal and threw the kit bag after it. Every kit bag went. I don't know why. And in that kit bag were cameras, binoculars, personal clothing and letters and God knows what-not. Everything had to go in. I don't know what his reasoning was. I don't know.

Where were you when that happened?

36:00 I was somewhere north of Thebes. Before I got to Levadi. I would have loved to know why that had to be done. But I didn't know they didn't tell us.

That must have been a very difficult thing to do?

It was because some of those kit bags belonged to personal

36:30 friends of mine and here is all their gear I am throwing into the water. I don't know why he did it I don't know. We had no respect for that captain. Eventually he dingoed on us. There was a bombing raid and he took shelter somewhere and, "Oh, my back."

37:00 And he was repatriated out of Greece, on the first possible way out with a crook back. He had no crook back. He was a 'dingo'. Every man of our unit regarded him as a dingo. I don't know what happened to him eventually, but we never saw him again.

When you had to throw out

37:30 **the kit bags, did you throw your own things?**

No, I kept that. Although I lost it all in the long term. But that was some weeks later.

When you were in Thebes and on that journey down to Larissa, what was the army doing at that point? What could you see happening around you in Greece?

Well, whatever army we had were further up,

38:00 they were fighting the Germans but retreating. Doing their best but retreating. They were pushed back all the time by the Germans. One of the most distressing things that I ever saw was the civilian population as refugees, trudging along the roads with their hand carts and wheel barrows, carrying what they could. Trying to get away from the

38:30 Germans. I don't know where they thought they were heading for because eventually the Germans took over the whole country. So I don't know what happened to them. But that's one of the most distressing things you can ever imagine is a group of civilian population trying to get away. Some of them had vehicles, and they tried to get petrol off us. They'd buy anything

39:00 to get a little bit of petrol so they'd get a bit further. But we couldn't give them any petrol. It's very distressing believe me.

Were you on the road travelling when you saw those people?

Yes.

So you were sort of driving in your truck and they were walking?

Walking or pulling their little carts or even wheelbarrows. Very distressing that.

39:30 **What sort of access did you have to food and water while you were in Greece in those early days?**

Once again bully beef and biscuits, all we had and nothing else. Water was reasonably plentiful in Greece as distinct from the desert where it was very scarce and hard to get.

So, at that point you still had food and so forth?

Still being issued with bully beef and biscuits. That's all nothing else.

40:00 **So your purpose in Greece was to assist in bringing the…**

We were there to help the retreat of our own troops. They were retreating. As we said they were on the run. They were doing their best but they didn't have any equipment. The Germans had all the equipment, we had nothing. You can't fight tanks with rifles.

Tape 4

00:31 **Talking about that old retreat, what did you and your fellow troops think about the army retreating?**

Well, we knew that we had no hope of holding the Germans. No hope at all. Without a plane we never had a chance. And I lost my truck at a place called Argos, we continued on past there,

01:00 Over the Corinth canal which separates southern peninsula of Greece from all the north of the country. Corinth canal, It was built many years ago. As the campaign reached it's climax at a place called Kalamata [evacuation beach]…have you heard of Kalamata, olives, supposed to be best in the world,

01:30 I don't know I don't eat them, not now. And that's where we were captured by the Germans. The navy came in to pick up some troops but I didn't get away from there at all and most of us were captured and there were twenty-two of us from our original forty less those that were killed,

02:00 were taken prisoner. I can only remember checking on that diary I said Iris gave me, I had all the details, that's where I got the number, twenty-two of us were captured. Some got away. Only a few.

You said that Larissa was the first time

02:30 **that you actually were bombed, you came into contact with the Germans. Can you describe that first experience of that for us.**

Well, Larissa was the first place as far as I know where German paratroopers landed in the war. The whole of the World War II that was the first instance of German paratroopers being

03:00 landed. And to support those paratroopers, Germany used a lot of dive bombers. And we happened to be there so we copped their dive bombers and that frightened us. Our worst, up to that time our worst bombing. They were fair dinkum because they were trying to protect their paratroopers. But I don't recall

03:30 Any damage being done to our particular unit at that stage.

You said it frightened you, could you describe what you would be doing while the bombers were coming down, what it was like, what you would see and hear?

Well, as far as I can recall the first thing you would do when a dive bomber attack comes, you get out of your truck

04:00 because you know very well that it is your truck that they are after. So you get out of it and take shelter best you can. That's what we did. You take shelter. Any from of shelter at all is better than none. It might be a bit of a ditch or a hollow of some…there was no big trees of course to hide behind,

04:30 but the idea is to get away from your truck, you know they're after your truck.

And how many, in that first experience of them how many of their Stukas would there have been do you think?

I wouldn't know. There would be several formations attacking different objects,

05:00 not objects, areas, attacking different areas. The one mob that were attacking the area I was in, we may not have been the prime object in that area even. I don't know.

What do you remember actually seeing from where you were of what was happening?

05:30 Well, when you see the Stukas diving at you or anything else, you know damn well that you've got to keep still that any form of movement and that gunner will pick you off, especially the rear gunner as the plane takes off and climbs again, that rear gunner is deadly. He's sitting up there, 'brrrrrrrrr'. He's got every opportunity to…I don't know you just hope for the best I suppose.

06:00 You can't do much else.

What sort of damage did you see as a result of that Stuka bombing?

I don't know, I couldn't say. Damage everywhere. There may have been a little bit of a bridge or

06:30 anything like that. Oh that's a prime target. A bridge of any description would probably be an even more important target than any truck. If there is a bridge there they will bomb it if they possibly can because they know that that's going to immobilise a certain number of vehicles or whatever.

So while you were travelling, were there times when you had to

07:00 **stop the truck and jump out of the truck?**

Oh yes.

Can you describe how that would happen. You would be driving along and…

This happened later on, further south in Greece. I had a mob of our troops in the back and a lieutenant, who's name was Mr Street. You always call lieutenants 'Sir' or 'Mr'.

07:30 He was in the front with me and I was going like a bat out of hell…the formation or squadron of Stukas were after us. And he'd say, "Go on, keep on going, keep on going." And then eventually

08:00 he couldn't take it any more and he'd say, "Come on let's get out." So…I thought I was a good driver in those days. I had my truck experience and so forth and he was very happy with my driving and that was why he said to keep on going. I suppose you could say I was going like a bat out of hell.

08:30 But eventually he said, "Let's get out." So we pulled up and took shelter. But he was a great chap. Mr Street. I think he eventually got promoted to captain. I've heard since he was promoted to captain. He was only a lieutenant then, but a hell of a good man.

09:00 **Now you were picking up troops all the time.**

We were handling troops all the time.

How was the condition of the troops that you were picking up?

Very tired, very weary, sometimes hungry too. They may not have had the number of supplies that they needed. It was grim.

09:30 A war time retreat is not very good. It's very hard. Because as you retreat your main thoughts are survival. You getting way from the enemy just a little bit further, possibly to make a stand at a more suitable area. But that's about all I can say

10:00 about the retreat, it was just pandemonium. Nothing that we had was good enough to stop the Germans. Nothing. They had the equipment and we didn't. They'd been prepared for it and we weren't.

Was there any sense of resentment about the troops, about the situation that you were put in such a vulnerable situation?

10:30 I don't think we even had time to discuss it. You mean from a political angle?

Well, just that you were put in this situation with no air support, with little assistance…

We hated the establishment for that. They had no air support there for us. We know we were doomed without air support. We couldn't do any good and we didn't. Lack of air

11:00 support was our greatest worry. The Germans may have still beaten us because they had better equipment in every way. They had tanks, we had none.

And you said you hated the establishment. Was that expressed?

Hated may not be the right word. But we realised that the establishment had let us down.

11:30 Even while we were still retreating we knew the establishment had let us down.

As you were retreating, what kept you going?

Orders. We were told to retreat, we were told to make ourselves available to help this battalion that we were assigned to.

12:00 I think it was the 2/5th Battalion from Victoria. Not really sure of that. I think they were the 2/5th. But that's the mob that we were attached to. I don't know whether I'm right there. But anyway it doesn't matter if it was the 2/5th or some other battalion. We were doing our best to help them.

12:30 **Did you have any special belief system that helped you through those incredibly difficult moments?**

I don't think so. You don't get time for your own personal thoughts. No, I don't think I had any thoughts other than "We're not going to win this one." We knew that. We knew that right from the day before we left Alexandria harbour, we knew we weren't going to win that one.

13:00 But we still went ahead with it because we were soldiers and that's what we were told to do.

The day that your truck was bombed, how close were you to the truck when that happened?

Maybe twenty thirty feet away. I wasn't very far away but I was on that side of the truck and the bomb came on this side of the truck.

13:30 So I wasn't hurt at all. Rubbish and dirt flew over the top of me but I was in the ditch, a bit of a hollow in the ground, not one that had been dug. Just a natural hollow, I was down in that. And that's better than nothing. I was not hurt. The truck was smashed in, all the front of it.

How did that effect you to see that happen?

Not greatly I suppose because you'd seen others,

14:00 You get used to it. You get hardened to it, knowing damn well it's likely to happen and when it does happen it doesn't upset you quite as much.

During the retreat with all those bombing air-raids and so forth, you were on the run the whole time?

Yeah, we were on the run the whole time.

Did you observe casualties during that…?

14:30 What type of casualties do you mean?

Troops being hit by trucks or troops…

I only saw two of our troops actually killed. There may have been others that I didn't see. We weren't naturally all together at the one time. I saw a Jack Kidston get killed. He sheltered, there was a bridge,

15:00 not a big bridge, he sheltered against the embankment formed by this bridge and a bomb came and we couldn't find enough of him to bury him. Hughie, that's right, Hughie Fox. He was a little bit older chap than us. He wasn't quite as mobile as some of us might have been then.

15:30 He was hiding behind a bush or tree. There weren't many trees there so I think it had to be a bush. And the Stukas came in this way and he decided to run to another bush. He never made it. The rear guard picked him off as he was running.

16:00 Yes that's how it happened. Nice chappie really, came from Toowoomba. But he became a casualty there. I didn't see any others of my unit killed, except those two. Alan Easton got killed, he

16:30 was a great Queensland footballer. He got killed but that was later on in Germany.

How did it effect you at the time seeing those two young men being killed like that?

Well, I suppose you get hardened to the possibility of this happening. You know damn well that it is likely or possible to happen.

17:00 So I don't think it would upset you as much, being a fellow soldier you expect these things to, you know they're likely to happen. I suppose you probably tried to hide your emotions, or whatever. Not always easy. Depending on how close you are to the person.

17:30 But I did see others that were not members of our unit get skittled by bombs. Not knowing them, they're another crowd.

How close were you to those two young men?

They were just one of the troops in my unit, like if you're in a football team. And you're all about equal, you're all part of the team.

18:00 They were part of our team.

And how did that effect the morale of the troops in your unit?

I don't think it would effect our morale. You're there to carry on and that's what you tried to do.

Was there any opportunity for any ceremony after their deaths?

No.

18:30 You don't have time for it.

So if you can move onto the day that you finally were actually captured. Can you tell us about that day from the beginning of the day, what happened that day?

Well, it started

19:00 the day before. Or two days before actually, when there was a long jetty there at Kalamata, and the navy

sent boats in to pick up troops that were trying to evacuate Greece. And we were not the first group there. So we were well back. First night,

19:30 a mob went off, evacuated. The second night the same thing happened and the third night we should normally have made it onto a boat to escape, but the Germans set up their artillery on a hill behind Kalamata and they shelled the boats with their heavy artillery

20:00 and the boats would not come into us. Now because of that the Germans also occupied the whole of the jetty and the beach foreshore might be a better word around Kalamata, around the jetty. The Germans took possession of that. So the Kiwis, there were quite a few Kiwis there, they're good troops those Kiwis,

20:30 and the Aussies, we went in. Time, might have been eight o'clock at night something like that. When we pushed the Jerry [Germans] out. We beat him, we killed a few, but the

21:00 boats didn't come in for us so we were left there. Some of the boys tried to swim out to the boats. The distance across water can be so deceiving. They never had a hope. They drowned. They were foolish to even attempt to swim out to the boats. The boats sitting out there it looks half a

21:30 mile, it might be five miles. It's so deceiving the distance over water. So when we realised that we had no escape, that the navy wasn't going to come back, so some officers there told us that we would have to be prisoners of war. And next morning the Germans came in and we just,

22:00 there was nothing to do. And that was 9 o'clock in the morning on the 29th of April. I'd only been in Greece nineteen days.

22:30 The Germans, they didn't do anything to us. They marched us to a cleared area and then they held a burial for their own troops that got killed in the scrap the night before. They buried them,

23:00 had a bit of a "Fatherland" thing, I couldn't understand German at that time, and I don't know what happened then, we lost a few too. I don't know what happened then, I just don't know. If they were buried there then it was in a different area than where I happened to be. I didn't see it.

23:30 Yes, the Germans, I don't think he did much to us that day. Just left us in the cleared area, no food or water or anything like that. And then next morning he took, really took control of us. And we were eventually taken back,

24:00 marching and I think we might have done a few miles by train, to a place called Corinth, the Corinth Canal, which was a very important part of the southern Greece. We were in camp there for quite a long time, several weeks at least.

24:30 If you remember that diary I said I tore all those pages out. I kept a diary from that day on. And I have several other notebooks that I kept as a complete a record of my whole of prison life in there. The other day I started reproducing those words, as close as I could word for word

25:00 on another book that I think. The originals were starting to get a bit battered and faded and so forth, so I'm re-writing it all. And I've got all the details there of the whole of my prison life. I haven't finished it yet of course, long way to go. I kept a very good record of all of it and so from here on in our talk this morning it's going to be prison life.

25:30 **What had you been told if anything by the army about what you should do in the situation that you were captured. In what way were you prepared for being a prisoner of war?**

We were not prepared at all. We weren't counselled, if you might say that. We weren't counselled by our authorities at all. There were no authorities. We had a few officers around

26:00 from other units, but we weren't told anything. We were just told to obey. Now if you want to avoid trouble. Obey. Some of us did and some of us didn't.

Prior to that had you thought about the possibility of being captured?

I knew I was going to be captured, long time before the show ended.

26:30 I knew we had no escape. The odds were so greatly against us. I knew I was, unless I got killed I was going to be captured. I think we all had resigned ourselves to that fact. That we're not going to get out of this. So that's what we used to say "We're not going to get out of this." The odds were against us.

27:00 **Did you talk about it amongst yourselves?**

Men don't talk a terrible lot about things. I don't think they talk enough really. When men have got problems they keep them to themselves and I suppose that attitude prevailed. We didn't talk as much as we probably should have. If we had talked more about it we may have been better

27:30 prepared mentally. Other than physically. You couldn't do much about physical attitude, physical side of things but mentally we may have been better prepared for it. But anyway, we weren't.

I know it must be quite painful to talk about it, because of what you were saying before, but can you tell us a little bit more about the battle that went on the night before in Kalamata? Can you describe a little bit more about what happened there? How many people were there

28:00 **and what actually happened?**

Well, I won't put a number on it because I don't know, but there were quite a few of us and the Kiwis. I don't think there were any Pommies [English] involved in it at all. It was the Kiwis and Aussies that went in. I don't think the German put up a tough resistance because he knew he had us.

28:30 He knew he'd get us the next morning. So although we went in with the bayonets and prepared to use them too, but I don't think the Germans put up a tough resistance. Because he just backed away from us, but he still had us next morning. But I know a few Germans got killed because I say them

29:00 Being buried the next morning. A few of our boys got killed but I never saw them getting buried. I don't know what happened to them.

It was a battle with gunfire?

Oh yes. We only had .303s [rifles]. And that's the only equipment we had. We didn't have any machineguns at all. I don't know that it would have made any difference if we had had them.

Now you'd been a driver and not

29:30 **really in the combat situation I suppose. Was this the first time that you were faced with this situation?**

Yes it's the only time I actually fired a shot in anger. That's the only time I've actually gone into combat, was that night. Didn't work out too well but you do what you can at the time.

30:00 **How did you deal with that situation where you were actually being faced with having to potentially kill other people and possibly being killed yourself?**

I don't think you worry about it. 'Right, let's get these buggers.' If you're going to get caught well that's too bad. But you just go in. I don't know. You don't worry about the possible effects or possible results of it.

30:30 You just go in and do what you can. At that time emotionally you have to hate your enemy and that gives you the drive, the urge to get in and beat him. But it didn't work out that way did it?

Do you know if you fired many shots that night?

I don't know,

31:00 I suppose I must have. It's a long time ago now. Sixty-three years ago.

And how close were the Germans. Could you see the people you were firing at?

Oh yes, because they were firing back at us. When you lifted your nose up you took whatever shelter was available and when they're firing at you, oh yes. They also had machineguns and we didn't.

31:30 Big disadvantage.

Was there any way of seeing whether you had successfully hit anybody?

I would not know. You don't know. I don't know if I ever hit anybody. In a way I hope I didn't. Because I eventually learned to have a lot of respect for the Germans. Eventually. A long time later.

Looking back on that night,

32:00 **that last battle, knowing perhaps that you were as you said earlier, you had no hope against the Germans, how do you view that sort of final stand against them if you like?**

Does the word despair come into it or desperate, I don't know. But I think the attitude that I had was that,

32:30 "You buggers have beaten us but we're going to give you a slap before it's all over." We still knew that next morning we were going to be prisoner. Because there was no way, the ships were not coming in again.

What was it like to realise that the ships were not going to come back for you?

33:00 That hurt. When we knew that we had been forsaken. Doesn't matter. I so suppose it may have had some emotional effect that there was our last hope sailing away.

33:30 But looking back at it now, they couldn't have done anything. The German artillery were sitting up on the hill behind the town. If they had come in they would have run the risk of losing a ship even. And

that’s more valuable than a few troops.

34:00 I don’t blame the navy now. They did their best. I’m sorry for those that thought they could swim out to them. Too far.

You mentioned earlier the lieutenant that, captain sorry, I’ve heard other stories about senior officers being able to

34:30 **escape in Greece while the troops were still there, to what extent did you feel that at the time?**

Great resentment. You can understand perhaps, it was the officers we were depending on and troops need to be lead and the officers have to do the job and our bloke failed us. All he was interested in was saving his own skin. No, I

35:00 could never forgive him for that. He was no good. I won’t mention his name, I know it very clearly. And there is no one else that can name him now because I am the sole survivor.

35:30 **Can you tell us a little bit about that camp in Corinth?**

Yes I can. There were some barracks there. And a big compound of mainly sandy surface.

36:00 Not on the beach but just a naturally sandy type of area. And we just camped on the ground. We had no facilities at all. We were put in groups of a hundred with our own, it was a drum cut in half. Yes, a drum cut in half was our cook house. I don’t recall

36:30 where we got the wood from but one of our blokes he was the cook and we were, supplies were given to us in bulk and it wasn’t very much and he’d cook them and do this with it and help make the best of it. I know at one stage the little Fox Terrier dog came into the area. I think he was a fox. Small, a dog similar to the size of a Fox.

37:00 We all chased him and our bloke caught him. He tasted pretty good in the stew. Poor little dog. But survival is very strong. We were sent off into different work parties after the Germans had organised us.

37:30 I was one that was lucky enough to get sent off into a work party frequently and you got extra rations, you might get half a biscuit or something like that. Half a biscuit to an ordinary person is nothing. But to us it was important. It was worth going and doing a bit of work to get half a biscuit. And of course, one of the greatest things

38:00 In that camp was lice. Body lice. They were, everybody had lice. I don’t give a bugger he had lice. If he was in Corinth camp, he had lice. You couldn't control them. So then at one stage the medical mob decided something had to be done, these lice were, because they’re very debilitating lice.

38:30 They’re living off your body. So the Germans marched us down to the foreshore, long gradual area where the waves are, the water is only this deep and then a hundred yards on it may be that deep. Not a lot of depth to it. So strip off hold your hands out and go through Germans here.

39:00 And they sprayed you. “Right oh, go and have a swim.” So you start walking off. “Jeez they’re biting a bit.” By the time you get to the water you’re just about fast enough to go into orbit. Because this stuff whatever it was, the bite, the burn the sting! Oh God it was terrific! We had this swim and wash this stuff off you, come back and put your same old clothes on again.

39:30 Hopeless. That happened a couple of times. Hopeless, you’re putting the same clothes back on again. I hate lice. The only time, after we eventually got up to Germany, we never had any lice, but there was one little incident where I got down among the Yugoslavs

40:00 who were in another area of camp, this was in Germany. And they had lice too. And that was the only other time I had anything to do with lice. It’s amazing how much energy lice can suck out of you. They’re living off your body. Not a nice subject but I’m afraid it’s a realistic one.

40:30 It happens.

Tape 5

00:32 **If you could just tell me what happened after the end of those six weeks? Was there anything else significant happened in that time?**

Nothing much significant because it’s all so similar, day after day, very similar to the day before. Eventually they, the Germans, decided that we had to

01:00 go up to Salonika. So we headed off across the Corinth Canal and then we went some distance on the train and tunnels had bee blown up so it was okay we’ll get off and walk. So you get off and the train the other side and so forth. A lot of that happened. There was one place from Levadi to Lamia, I’ve got it in

my diary

01:30 and my heading is, ‘The Worst Day of My Life.’ We had to march from three o’clock in the morning because we had to be at the other end before dark and we marched thirty-two miles across the Brallos Pass. Now I still regard that as the worst day of my life.

02:00 Because by that time I’d formed up with a couple of cobbers [friends], one bloke by the name of Gordon Glanford and George Sutherland, two from my unit, both real great fellas. And we marched on and on carrying all our gear. Another bloke in our unit was a bloke by the name of Ernie Shelswell. He wasn’t as mobile as we were,

02:30 wasn’t as healthy and fit as we were. So he cracked up, well that would have been bullet. So Gordon Glanford and I took him one on each side, we helped him along, we carried him virtually and the third man George Sutherland, he carried all our gear. So he had just as big a load as we did.

03:00 That was a terrible dark day. Anyway, four or five of our chaps actually died on the trip. Not necessarily my unit but fellow prisoners died. There was one German guard died from exhaustion. It was grim.

When you say that man cracked up, what happened?

He just couldn't walk any further.

03:30 He just couldn't walk. We didn’t have any strength to begin with. Not a lot. We were deficient.

Had they fed you in the Corinth camp very well?

No, that’s why, we all, we didn’t fight, but we struggled to get out on work parties to get half a biscuit extra. And that helped Gordon and George and I. We used to get out on these work parties. It helped to create our fitness too.

04:00 Improve our fitness and then the half biscuit. Anyway we eventually made it to the town called Lamia. A camp near Lamia or something. Almost thirty two mile the German told us. Not my figures, his. So they gave us a feed of, dry salted fish.

04:30 Which was the worst possible thing because thirst was overpowering. Put us in a train in a carriage locked up. There may have been a couple more deviations, where get out walk or march for a while and be back in another train, depending on where the train lines had been bombed.

05:00 Blown up. So we got to Salonika camp.

On that march you said that if you hadn’t picked up your mate he would have been shot. Did you see anybody else get shot?

No, I never saw anybody else get shot. But the others told me that some of the boys had been shot and I could tell you how many, either four or five.

05:30 But none of our unit. You help your own and we helped Ernie Shelswell. Now I’ll stay with Ernie for a moment. He never recovered from that and he was repatriated back home and I believe he died soon after he was repatriated to Australia he died. He never recovered.

06:00 **If someone was sick enough they could get them home?**

There was repatriation, yes. Several other chaps were repatriated. I met one at an Anzac service on the 23rd of April this year. An Anzac service at Benambra High School. I was the guest speaker down there. And I met one chap who had been POW in Germany.

06:30 He was repatriated because he was originally an ambulance bearer. I don’t know what unit. But when he was repatriated because of ill health or because he had been non-combative. He’s an old man now.

And on that march how did they keep you moving forward?

07:00 Those German guards are, they had a truck, not a utility for any of their own men that fell exhausted, into the truck. We never had that opportunity. We were really an encumbrance to them. They didn’t want us at all. We were a bloody nuisance in other words.

07:30 So when we got to Salonika well that was a fairly big camp, big in that there were a lot of prisoners there. Now Salonika is the only place in the European mainland where malaria does occur. It’s the only area. George Sutherland

08:00 went down with malaria in Salonika. I never saw him again until about forty years, fifty years later I met him up at Caloundra. I suppose you could say he survived. But when he went down with malaria the Germans took him away somewhere,

08:30 I don’t know where, put him into some sort of hospital or something like that. I don’t know what his life was eventually. Because by that time I was totally on my own. After George was taken with malaria. I had no more of my original unit personnel with me. So I made it my business to go out on work parties as often as I could be chosen

09:00 Because it meant half a biscuit a day it would help maintain my fitness.

How would you get onto a work party?

German guards would come in and say, “Right, fifty men or a hundred men or twenty men.” Or whatever. You never knew what the job was going to be. But if you felt fit enough or serious enough to maintain your fitness,

09:30 you’d push forward and, “I’m right.” So you’d make yourself available. Some of our chaps did not make themselves available. They were not going to work for the Huns. But they forgot that they were working for themselves. To maintain fitness which is all important.

Can you describe a little bit more about what you saw when you first came into Salonika, what would you see

10:00 **in the camp?**

We marched right through the streets of Salonika to get to the camp. And it’s a fairly big place. Not as big as Brisbane, not like that. But a fairly big town just the same. We marched and of course when you march you are dog bloody tired.

10:30 I suppose you could say we were as weary as you can be and still be able to march. But always if possible when we came into a town you put on your best. You try and march like soldiers. I don’t know whether it impressed the Greeks, but that’s the way we did it.

11:00 But it was just a tradition with us. Whenever, put on your best.

How did the people in the town treat you when you were walking through?

They tried to give use things, it might be an apple or a couple of olives or something like that. But there was a limit to that and eventually the Germans forbade them to do anything like that. They couldn't give us anything. I have seen it when we’re marching along and some of the Greek people

11:30 would throw a few coins over to us and we’d try and pick them up. The Greek coin, the drachma and of course it’s not very valuable and it wasn’t much help to us anyway.

Just to describe that camp a little more, when you came through the gates of Salonika. What did you see?

12:00 Well, there were a few barracks there too. But a lot of us slept out in the open and I had a blanket but I don’t know how I came to get it, scrounged it from somewhere and groundsheet, waterproof, and slept out

12:30 on the dirt. But then at one stage I was able to get in onto the concrete floor of a building and I slept on that. But you learn to take these things in your stride after a while.

How did you get that position?

I don’t remember. I remember I was sleeping on the concrete as against sleeping out on the dirt. That was a big improvement

13:00 although the dirt is not as bad as you think because you can dig a bit of a hole for the hips or whatever and you can’t do that in concrete. Anyway, Salonika …oh yes, there was one little incident. Before I left home my brother Ray, second eldest, and his girlfriend at that time, became his wife later on, both dead now, they gave me a watch,

13:30 a good watch with leather covering and so forth so it wouldn't create signals and I sold that watch for half a loaf of bread, black rye bread, that’s the only bread you get in Greece. And George and I, that was before he took with malaria and we had half a loaf of bread to share and that was heaven.

14:00 But he would have done the same for me if he had had anything to sell.

What would happen at meal times in Salonika?

Well, you’d have to line up and we weren’t in groups of a hundred then there was no looking after yourselves, there was all coming from the main kitchen and line up with your dixie [pot]

14:30 and march along and flop a bit of stew or whatever it is into that, never very much, always well the amount you’d get in a whole day would not equal of one normal meal, oh no. Starvation was a big problem to us in those days. I suppose it was because of lack of organisation. And by this time

15:00 I think I’m about right, or very soon after Germany started war against Russia. So that might be one reason perhaps why transport was so difficult for them. They were putting all their effort into the Eastern Front. That’s the Russian Front. And I guess we had to take second fiddle.

15:30 Or third fiddle or more. But then there came a time when they marched us over to another camp away

from the original camp in Salonika and it was fine, after five mile away and we were there for only a few days and then first train load of men

16:00 went, heading for Germany. And we were the second train load from that camp only a couple of days later. They said this is going to take three days to get to Germany, so they gave us three biscuits and a little tin of conserve, I don't know what it was,

16:30 and it took five days and six nights so we were hungry again. You get used to it. It's amazing how much you can learn to live on. What would normally be disastrous for some people eventually, it doesn't become adequate, but you learn to cope with it.

And I guess the march that you did initially to get to Salonika, part of the problem of

17:00 **that was probably hunger related as well?**

You're all still weak, because the food just had not been sufficient. We'd all been in the same boat, but those that didn't take the opportunity of getting into work parties would be even worse than we were. Because their fitness would be less than ours. I place great importance on that fitness at that time. I knew how important

17:30 It was going to be. Eventually as well as at the time. It was important. Try and keep fit if you have a chance. If you lost your fitness, you were in trouble.

Did you see many people die in Salonika, or disappear?

I didn't see anybody die there. I saw a few that were taken away by the Germans

18:00 to hospital perhaps. People that could no longer cope with life. Cope with the circumstances perhaps, they were taken away possibly to some convalescence camp or I don't know.

How did people beat the boredom in Salonika?

I wish I knew. Boredom is very difficult.

18:30 One of the hardest things to bear, being a POW, is the uncertainty of how long the war is going to last. That's a big problem. If you knew, possibly you'd go and commit suicide. But if you knew it might help you. But the uncertainty weighs heavily

19:00 on you. You don't know whether you're ever going to see it through. And how long is that going to be? You just don't know do you. The uncertainty.

Can you think about what your family think about you?

I've commented in my diaries about that. I've expressed my concern for my family at home because I knew that they knew nothing about me and that was in April, September before they heard

19:30 anything about me. I was just…words were, 'missing in action.' That was September and several months later before I knew that they had heard from me and that was a big relief.

So at the time when you say there was a lot of uncertainty, how long did you think

20:00 **that you would be detained?**

Well, before I sailed to go overseas initially, I thought twelve months we'll beat the buggers. I was wrong. After I was captured and I saw the strength of the Germans and the great discipline, the German Army is the most

20:30 disciplined army imaginable. Their discipline is, it's terribly important to them and I realised then with the equipment they had and the discipline they had they were going to be a tough nut to crack and it was going to take a long time. The morning I was captured I realised that this not going to be easy. I was going to learn one German word a day. I set myself that target. One German

21:00 word a day. And I maintained that for a long time, and that's a big target believe me, because you don't only have to remember all the other words you've learned, you've got to take in this new one. And then eventually I became very fluent in German. I could read it, write it and speak it. Using the local dialect, where I was,

21:30 most of the time. I could talk German to anybody and write it and I did. Eventually continued to write it.

What was the first word you learnt?

Kom! Come. Kom hier!

22:00 Come here. You learn a lot of words and you learn them very quick depending on how of the way it's spoken, you soon learn.

Can you recall parts of your diary, after that what you say was the worst day of your life, can you remember what you wrote about that day?

22:30 Yes, I could even show it to you. But it's not appropriate to the occasion. That worst day of my life, I've never forgotten that day and I've been through a few nasty episodes in my life but there was never anything to compare with that day. It was

23:00 the worst day of my life. Even if I was twenty years younger now. I couldn't do that, I couldn't do that again.

Did it help you in those early days to write in your diary?

It gave me something to do and I'm quite sure as I went along I appreciated what I was doing. I knew that if I'm allowed

23:30 to keep this diary it will be of interest in later life and it has been. The Germans never took it off me. And then as the years rolled by, getting notebooks to write my diary in was a problem. But I scrounged them and got them by hook or by crook and I value those diaries quite a lot. I hope, well of course I'm going to lose them eventually.

24:00 They're going to lose me but that's why I'm re-writing them all now into a different book.

Were the German guards cruel in Salonika?

Some of them were but not many. The fighting soldier is alright. He understood that we were fighting soldiers too. But most of those soldiers

24:30 were sent off to fight against Russia. And they brought in second class troops to look after us. They didn't need fighting troops to look after us. They brought in these older and not so fit troops and they weren't real good fellows. But the German fighting soldier is not a bad bloke.

25:00 As far as I'm concerned.

How about within the groups in the camp, did people start to push other people around within the allied groups?

I know what you are getting at and I have to answer it a different way. We were not the only troops in the prison camps. There were Yugoslavs, there were Palestinians and there were Cypriots from Cyprus

25:30 and of course the Froggies [French]. And initially in Corinth there were a lot of Italian prisoners there. Italians that had been captured by the Greeks. Greece and Italy were at war, they came down through Albania that way and they were at war and these Italians were captured by the Greeks. Well, when the German troops captured everything they

26:00 found themselves with quite a lot, several thousand at least, Italian prisoners of war. And they would not let them go because whenever they released these Italian prisoners they used to go and play hell against the Greeks because the Greek was beaten then, he was finished. That was why the Germans hung onto the Italians and wouldn't let them go. I don't know what happened eventually because we moved off to Salonika.

26:30 **So within the camp was there a lot of tension between the different nationalities?**

No, one race only, the Cypriot. They were a rowdy bunch of fellows. They caused a lot of trouble. They were unruly, undisciplined I think was the word. They were very undisciplined. I know the Germans fired at them quite a few times.

27:00 The Palestinians, they were alright, the Yugoslavs were alright and of course they had been fighting troops originally. The Pommies [English], the Kiwis [New Zealanders] and ourselves, we got on reasonably well together. It was only the Cypriots that caused us any trouble. So they were out as far as we were concerned. We wouldn't help them at all because they made no effort to help anyone

27:30 but themselves. That's their nature I suppose.

How long were you in Salonika?

It might have been a month before they put us on a train and sent us north.

And you were alone at this stage.

I was still with a lot of people but I didn't have any of my

28:00 own friends. Particular friends. And that's one I regret because it's so important to have a close friend. Someone you can rely on and you give him your home address and he gives you his home address so that if anything happens to either one of you, well at least somebody knows. That's the reason for this close friendship. And if you can help anything,

28:30 it's what they call mucking in together. If you've got half a loaf of bread well okay, here's your share. You share things well unconditionally. That's a foregone conclusion, if you've got anything half of it is his. If he's got anything half of it is yours. You couldn't really cope without it. I did eventually meet up with some more friends

29:00 and formed quite close friendships for that very same reason, to help each other.

So what happened after Salonika then?

Well, they put us on a train and sent us north, as I say with three days tucker and took either five days and six nights or six days and five nights, I've just forgotten what, and that was a bit difficult because we were locked up in the train,

29:30 box cars and no ventilation, one bar window about this big. Very difficult. Heat was terrific. That was in July, the heat of the summer over there. And very often we were pushed into a side somewhere to let the German

30:00 troop trains, that had precedence over us of course, that's normal. We were left on the side for four or five or six hours or eight hours a day in the boiling sun. I don't know that we would have done it differently ourselves under the same circumstances. They were fighting a war. They had

30:30 to do what they could to win the war.

So for five hours you would stand?

Oh yes, standing still. No ventilation. Grim.

Did you see any evidence of men just crumbling under that condition?

Not dying, I've seen chaps just collapse, mainly from the heat and of course the lice again. Under those humid conditions the lice just thrived.

31:00 They had a picnic on us. I might emphasis the lice a bit and you might wonder why but by God they are one of the real enemies of those conditions.

Did you end up with scabs from the lice?

I don't recall any scabs. They're all over you, everywhere. You can imagine fleas. Lice are ten times

31:30 worse than fleas. As far as I'm concerned.

Did they make you scratch?

Oh yeah. Anyway.

How about going to the toilet in those dire hours, how would that happen?

We were let out once a day. One wagon at a time. Out do what you had to do and get back in again. It was difficult.

32:00 One of the more unpleasant sides of that sort of thing. No, I wouldn't want to go on a train journey again. I haven't liked trains since. I know they're nothing like that now but it leaves a bad thing in your memory. But it finished.

32:30 **And what happened at the other end?**

We came to a place called Marburg which had originally been part of Yugoslavia, right on the border, a place called Maribor originally, the Germans renamed it. And that's where our train journey finished up.

33:00 So then we were given a piece of bread, ten men to a loaf or something like that. I don't know exactly. And a cup of coffee. Now ersatz coffee. Do you know what ersatz means? Artificial coffee. And it tasted so beautiful, I can still smell it today. It was amazing we had a cup of coffee.

33:30 Of course we had no cups, a dixie of coffee. After a couple of days they called for work parties and this is where my regular POW life began. I was not in Germany. I was in Austria, which was German, totally German just as Queensland and NSW are Australian. There is no difference. The language is the same the customs are the same.

34:00 Germans and Austrians were all serving together as one. They called for volunteers to go out on a work party. Thirty five of us. So you had to be something to get on this work party. And I became a schneider. A tailor. I couldn't even sew a button on. But they didn't test me there. They took me on

34:30 this work party and we left the next day on this work party. All our gear which was very little and we went to a town called Graz. It's the second biggest town in Austria. Got off the train and kept marching and marching and came to a place called,

35:00 a horse hospital, as they called it a Ferde Lazarette . A horse hospital in an area of Graz called Gosting. And our job there was, well we were doing various things, but firstly they

35:30 took us in there and I don't know what they did, and then they marched us on again to what was to be our quarters. And it was the top story of a great big story, as big as the whole floor of this house, or thereabouts, of a town pub. The bottom story was a pub and the top story was this great big room and

that where we were.

36:00 The steps leading up to it and the guardroom at the foot of the steps. All the windows were barred. And that was the guest house, yes they did call it a guest house, in Gosting in Graz. So I'll skip on but it was the

36:30 same thing. Each morning we had whatever was breakfast and then we marched off to this horse hospital for our work nine or ten hours a day, I think it was ten hours a day there. It wasn't too bad. We were given various jobs and part of my job was on the disinfecting gang.

37:00 Now this Ferde Lazarette had a lot of horses, I mean a lot. There were actually, at full strength there were a thousand horses there. Twenty stables with fifty horses to a stable. Twenty-five each side. When one horse died or was taken away from any reason, his stable and the one

37:30 on either side had to be totally cleaned out, disinfected and repainted with whitewash, lime I suppose. And I was one of three men detailed for that. And that wasn't a bad sort of a job, no extra tucker [food], just rations. But this disinfectant played up. And that area snows heavily

38:00 all winter and you go out and spit onto the snow, it leaves a black trail. This disinfectant was getting into your system and it left a black trail of spit. That was alright I suppose, for POW life you don't expect it to be easy and it wasn't. The only meat we ever got was

38:30 horse flesh. If a horse died we ate some parts of him and the rest of the rations were pretty minimal.

The accommodation must have been…

We had beds.

Compared to Salonika.

Oh yes. Each one had a bed. But the cold, because we were up in Germany by now, or Austria and it, the winters there are cold, believe me.

39:00 You get snow this deep. And marched into work each morning. If you washed your face, wet your hair and combed it before you left before daylight. The hat or cap you wore, it all froze to your head. And that is true. The cold was terrific. Twenty seven degrees below zero, below freezing that is.

39:30 And damn cold. They use the same temperature gauge as we do now. Celsius. But the Germans treated us reasonably well there. Provided you worked you could cope. You could get by on it. I did. And I got word then,

40:00 Sometime after, well after the new year I got word that my people had heard from me and that they knew I was a POW. That was good news. Took a lot of worry off my mind. I was on the top story of a two story bunk and underneath me was a young Kiwi, New Zealander, Jack Coatsworth. He came from Invercargill. Can I digress a little?

Tape 6

00:32 **You were going to talk about the Kiwi…**

Jack Coatsworth. This has nothing much to do with military. When I was in the guest house at the Ferde Lazarette, I was in the top bunk,

01:00 and the bunk below me Jack Coatsworth, a Kiwi from Invercargill, New Zealand. Many years later I became secretary of the Murwillumbah Probus Club. I was there for three years in that office. And I got a booklet detailing all the names of all the secretaries and presidents of every

01:30 Probus club in Australia and New Zealand. It mentioned the name, the Probus club of Invercargill. And I thought just for curiosity I'll write to Invercargill and see if they know anything of the Coatsworth family. So I wrote to them and eventually a few weeks later

02:00 came a reply from the secretary of one of the Probus clubs in Invercargill. "Yes, we know the Coatsworth family. Some of them are still alive and they would love to hear from you." So I wrote a letter back to the Coatsworth family. And I got a reply saying, "Yes, please come over." So Iris and I hopped on a plane

02:30 from Brisbane and we flew to Christchurch and hired a car and went down to Invercargill. Firstly Iris and I stayed with the secretary of the Probus club, they had accommodation for us and we went and met the Coatsworth family.

03:00 The father of Jack Coatsworth who I met in Austria, he had passed away and so had his mother, but there were brothers and sisters of Jack Coatsworth there. I met them and we stayed a week there and they treated

03:30 us wonderfully. I found Jack Coatsworth's name in the cenotaph in Invercargill. I wrote a letter to the Invercargill Council asking them to please dress it up a bit because it had faded badly and for several years after that I corresponded with Margaret Coatsworth who

04:00 was the sister and law of Jack Coatsworth's brother.

How about Jack himself, did he survive the war?

Unfortunately Jack did not. Jack committed suicide. He couldn't take it. As we were

04:30 marching to the Ferde Lazarette every morning, part of the way we marched along a tram line. Jack, I had gone from there at this time. Jack Coatsworth threw himself under the tram, under the wheels of a tram, coming past him. They did not know the cause of his death and I was able to tell them.

05:00 I hated doing it. But I thought they deserved to know the struth. Anyway, I've stopped writing to them now. Margaret was still alive until just recently, she passed away, she is quite elderly. Anyway, that episode is all finished.

05:30 **While you were in the camp together though, and you were sleeping closely to each other, how close were you?**

Jack Coatsworth was a nice young fellow. We shared things, helped each other as much as we could. He also wrote to his family and I wrote to mine and a lot of the other chaps never bothered writing at all. And some of them

06:00 never ever received any replies from their family, so I don't know the reason, they just didn't.

Jack's reaction, not being able to cope with living in the camp with being a POW, was that unusual?

No, some people coped with hardship and upsets, much better than others.

06:30 Jack was one, it got him down. I suppose it could be said I helped him as much as I could because I knew I was coping mentally better than he was. So I helped him as much as I could but then later on I moved away from that camp. I was detailed of course, you don't do anything voluntarily. I was sent out onto a farm camp.

07:00 And not long after that Jack committed suicide, he just wasn't coping that's all. We had another chap there. He was an Englishman in that same horse hospital business. I forget his first name but he was named Brashaw. He didn't cope either. He went in the, his mind let him down.

07:30 The Germans took him away and put him in a mental hospital for a while. He came back but then I heard later there was a total mental collapse. Some people just don't cope as well as others do.

Now you seemed to be quite strong even from the beginning, what do you credit with giving you that strength?

08:00 I think it was my father, he was that type of person. Pop was a leader. In civilian life, I didn't know him in his war time of course. Pop was a leader and people used to come for him for advice mainly. He was a JP [Justice of the Peace] and I think if I have any strength at all,

08:30 in that respect, I got it from Dad. He was that type of fellow. A great father. A good chap.

What sort of methods did you use to keep yourself mentally strong?

Good question. Well, I resolved very early in the piece, apart from learning German,

09:00 I'm going to see this through. I was quite determined to see it through. I don't think at any stage I felt like giving up. I was going to hang on but that's the way it worked out. There were a couple of times especially near the finish when it might have been

09:30 excusable that I had given up, but I didn't. I wanted to see it through. And I had Iris to come back to and that was a very strong point. Very strong point.

So even in those early days when you determined to learn German, what was your thinking behind that?

10:00 I thought by learning German I'd be able to help myself and help my mates. Some of them were not interested in the slightest in learning to speak or understand German. Didn't matter if you didn't speak it, as long as you understood it. It was a big help. But some of them weren't even interested in that. I was for some reason,

10:30 I wanted to learn German and I did that quite successfully really.

And how do you think it did help you?

Well, that way I could get a better idea of what was happening in the world. But mind you it was mainly

from the German angle. I could read the German papers eventually and I could listen to what the Germans were saying amongst themselves.

11:00 I never let onto them unless it was necessary, that I could understand German. I kept that to myself. This was my little secret weapon I suppose you could say. I can understand you buggers. It was good that I did learn it because it did help me in a lot of ways.

In what other ways do you think it helped you in terms of your relationship with the guards and your lifestyle during those years that you were there?

11:30 As I was saying, I eventually became the leader in this work camp. After I moved away from the horse hospital I was sent out onto a farm. There were nine English men there and myself. And I eventually became the leader of that camp because of my knowledge of the German language. I could do more the boys, through the guard, by being able

12:00 to talk German. And I'm pleased that I did do that because in a lot of way although it eventually got me into a lot of trouble, which is another story, I was able to help the boys, I got things for them through the Red Cross which they had not been able to get because the previous leader would not attempt to learn German.

12:30 **Can you tell us how that came about, your becoming leader, what sort of process was involved?**

Well, the boys in the camp, there were nine, there was the leader, he was from the Lancashire Fusiliers [bomber], elderly person, forty, I call that elderly because we were all mainly younger. He wouldn't learn German and therefore he couldn't

13:00 get anything extra or do anything extra for the boys. And the boys eventually, although they were all Pommies too, they rebelled against him. And because I could talk German they thought that I would be able to do a better job for them. I think it turned out that way. Because I eventually got permission through the Germans for photographers to come in and take our photos.

13:30 I've got some of them there. George was never able to do that. I got permission for them to go and play football against another work camp about nine mile away. In a different district. We were able to meet up with each other. George never attempted to do that.

14:00 I was able to get better clothing for them through the Germans. George didn't attempt to do that. He couldn't write German and I could so that helped me a lot. After the war was over. We're jumping ahead a long way now. After the war was over. I corresponded with the farmer that I worked with, his name was Adolf Kleindienst.

14:30 A learned man, whereas most of the local farmers were of the peasant class. But Adolf Kleindienst was a learned man and we corresponded in German for three or four years, until eventually his letters stopped coming. I don't know why. I presume he died. He was getting old. He was about sixty when I was there. Age caught up with him I suppose.

So during the war was he a German civilian?

15:00 **Or was he a German soldier?**

He was a farmer, a German farmer. And being an educated man we had more in common than I had with some of the other farmers. Because although I wasn't educated, I was a bit more worldly wise through studying maps and geography than some

15:30 of the others were.

How did life change for you when you moved from the horse hospital to the farm labourer work?

Well, the change wasn't as great as it might have been had I not been born on a farm here in Australia. I grew up as a farmer although the methods and everything, the acreages and the number of animals was so different.

16:00 On the farm I milked eighty cows. On this farm I was moved to in Germany they had four cows altogether. Only four. And two of the cows did the ploughing. At that stage they had no horses. I think they

16:30 wouldn't have had about six or eight acres of ground, that was their total farm. And in normal peacetime they would have had to make a living off that. It would have been difficult for them.

So when you were working at the horse hospital did your barracks change when you moved to work on the farm?

I moved away from there totally.

So what were the living conditions like in those two places. How did they vary?

17:00 **Where you were with the horse hospital and with the farm?**

In the horse hospital, we were not dealing with the individual so much as we did on the farm. You were working with the farmer all day, fourteen hours a day in summer. Twelve hours a day in winter.

17:30 Of course that helped improve my knowledge of the German lingo too. We got on reasonably well. We didn't always totally agree. But to show to them that I was interested in learning their language, that lifted me up a peg or two in their estimation. That I was prepared to learn

18:00 their language. I didn't tell them it was for my benefit and not theirs though. But that's the way it was.

So where did you actually live when you were working on the farm?

We were billeted in one room, a very small room, ten of us, that's the nine Englishmen and myself at that stage, in a small room, two bunks top and bottom,

18:30 and the guard was in the next room. And the window were all barred and to get out at all we had to go out through the guard's room and of course he slept in there, ate in there and did everything in there. We were fed at the farm, whatever they ate, we ate. It was perhaps as much as you could expect in a prisoner of war camp.

19:00 I got on reasonably well with, especially the old bloke, the chap I wrote to later on. The old hausfrau, she was alright I suppose under the circumstances she was okay. Bit of an old bitch we thought at the time. She was tougher. She was more pro German than Adolf was,

19:30 her husband. They had three sons. All in the army. Two of them got killed right near the end of the war. Their youngest son, Hans, he was in the German army fighting up on the front, the Finland front, up near Finland and Russia.

20:00 He fought with the Fins against he Russians. And he used to come home on leave and he was the youngest so he used to come to his house. Whereas I was working there. And we had many conversations about army life and so forth. No animosity. He as a German doing his bit. I was an Australian doing my bit. So we didn't hate each other, we understood each other.

20:30 But the older two they were both married and lived away from home and I didn't see nearly so much of them. Another little point while I was on that farm, Germany depended to a large extent on foreign labour so there was a Polish girl, Zoske Treikuna [?]

21:00 was her name. She was a bit older than me. She worked in the house, but also on the farm, whatever was doing she had to be in it. Those European girls they could work just like men. They can fair dinkum, it would surprise you. Anyway, this young Ganek Granowski [?], he actually was a Ukranian, Polish-Ukranian, Russian, very little difference.

21:30 They can all speak each others language up to a point. So Egon, Ganek, the Germans called him Egon so eventually I called him Egon too, but Ganek was his name, he arrived there with no boots, just an old skinny pair of longs on that came down to his ankles and an old what we would call sports coat.

22:00 That's all he had. So I helped to get clothes for him. Gave him a little bit of something. We taught each other or language. I learned to speak quite a bit of Polish and he learnt to speak quite a lot of English. He learnt all the swear words very early in the piece. And when we were having our lunch, one day I remember very plainly in

22:30 the kitchen. And the old housefrau is over there doing something and Ganek and I were talking a little bit of English, Ukraine, Polish, same thing, a little bit of German. And the old hausfrau couldn't understand what we were saying so she blew her top. She said, "When you are in my kitchen you speak German!" We really upset her.

23:00 But I'll stay with Ganek if I can. When the war finished he was still over there and eventually I came home. I got letters from him, he was still in the are, so I made an effort to get him out here as a migrant. I got total approval, I had to go through a lot of avenues to get it from our authorities here, total approval for him to come here,

23:30 and I would be totally responsible for him, but I was prepared to do that because he was a good kid. And then I got word back from him that he had accepted migration to Canada and I've never been able to contact him since. Don't know where he is. He night be still alive, he was six years younger than me. I'm only eighty-five now so he'd be seventy nine now. That's life.

That must have been a bit disappointing?

24:00 I would have liked him to come out here. You do things in war time that you wouldn't do otherwise. Why would I ever ask a Ukranian boy to come out here to Australia? But wartime he wasn't a Ukranian, he was my friend. But we were living in this house, we were taken to work mostly morning,

24:30 you had to get up at five o'clock, you had to be at the farm at six o'clock. It's daylight by four o'clock over there in summer time especially. We'd have our meals on the farm and then at night time we had to be back in the camp by eight o'clock. Still daylight over there. Not in winter, it was dark very early. And

then if we needed anything, a few times we had to go to the doctor.

25:00 The guard would have to march us into the nearest town which was Kreuzberg. Not Kreuzberg Germany, that's where the Volkswagons are made, this was Kreuzberg Austria. Anyway, we were treated I suppose within reason. But by gee you had to work. That wasn't easy.

Were there any guards either there or at the previous camp who

25:30 **were rougher or tougher than other guards?**

You always get that. Some guards are more understanding than others are. I think that is the right word. They understood that we were from our country doing our best and so are they. There are all types. Some guards are better than others. I know there was one guard, this was when I was out on the farm. He was a,

26:00 well I suppose you could call him a mongrel, and I don't know I lower word you can use in the English language than that. Adolf Grubek. He was a so and so! If he could do anything to make life miserable for us he would do it. But we were very happy when later on he got moved to the Russian front.

What sort of things did he do?

Well, I don't know. If there is anything.

26:30 Now for instance we used to get some Red Cross parcels with food in them. Not as much as most people think because sometimes we'd go three months without any Red Cross parcel then a parcel would come and we wouldn't' get one for another couple of weeks. And then another great long gap. So he would, all the parcels were kept in his room and we each had a little nook or corner

27:00 for our stuff and I think some of that stuff disappeared and I know where it went. But anyway, you can't prove these things. He was at this place all day while we were working on the farm. I never forgave him, Adolf for that.

And what did those parcels mean to you?

They meant a lot. Apart from a little bit of extra food, they showed

27:30 the Germans that our countries have still got everything and the Germans were just going down like that, ration wise. So they were very jealous of us. And we played it to the hilt. You do those things. You wouldn't do it now perhaps but we did it then. If we could make our country out to be even greater than it was,

28:00 we'd do it.

You said you were the elected leader. What sort of from did that take? Was there any kind of organisation in terms of meeting or that sort of thing? Did you have discussions?

I was the boss of the camp apart from the guard. Everything the guard had to do had to come through me. If he had to tell the other boys to do something, he had to tell me and I had to tell them.

28:30 I coped with that quite well. There was only one problem we ran into and it did come back on me. Towards the finish. A couple of the boys escaped. How did they do that? We got a hacksaw and sawed through the bars on the window and they got out and it happened to be the window closest to my bed where they were getting out. They never succeeded.

29:00 They didn't get away for very long. They were caught and the Germans found out how they were doing it. I was held responsible because I was their boss. I was their (UNCLEAR) is the German word, confidence man is the English word for it. I copped all the blame and that happened three times. So I was held responsible for three escapes. And towards the finish, do you mind if I don't go into this?

29:30 I wouldn't be here today. Had the war not finished then, I wouldn't be here today. Eventually because of that I was taken away from that camp and put in prison

30:00 and finished my days in Markt Pongau which was a disciplinary camp. In other words, a prison camp within a prison system. That's where the war finished for me, then. I was due to be court martialled over that.

30:30 Over helping the escape. The Germans looked very badly on that. Escaping from German control. It was bad. But anyway that's, a lot to do before the war finishes.

Did you in fact at any time during, from the time you were captured, think about escaping?

No, I knew my geography far too well.

31:00 I knew I had to do one of two things. Go through the German front lines or cross the Alps into Switzerland. I knew there was no hope of either. There was no other way out. There was through the front line or over the Alps. No chance. None of them did escape from there. From that area. Other areas they may have been successful, but from where we were you couldn't do it.

31:30 **Prior to those particular escapes when you were in the camp at the farm, were there previous attempts at other camps where you had been? Where people tried to escape?**

There may have been but I never heard of any successful escapes. I don't think I heard of any others. I wouldn't have heard of others, they would have had to be successful for me to hear of them and I never heard of any successful escapes from within that area. We were

32:00 totally boxed in by the Alps.

I just wondered whether anyone had tried to get away and suffered the consequences of that. We had heard stories of people probably in a different region altogether, but people that tried to get away and then suffered the consequences of…

The Germans looked very adversely on attempted escapes. They didn't like the idea and the

32:30 Great Escape that happened in a different area among officers. They were all officers. And that was Northern Germany near the Polish, what had been the Polish border. The great escape, there have been films of it recently. That was totally different from escape from a work camp. They were not workers, they were officers and officers didn't have to work.

And did those men that tried to escape, did they speak to you about it?

Oh yes.

33:00 **You knew all about it?**

I had helped them. I helped supply food, whatever I could to help them. Food and everything. Whatever I could do I helped them. There is no doubt I was guilty as charged you might say because I did help them to escape. But they didn't get very far, it wasn't successful. There was three of them escaped, Greg Bourchier,

33:30 he happened to be an Aussie that came to the camp later on and he said, "This is no good, they're making me work all the time." So he said, "I'm going to escape." And so we said, "Okay we'll help you." He didn't get far. And another chap was Frankie Wheatcroft and the other was Henry Davis. They're the three that escaped from there. Now one little point I don' t know whether I should put this on tape but it actually did happen. Frankie Wheatcroft

34:00 who, an Englishman from somewhere in England, I don't remember where and it doesn't matter. But he became very 'un-British' eventually. I don't mean that he became German. He became dirty, slovenly, untidy. He just wasn't a good soldier. He was no credit to his fellow cobbers.

34:30 I pulled a string and had him removed from the camp, sent back to base camp. He was no good to us. He was doing our total reputation, all of us, he was doing us damage. Actually, he was working on a farm and a farmer came to me and told me that he wanted to get rid of Frank. Frank was not good. He wasn't blending into the family he was working with, he wasn't blending with the rest of his

35:00 cobbers. So I thought best thing to do so I got him removed. So that is one of the powers that I had as leader of the camp.

So as leader how did you feel the burden if you like of keeping morale up and maintaining those standards so everyone was in…

It's a big responsibility. But I think I was able to cope

35:30 one way or another. I coped. They were generally a good bunch of boys. They were decent fellows. One chap, Len Smith, he came from some part of London itself. He was having trouble corresponding with his wife and he asked me to write to her and I did, I told her that,

36:00 well I suppose her that Len was having a tough trot and try to encourage him a bit more. She wasn't encouraging him at all. Because he used to, "Reg, read this." She wasn't helping him. And I

36:30 think when you are in a prison camp, you need all the help you can get, mentally and in every other way. And she just wasn't helping him at all. She was more or less belittling him. It wasn't the right thing to do. So I think from there on after I wrote to her and I think she improved. May have been some problem between them and they just weren't combined and of course he'd been away for

37:00 quite a few years. That's life. You get all sorts.

How did the letters that you received from Iris help you?

Wonderfully. Words of encouragement. That's what we needed. She wasn't a brilliant writer, but she wrote some very nice, comforting letters. Gave me all the

37:30 local gossip, what so and so has done this and so and so has gone here and it helped a lot I knew what was going on, but she was great to me. She was great to me. I don't say that I wouldn't have survived without her help, because that's not right. I would have survived much the same. I would have learnt to

cope, which you do as a prisoner of war. You learn to cope with the circumstances as those circumstances are at the time.

38:00 She was great.

You spoke earlier about the first time when you received the news that your family knew where you were. Did you receive a letter from them on that occasion, or...

Well yes, I think I might even have it somewhere on the list there, the

38:30 first letter from my mother informing me that they had heard I was okay. I received a lot of letters before that. But she had written before she had received that I was okay. And of course you know your mother is always very soft hearted and so forth and she took the upset rather seriously, rather hurtfully. But eventually

39:00 she became reconciled with the fact I was a prisoner of war and I'd be there until the end of the war. I think that's about the best way I could put it.

Can you remember receiving that first letter though when you realised?

I don't think it meant anything other than personally to me, just a feeling of thank God they know. That's about all I could say

39:30 about that. I don't know how else I could describe it. A feeling of relief that they knew I was okay. If all this were to be done again I'd do a lot of it very different perhaps. Yes, I think I'd do some things different.

40:00 But what I did at any stage was what I felt had to be done at the particular time. At a later date or an earlier date it may have been different but I did it at that particular time. But it is never easy because we are not trained for these circumstances

40:30 at all. We don't know just how we should react to them or I don't know.

Tape 7

00:32 With prisoners of war there would be a thousand different stories, or a thousand anything.

You said that there were things you wish you had handled differently, what specifically?

Having to send that young Frankie Wheatcroft away. I regretted doing that. But at the time I think I did the right thing. It was more important

01:00 for us to uphold our image among the Germans than to upset him. I think so. Our image to us was very important. As is say whenever you went through a town or, you put on your best. We were trying to do that with the Germans. We were trying to show ourselves as being better than them.

01:30 Of course we weren't better than them at all, not in reality. We were different but not necessarily better. But we wanted to try and prove to them that we were better.

You guys must have, there were ten of you must have got quite close over that time.

You go to work fourteen hours a day there's not much time for anything else is there. You've still got to try and, you know full well you've got to do another fourteen hours of that a day.

02:00 Fourteen hours tomorrow.

And how long were you on that farm?

Three years. It was just over four years altogether. From the 29th April 1941 until the war finished on the 8th May 1945. That's four years, ten days.

What did you do for things like Christmas?

02:30 Christmas is not very important for the Germans. Easter is. Easter is far more important than Christmas to them. Down to their own local way of doing things. Easter is very important to them.

Well, what did you do for Easter then?

We didn't do anything. Just worked. See everyone was work, work, work. It was wartime. There's not much you can do. They're

03:00 very religious people the Austrians and they still had their churches and all that, oh yes very important to them.

I wasn't quite sure how this story went but did you say you were nearly court martialled at one

point?

I was to face court martial but the war finished.

For helping prisoners escape?

03:30 Yes. I was coming up for court martial under section, I forget what it was. I'd been notified even about the fact that I was to be court martialled.

From the Australians?

No from the Germans. Oh yes it was a German court martial and that wouldn't go easy.

How could the Germans court martial you though?

It's similar to a court martial with us, I don't know what they call it now, I've forgotten. But it is the same type of thing as is

04:00 if I was being court martialled by an Australian, you'd be court martialled by your superior officers. So in Germany I'd be court martialled by the German officers.

So what exactly did you do to help them escape?

It's not so much what I did, it's what I knew. That they were rebelling against. They knew that I knew that I was going to escape. They knew that I helped them escape. They couldn't do otherwise because we had to saw the bars through

04:30 right beside my bed. There was no doubt that I was totally guilty. I'm proud of it now. Very proud of it. Anyway, it worked out alright. The war finished and there was no court martial ever held.

So when you went to Salzburg was that because you were up for court martial?

It wasn't actually Salzburg, but not far away, Bischofshofen,

05:00 I think was the actual word. Only a small discipline camp there.

Did it upset you at the time?

No, you just took it for granted. Took it as it comes. That's a pretty town that Salzburg. A beautiful area. High mountains there with the snow. Very good.

With that group of men that came so close over such a long period of time,

05:30 **was there any fights that broke out amongst the group?**

No, not to my knowledge. There may have been misunderstandings or disagreements, fights no. I never saw a fight among our own little group. You wouldn't have achieved anything anyway. We just didn't fight.

So you were quite unusual in that

06:00 **you weren't attached to a much bigger camp. You were just on your own.**

I was on my own but we were under the direction, more under the control of the big main camp.

And would you ever go and see the other guys in the main camp?

I went once. I was taken there once. I had a list of things I knew our boys needed and so forth and I think it took about three days.

06:30 The guard had to go with me and by train, a hundred and fifty miles all the way. One of the benefits of being the leader of the camp, I got that and they took me to this camp and I achieved what I went for, got all the various bits and pieces that the boys needed.

07:00 **What was that camp like, compared to where you were?**

It was a very big camp. Very big camp that one in Wolfsburg. There was an Italian camp next door to it and they were being held prisoner too you know, but this was right near the finish. And that camp copped

07:30 a bombing. Quite a lot of Italians killed in that. A lot of them wounded too, Allied bombing. I don't know whether it was intentional or whether it was misdirected. I don't know.

When you look back now or even in more recent times when you've looked back at that three year period, what stands out as the hardest times, when you're on that farm?

08:00 There must have been some time that was worse than others, but I can't just think of any particular one at the moment. No, I can't say there is an outstanding bad moment while I was there.

What did you miss most about home?

08:30 I'm a very homely person. I'm very family orientated. I was at that time. Letters to me mean so much. Another point. Talking about letters, I kept a record of every letter I ever wrote, who it was to and the day I wrote it and I kept

09:00 likewise a record of every letter I received, the day I received it, who had written it and the day it was written. And I've got all those details here and it would surprise you to see how many there were. And I don't think any other prisoner would have kept as complete a record as I have there.

Why was it important to keep that record?

Something to do perhaps. Something to fill in the time.

09:30 Something for my own mental satisfaction. I knew who wrote to me and I knew when they wrote it. It was good. Every letter that I ever received from Iris. And we've discussed this when we are together many, many times.

What sort of things did you discuss about those letters, after the time?

10:00 I don't know. What does a man and his wife discuss about, there are lots and lots of things? I think that in a way she was very proud of what I had done in keeping all those letters and proud also of the letters that I wrote. I was

10:30 a good correspondent if I say it myself. Some of them, not all of them, I've still got some of the letters here to prove it. I loved writing letters. We used to receive an odd issue of cigarettes. I've never smoked a cigarette in my life and I traded those cigarettes, what for? Letter writing material. Letter forms or letter cards,

11:00 which is very much smaller. I used to buy those letter forms or cards to the chaps that didn't bother writing so much and I was able to write far more letters than I was really entitled to.

Apart from family was there anything else that you really missed about home?

11:30 I suppose there was but I can't recall, nearly everything reverberates around your family. What were they doing and why were they up there doing that and so forth.

Did you ever get sick in those three years?

Not particularly. I was pretty healthy

12:00 I suppose. I had a few problems. I had cancer cut out of the lip on the 15th of February, the war finished in May. I had cancer cut of there and I've been battling cancer ever since. Skin cancers, that sort of thing. They're all skin grafts.

And did this happen while…

While I was a POW, yes.

12:30 **And what was the procedure like to have that done?**

I suppose it would be much the same as if I had it done here. An English doctor did it. Of course he was captain. All doctors were captains. He did it, the thing was sent away and analysed, much the same as it would have been done here.

13:00 **What about entertainment? Did you have any access to shows or concerts or plays or music?**

Now, to answer that question I have to revert back to when we were at the horse hospital. We had this one big room and there were thirty five or thirty eight, thirty five initially there. I think they stepped it up another three later on.

13:30 Yes, we used to have ping-pong tournaments, spelling bees, quiz sessions, we had one chap played the mouth organ beautifully. And the Germans got him a mouth organ. That's not too bad is it? They got him a mouth organ so he could play. Things like that, you had to try and entertain yourself somehow. Try and break the monotony. And that was one way of

14:00 doing it. And of these quiz sessions, that type of thing, good. Another thing that I was good at, at that time. You've probably never heard of it, being a girl, 'scratch pulley'. You'd get two men to sit on their haunches with a roo stick between you and you put your legs against each other and see who could lift the other bloke off the ground. I was good at that. And there was one contest we had, I won that.

14:30 I wasn't as big as the other fellows but I think I was fitter than most. I always regarded fitness as being pretty important and I don't think some of the others put the same emphasis on it.

So you did that in the room?

In our room at night. Now when we were on the farm we never had any entertainment at all like that. We were working fourteen hours a day and you didn't have much energy left for anything by the end of the day.

15:00 Only twelve hours in winter. That was a big help. But then you had to battle the cold and the snow and I suppose that balanced things up a bit.

So there was no sport that happened at that time?

We played one game of football against the other work camp I said a while ago. People named, don't know the names,

15:30 Kipling was the district they came from, a labour camp there. They came over or did we go to them, I forget. But we played a game of football and they killed us. We were not any good at football. But other than that I don't recall any from of entertainment at all.

You said you were pretty good at

16:00 **negotiating. What sort of things did you get into the group? Were there specific things that you needed to get, supplies or things that would help…**

Yes clothing mainly, German issue clothing. Boots were terribly important thing over there. You can't walk barefooted in the snow. That's for sure. So we got that.

16:30 We got new issue of boots for us. You can't work on a farm without boots of some description. Things like that I was able to help the boys a little bit. I'd liked to have helped them a lot more. But there is one thing George wouldn't do. He wasn't going to talk to those bloody Germans. It's not the right attitude if you want to help your mates.

17:00 **When you were on the farm did you see any people from the town, any women, any…?**

Women! Plenty of women over there. Firstly, let me explain why. The men were all at the war. When it came to harvesting time we would do the harvest and there was only one threshing machine, in the district

17:30 and that would come around all the farms and thresh their grain. This was all on the plant and that would have to be put through the thresher. All women doing that. If I was the only man I'd be doing the hard work there. And

18:00 the women would be doing all the other work and believe me they can work, they can work just like a man. They've done it all their lives. They are the peasant women. I don't say the city women are like that, they're not. But these other women they could take a couple of cows out and yoke them up onto a plough and go and plough a paddock. We, what happened, the first farm, I was on two farms.

18:30 The first farm I caused a stir, I walked off that because they, I couldn't stand the food they used to dish up. It was filthy and I protested and I won. But I wasn't the leader of the camp then. That was not long after I went to the farm camp. Anyway, this Mitzi, she was something similar to my age. Big, hefty, she could have picked me up and thrown me out the

19:00 door. When it came to ploughing. She'd be leading the cows and I'd be holding the plough at the back because I knew more about that and she knew more about driving the cows than I did. And things like that, two cows pulling a wagon load of hay as high as this ceiling. They'd be up,

19:30 I might have to, using the pitchfork, throw the hay to the top and they're up there treading it down and they know how to do it, they've been doing it all their lives.

Did you ever hear of any of the POW men starting up romances with the local women?

I did hear of a little bit of it but I think it might have been exaggerated too. Luckily there were no German women on my farm. None.

20:00 And there was only this Polish girl, Zoske Treikuna Granowski was the young fella. And Zaska had her fella he lived on the next farm and he was also a Pole, so they go on well together.

Was Zaska a POW?

No, foreign labour. Forced labour.

20:30 Quite a few of them around. There was another Polish girl she worked on a farm way up on the hills there. Zelka. I don't know what her real name was. Christ, she was as strong as an ox! But know women didn't come into it very much at all. I have heard of some contacts being made

21:00 and as a matter of fact there was one made in our camp but I knew nothing about it. A strong point this. When I was moved to Markt Pongau, about there months before the end of the war, I lost touch with my fellows, until the war finished. And I read it in my diary, only the other day, some days after the war, the chaps

21:30 that were from my old work camp, my own cobbers. They came through pulling wheelbarrows and whatever and one of them eventually tried to make his way back to the farm where he apparently got very friendly of the daughter of the whole of the German family. What was her name?

22:00 Frauney [?] Funny thing you don't know people over there by the surname as you do here. You know them by their farm name. Wald bauer Frauney, Wald bauer was the name of the farm, Wald meaning forest or scrub. This blondie, I know it never succeeded because eventually he wrote to me years later

22:30 and said he was living on his own in England. And he made an attempt to get back to see Fraunie. I don't know how it worked out because they threw us out of Germany so I don't know. But he is the only one that I ever heard of and I didn't hear the conclusion to it so I don't know.

How hard was it for you to leave those men when it all…?

23:00 I had no option. I was taken away under arrest.

How did they respond when that happened?

I don't know I wasn't there I don't know what they thought.

So you didn't really get a chance to say goodbye to them?

No. I was working out in the paddock, I forget what I was doing. The German guard

23:30 came along. He had a pushbike at the time. "Reg come over here." So I went over. "Righto, you're under arrest." So he took me straight away and I never even said goodbye to the people I was working with in the paddock. In the paddock it was, I was doing something I don't remember what it was. And I was taken from there straight away and back to the camp, barracks,

24:00 pick up my personal gear and marched me into the town put on a train and I was gone. I was put under a guard to be taken through to Salzburg and from there to Markt Pongau. As far as I can make out the court martials were all held at Markt Pongau. And that's where I would have been court martialled. But the war intervened luckily.

24:30 **What were the other men in that holding camp there, were they in for similar things?**

Most of them yeah. Some of them were there for sabotage. Different crimes. I don't think any to them were there for theft but they might have been. But you mustn't look on theft as been a mark against the chaps there, because anything you could

25:00 pinch from the Germans, good you'd do it.

Prior to leaving the camp did you have any indication that the war was coming to an end?

Apart from leaving the farm camp where I was? We knew it wouldn't be long. We knew. I could read the papers. We knew that

25:30 it would end some day fairly soon. And all we had to do was hang on that time. We didn't care what happened to us as long as we could hang on. They could do what they liked with us as long as they didn't kill us. Well, I don't think they did. They didn't kill me anyway. They might have if the war had gone on longer I might have been in more trouble than I was.

What would have been the punishment along with the court martial?

26:00 I don't think they would have shot me. I don't think so. I certainly would have been given a long period of solitary confinement. That would be for sure, at least that. Solitary confinement. They were, pardon me if I say it, they were shitting in their own nest. Because I was working on the farm doing work for

26:30 them and they took me away. I don't know how they would replace. I knew the workings of the farm just as well as they did. I don't know how they would replace, labour was getting very scarce at that time. They did the wrong thing by taking me away. That's the way it worked out.

How did you respond to the guard when he said you were under arrest?

You can't do any thing. You just say, okay and you've got to go.

27:00 You can't rebel or argue or dispute it, you don't have that option.

Do you think you had changed as a person by then?

Possibly change was taking place all the time. I think under any circumstance, anybody under similar circumstance they would change as time moved on. I'd grown older.

27:30 I was only twenty-two when I was first captured and I was nearly twenty-seven when it finished. So times change and we change with it.

Did you hear anything of your brother while you were there, and what he was doing?

Only from letters from home. I even got a letter from him. I've got a letter there,

28:00 this is a very unusual thing and it does concern this. It was written by my younger brother, he was in

Syria at the time because our Australian troops were in Syria. He had written to my second eldest brother, Ray. Telling him he was in it, he describes what he is doing in Syria, driving trucks and so forth and saying at that time, this was written in

28:30 1941, he still hadn't heard anything of me. That's right yes. And up until that time none of the family had heard where I was or what had happened. He mentions just one liner,

29:00 "Haven't heard anything of Reg yet." So he didn't know. But he eventually as I said before he was a member of the corps troops ammunition company, he eventually became a paratrooper and learned to jump out of planes as a paratrooper. But they were based at that stage mainly up on the Atherton Tableland. But the war finished and he never jumped in

29:30 anger.

Why was that upsetting or moving to you that he would write that line?

Well, I suppose for a start he was my younger brother and he's emphasising the point that they still didn't know whether I was

30:00 alive or not.

And just the family not having any concept of what you are going through or…

No concept at all because they didn't even know where I was. I think it was September that they got word that I was alive as a POW. And it was

30:30 sometime after the new year that I got word from them that they knew that I was still okay. The funny thing…

Maybe at this point we'll go a little bit further, how you've come to find out about the end of the war and that you were moving on?

31:00 I was in Markt Pongau when word came through that the war was over. But the German guards still stayed in position because they weren't game to…the German guards wouldn't release us because they were frightened

31:30 that we might retaliate against the civilian population, so they held us there for another two days. We wouldn't have touched the local population. We were so damn pleased to get out of it. We had nothing against the local population at all. Then the first thing, the Americans broke through to us. Now the Americans from this way and the Russians from this way, they met face to face, where do you think they met?

32:00 At out old farm camp area there. That's where they came in contact with each other.

At this stage you were gone from there?

I had gone from there. So we stayed there for quite some time while plans were made to evacuate us really. So then eventually when we were ready, we

32:30 were still sleeping on the ground and no buildings to protect us and American trucks picked us up and took us through in groups of twenty-four. And we were put on the side of the aerodrome at Salzburg in our groups of twenty-four. Pegs were put in and, "Right you stay with that peg number so and so, you stay with

33:00 that peg number so and so." Then as the planes came in and took each group off, you moved up one peg and eventually of course, our turn came and we flew out of Salzburg to a place called Epinal in East France. We landed there.

How did it feel

33:30 **to fly out of Germany?**

Good. I tell you what we got a surprise because we could see down under all the damage that the bombs had done, you know bomb craters, hundreds of them. We could see where all the bombing took place. Anyway, we flew into eastern France, then first off, the first thing they did was delouse us. I don't think we were lousy at that time, that all happened earlier, but we were free

34:00 of lice by that time. They deloused us again. Gave us new uniforms, different uniforms, clean uniforms. And then we were put on a hospital train, a Red Cross hospital train and went right across France past Rheims, to a place called Le Havre,

34:30 right on the coast of the English channel. It's south of Dover, Calais, and from there after spending another night out in the open because there is no accommodation, we were flown across into England across the channel. Old Dakotas, DC3s [Douglas Dakota bomber]. They just about finished now, I think there are only one or two operating

35:00 in Australia. We flew across to a place called Guildford in Surrey. And from there by truck down to

Eastbourne right on the south coast of England, lovely spot but their peaches are pebbly, no good. They haven't got any beaches like we have, totally different. There we were given mail and

35:30 so forth. A dozen letters at a time. They'd caught up with us.

Had they lost you for a while? How did people know where you were?

Well, as soon as we were totally released somehow the Red Cross people got a letter form through to us, some special

36:00 type of letter form, you could only write a certain amount. And that was posted home so, yes I think it was posted direct to home. They knew I was free. So at Eastbourne we were given a bit of recreation time and so forth.

36:30 Another story that does concern this, during the war, while I was at my very first camp in the horse hospital business, a bloke named George Gaskell, an Englishman from Lancashire. He wanted me to write a letter, he did not have the ability to correspond at all; he wanted me to write a letter to these people

37:00 who he was very friendly with. He wanted to write to them. He said, "Reg, will you write to them?" They were the Smith family in Lancashire. And I wrote to them and they wrote back and that went on for a while and after a while we wrote to each other independent of George Gaskell. So when I arrived at Eastbourne there was an invitation from the Smith family

37:30 of Lancashire to come up to visit them. And I went up, now if you look up at that Red Cross parcel there, it shows you something very relevant to the story I'm telling now. Read what it says on it, "A gift on behalf of your next of kin

38:00 with best wishes from the London committee, Australian Red Cross Society." I took that parcel full of goodies from the Australian Red Cross to the hostess where I was going to and she was working doing something WVS or something, Women's Voluntary Service, he was a baker,

38:30 Bill Smith. And during the day he would take me, put me somewhere with some people that were, one day I know he handed me over to a vet, going around the sale yards and that worked out well. I wrote to those people for a short time after I came home but then, like everything else it died. I came

39:00 back from Lancashire then back to Eastbourne.

How did the people like the Smith family treat you as a POW?

Wonderful. It's the only way I could say it.

Did they want to know your experience or did they avoid the topic?

They didn't avoid it. They didn't have any sons of their own. They had an elder daughter that was married to an American and they had younger daughter about this high,

39:30 must have been a big fifteen year gap between the two daughters, something wrong there, anyway that's the way it was. I came back then and there was another invitation to visit another family, up in Shropshire so I went up there for a few days and came back and then they wanted some volunteers to go through a testing period for a visit to Buckingham Palace.

40:00 I volunteered. We were drooling. You were checked out from every possible angle and I was one of the twelve that was still there at the finish. So off I went with these other people to Buckingham Palace. We met the King and Queen. We had afternoon tea at Buckingham Palace. We met the King and Queen. The Queen Mother just died not so long ago

40:30 and King George VI who was not a brilliant type of person or he wouldn't have got above the rank of lance corporal if he had been in a real army. But the Queen Mother, I always said, "She was a lady." I can't say anything nicer than that to anybody. We enjoyed that, having been to Buckingham Palace right.

What about, were the Queen's daughters there as well?

The present Queen, she was there, about a seventeen, eighteen year old

41:00 and Princess Margaret was there. She's just passed away too I believe. I wrote in my diary, 'Princess Lizzie looks alright but Margaret is bow legged!' That's my comments. Anyway, we spent another couple of days in Eastbourne and then we were put on a train up to Liverpool.

Before we got to Liverpool. That experience at Buckingham Palace must have

41:30 **been amazing?**

Well, it's a unique experience, especially for me. I've never been a great believer in royalty. They're the cause of me going to Greece. But that's beside the point, it's not their fault.

Did you think that at the time?

Oh yes, I always thought that we were sent to Greece because of the connection between Greek royalty and English royalty. At least I think so. I might be wrong.

Tape 8

00:39 **Can you tell us a little more about the pomp and circumstance about the visit to Buckingham Palace?**

As I was saying, we were well chosen because you had to be fit, you had to be appearance wise up to scratch, uniform and all that. Polished boots.

01:00 And we went by bus or something and pulled up at Buckingham Palace and we walked, no you don't walk when you're in the army, you march, through the portals of Buckingham Palace into the great, big, backyard. Big lawn area, must be five or six acres of it, beautiful big lawn. And that was in June 1945. So June in England is

01:30 their nicest month I think. Beautiful. There were a lot of people. Mainly troops, both sexes from various parts of the Empire, there was an Empire then. And there was a certain number of medals dished out and I saw one chap being decorated with the VC [Victoria Cross]

02:00 and I think his name was Brown. He was an airman from Canada. He was in a wheelchair and he had no legs. I think he would have swapped that VC medal for a new pair of legs.

02:30 Anyway, we enjoyed that. The King and Princess Elizabeth, the present Queen that is. They marched around one side and the Queen and Margaret Rose marched around the other side and they met. You don't ever speak first to royalty. They

03:00 speak to you. And the Queen stopped in front of me and asked me a few questions and I answered as best I could and we talked for I suppose a couple of minutes, quite a little bit of a chat you could call it. But I've always said of the Queen Mother, 'She was a lady.' I don't know of any reason to change that at all. She was the pick of the royalty bunch as far as I was concerned.

Do you

03:30 **remember what you spoke about?**

It was just typical everyday stuff. Nothing very intimate or anything like that.

She didn't ask you about your war experience or anything like that?

Not precisely, no. Just how I enjoyed being clear of the war behind me and so forth.

04:00 It was an interesting experience because not many people can say they've been to a party at Buckingham Palace. And here is me just a plain old army driver and I've been there.

And not in those circumstances when the war had come to an end in Europe, I mean they were extraordinary circumstances to be there really. So how did you feel about that at the time as a young man?

I felt very lucky.

04:30 I was very happy to have been chosen. Firstly to have been one of the final twelve that was selected. I was happy about that. And I knew then that would give me a memory to last me a long time ahead. It did too. I still recall it quite vividly.

What's the thing you remember most about that?

05:00 Firstly the beauty of that huge back lawn in Buckingham Palace. It's quite big, they must have more than one gardener there! It was beautiful. I don't know whether it would always be beautiful each month of the year, but that was in June and it was beautiful then. Lovely flowers and so forth. Very good.

05:30 Very nice. I wasn't impressed by the King he was a, well he left a lot to be desired as a king. I always like to think of a king as an upstanding strong man. The pride of the bunch. I couldn't say the same about him. No. His speech was very poor and he stuttered. That's not his fault either. That's just the luck of the draw I suppose.

06:00 He never wanted to be King in the first place.

You've been I living in such different such confined circumstance as a prisoner of war for four years, and suddenly you were in London surrounded by wealth and royalty and just something entirely different from where you had been. How did you

06:30 **adjust to that change?**

Well, you said I was in London, that's very true. I went to St Paul's, Westminster Abbey, it's all in my diary. That's how I knew I was there. I travelled around in the top of a double-decker bus, two shillings I think it

07:00 cost me. I could go anywhere I liked on the bus for two shillings a day. It might have been a concession to us I don't know. But I enjoyed that. And I've seen an awful lot of London. Fleet Street, Billingsgate Fish Markets, I've seen all them. That's just the way it was. I was on my own all the time.

What was it like to suddenly be somewhere, where to suddenly had the freedom to move around and do as you please?

07:30 A great relief I suppose. I think you want a better answer than that. Well, I don't how I could answer that one really. it is just a great relief and a great sense of freedom and on top of that I'm only here because we won. And that was a good feeling.

08:00 I could tell you this, a few of our chaps when they hit England, they went off the deep end altogether. They did all the wrong things. You see we were suddenly in possession of money. All our wartime pay was stored up and we were able to get it and I didn't draw much because I wanted money for when I got home. But some people as soon as they got the money they did all the wrong things.

08:30 There is one chap I will talk about, Greg Bourchier. Now Greg was the first Aussie that escaped from our farm camp. When he arrived in England. I didn't see this but I heard from his own cobbers, the first thing he did was spend money and he got himself a woman. He was with this female on the Street

09:00 and somebody, an Englishman, made a comment about, "The Aussies being over here pinching our women." Words to that effect. And Greg turned around, he was an aggressive bugger, he turned around and smashed this bloke and broke his glasses. It cost him a lot of money in the local police court. That's what some of them were like. They didn't know how to control themselves under a different set of

09:30 circumstances. All of a sudden they were free. They couldn't handle it. I didn't spend much money I bought a few presents to bring home with me. I knew I wanted that money to set up house when I got home.

That day that you heard that the war was over, what went through your mind that day?

10:00 I don't think I can answer that because I just can't recall it. It was so exhilarating I suppose would be the word. I don't know. It was just "Thank God for that." At that time I'd cobbered up with an old miner from Wiluna in Western Australia, named Fred Alice. He'd be gone now. He was skinny as a rake.

10:30 He couldn't take the German food at all and he was terrible skinny. So I was helping Fred as much as I could because he had no strength at all. But we were just so pleased it was all over.

Those final few months for you after the war were…

Tough.

What was it about those few months

11:00 **that made it so much tougher than the previous few years?**

The fact that I was under arrest all the time. That's what made it tough. And the conditions in the discipline area. They were pretty tough. But I didn't care, I knew the end of the

11:30 war was coming. I knew that I hadn't done anything wrong.

When you say it was tough was it in terms…did you have enough food to eat or?

On no, never enough. And that's enough to keep us alive up to a certain low standard. But not enough to say, "Gee, I've had a good feed."

12:00 Not that sort of tucker [food]. The tucker itself was very poor. Because they didn't have much themselves at that time of the war. Food was very scarce everywhere. We didn't get the pick of it either.

And what about the treatment of the prisoners, was that different there compared with where you had been?

They were fairly strict, the German guards were fairly strict.

12:30 They knew the writing was on the wall and they were not going to upset any of us any more than necessary. Because I suppose they feared the consequences too if war finished and we got the upper hand. They didn't want to get in our black books. I don't think I could describe it any better than that. I don't say they came crawling to us. Because they didn't.

13:00 The average German is fairly proud too. They didn't come crawling to us but they didn't want to upset us.

While you were in those various camps during those years, what did you know if anything of the camps where the Jews were being held and where much more severe things were

happening?

Virtually nothing. See the Germans people themselves

13:30 knew very little of what was happening to the Jews. And I got most of my news from the German people. So I knew virtually nothing of what was to become the holocaust. I didn't know. That must have been terrible for those that were Jews. I know because even my little episode must have been terrible for my people at home.

14:00 Not knowing precisely is one of the hardest things to bear.

So going back to when you did get to London and you had this incredible experience and some of the other blokes that wanted to be chosen must have been a bit jealous of you?

14:30 **Being one of those final twelve to get…**

Well yes, I suppose they were but I don't know, men don't show their feelings very much. They try to hide their true feelings. Women are a bit different but men try to hide what is underneath. And if they were disappointed or jealous of me they certainly didn't say so. They may have shown it but had I been wiser

15:00 enough to recognise the symptoms. But no, they didn't show it.

How would you describe your physical and mental condition after the war in that first month?

Physically, I was getting stronger all the time, doesn't take long, a month will put you back into normal condition. I think by the time I reached England

15:30 I was pretty near back to normal. By the time I left England on the 2nd of July 1945 I was back to normal. Mentally I was okay. I Was strong enough not to let anything get me down.

Do you remember the first time you sat down to a really fabulous meal?

16:00 Well, I suppose it would have been on one of those trips up to the Smith family at Weean [?]. When they did their best for me, or when I went to the second place. He was a manager of a local branch of Barclays Bank. He did the right thing. He and his wife did the right thing by me. They took me around and introduced me to a lot of people. And somewhere along those

16:30 lines I would have had a good feed. They would have turned it on for me.

What was the best thing do you think about being free again?

That's it. Being free. There is nothing like being free. To know that you are free and you can make your own decisions. Up to a point, being in the military

17:00 you are under certain restriction, but I was able to choose what I did within certain limits. I liked that.

And what were you looking forward to in the future?

Coming back home to my family first. And then starting off with married life and getting a good job, which I was

17:30 able to do.

So can you tell us about that trip home to Australia?

Yes I can! On the 2nd of July we left Liverpool, that's up north west coast of England, on board the Mauritania. The Mauritania had been one of the ships in the convoy that took us overseas. A big boat, forty-five thousand tonner. But there were a lot of prisoners of war there.

18:00 Australian and Kiwis only. And there were a lot of war brides on that boat. English war brides who had married Australians that had been stationed over there. And of course they were coming to Australia most of them for the first time. And we came across the Atlantic,

18:30 through the Panama Canal. We were allowed ashore for eight hours. Maybe four hours. At a place called Colon which is the Atlantic side of the Panama Canal. And then only to a great big American PX [Post Exchange] store, like a big canteen. We were allowed to do what we wanted to do there with what money we had.

19:00 I wasn't spending anything. I'm a bit of a scrooge and I wanted to save up the money for when I got home. And we went on board ship again and back, on through the Panama Canal and out into the Pacific. Japan was still at war that was July 1945 and the Japanese war didn't finish until August '45. So Japan was still at war.

19:30 So we set off I imagine. They don't tell you precisely what you are doing. But I think we were heading for Wellington New Zealand. We had Kiwis on board. And after a day or so out of Panama Canal on the Pacific side our boat turned around and went helter skelter back to Pearl Harbor. They told us there was a Jap sub in the area. I don't know if that is right,

20:00 but I have to believe that it is because that is what we were told. There was a Jap sub in the area. So into Pearl Harbor we went. that was a fair way off our course too. Now we had no money. So they paid us two dollars American. It came out of our pay book which I could show you there. Now the first thing we did when we went ashore at Honolulu, we'd been on ship's tucker for well fortnight,

20:30 three weeks something like that. We headed to a café for a decent feed. And you could have tea and toast, or anything you liked. And what do you reckon it cost us? Two dollars. So I was broke for the rest of my time in Pearl Harbor. That's all the money I had. But the Americans treated us very well. I'm a non-drinker but they picked up a lot of our boys and took them to the pub and shouted them.

21:00 We got back on board ship and then the ship moved out from the wharf and stopped. Another load of Aussies is coming, or it might have been Kiwis. One of the American boats picked them up and bring them out to us. And we, off we go again,

21:30 we're way down, Pearl Harbor is a bit like that, it opens out as it goes, at least that's my impression. And we're a long way, just out to the stage where you just feel the boat starting to react to the swell of the ocean and we stopped. What for? We looked around and there way in the distance coming from the harbour is an American boat, launch. Coming

22:00 flat out! You could see the waves splashing and standing up in the very bowels of the ship with one hand on the front of the boat, he might have had a rope in his hand, is the (UNCLEAR) and he's belting the boat. He's going home! That was so funny, I bet five thousand people cheered him on. they brought him in up the rope ladder and he was too drunk to get up the rope ladder so some of the seamen went down and helped him up the rope ladder.

22:30 So that was alright. Off again we went and heading to Wellington New Zealand. Got there on Saturday, Sunday, raining. Wellington always rains, always windy. So they tell us. Left there on Monday morning and off for Sydney Harbour. And late on I guess it would have been the Wednesday afternoon we came into Sydney Harbour and there was the sun setting

23:00 behind the Harbour Bridge. A glorious sight. Wonderful. We were back home again. We had completed the circuit. I like to call it 'Around the World on Five Bob a Day.' But it was great to get home.

23:30 I came home and they bunged me into a convalescent camp for a while and various other things that had to be done I suppose. And that was on the 8th of August I arrived home in Murwillumbah. On the 15th of August Japan surrendered. The war was over. And I like to say that the Japs heard I was here so they decided to give in, but that wasn't the case at all.

24:00 Couple of months passed by and then on the 3rd of November 1945, Iris and I got married. He had been a long courtship brought about by the war because we were engaged on the 16th of November 1940 so we'd just about a five year engagement. Now while I was

24:30 a prisoner of war I wanted a job when I got back to Australia. I wrote to the manager of the Shell company in Brisbane, giving me details, because they knew of Worthington transport, we'd carted all their produce at some time. And that application was received by him and it was put into what they call the Shell House Journal and then

25:00 when I came home eventually I went to Shell company and asked for a job. "What sort of a job?" I showed them their Shell House Journal. "That job." So I got a good job out of it. I was on the refuelling staff at Archerfield aerodrome. Archerfield was the airport then. But only, within twelve months, Eagle Farm, the present airport became the main one.

25:30 And I got transferred across to there. So that was lucky. Iris and I bought our first home. We paid half a house rent for a few months until we got our own home and then we never paid rent since. But we've always had a struggle. Mainly because we love travelling so much. Caravan travel is not cheap. But we loved it.

26:00 **Reg, can you tell us about first arriving back and meeting Iris again?**

Yes I can. How well do you know the north coast rail line? It used to run, I believe it's finished just about yesterday or today, the whole north coast line north of Casino is finished. Byron Bay,

26:30 there used to be a railway station, there was also a restaurant type of thing there with the railway station. That's not the right description of it. But anyway that's what, I travelled on the train the same day that I arrived in Sydney I boarded the train that night for home. I wasn't

27:00 supposed to but they made concessions and they got me onto it, and I travelled by train. And at Byron Bay I thought I'd get cleaned up and tidy up and comb my hair ready for it's only an hour's run through to Murwillumbah. And who should be on the railway siding at Byron Bay than Gran and Pop as they are now known, and Iris. They brought Iris with them. Down to Byron Bay to meet me.

27:30 Instead of all meeting in the confusion of everything at Murwillumbah Station. So that was it. That's where I met Iris again at Byron Bay.

What was it like to see her again?

Wonderful. She had grown a little bit older. She was nearly five years older than when I last saw her.

28:00 But that was okay, we hit it off right from the word, straightaway, no problems at all. And as I say, we got married on the 3rd of November 1945. I started work for the Shell company very soon afterwards and then eventually I resigned from the Shell company. I wanted to get a little bit of dirt between my toes. The old

28:30 farming instinct was still dominant. And we bought an orchard up in Stanthorpe. And went up there fruit growing and I also had a poultry farm attached to the orchard. That worked out alright. We were up there for four years. And then we sold that, did reasonably okay out of that. Never made a fortune but we didn't lose any money either.

29:00 And we went down to the Tweed [River] again, banana growing. That was alright. I had one of the best banana plantations on the Tweed. The Department of Agriculture said it was in the top six of the Tweed. Eventually our family grew up and started to drift away. Graeme went into the air force, that's the eldest one that is in Singapore now.

29:30 Rhonda left home she wanted to do her own thing, so she moved into Murwillumbah. So eventually we left there and we sold our house we had bought in Tyalgum, the village near where we were banana growing. And we bought a home in Murwillumbah right on the river bank. It was quite a nice home. I paid ten thousand and fifty dollars for it at auction.

30:00 Eventually we sold that for seventy five thousand dollars and Rhonda and her husband both in the air force had won a block of ground at the village of Condong just outside Murwillumbah where Chillingham is.

30:30 And they had to build a house on it within twelve months which was more sudden than they had anticipated. And they didn't have enough money to buy the block of land and build the house too. So Iris and I sold our home on the river bank and lent them the money to finish the house and we moved into it with the idea that when Graeme got out of the air force, Rhonda was going to get out earlier we knew,

31:00 they would pay us back and move into the house and we'd move out somewhere else. Well, that's the way it worked out. Graeme had to get out a bit earlier than he thought he would and he's TPI [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated] now. Rhonda's still going, she's running a family day care centre. So Iris and I had to move out and that's when we bought this place.

31:30 We went along smoothly for the eight and a half years that we had been here. Until Iris passed away on the 6th of March last year. That was a big blow because life hasn't been the same since. Not for me. I'm not cut out for bachelorhood. But I've tried to cope. It's different. We've had a hell of a good life. We raised

32:00 four kids quite successfully. We've done a lot of travelling. We've been around Australia. We've been up and down this way and the other way. We went dancing together. Iris joined the RSL [Returned and Services League] Women's Auxiliary, she's a life member of that. I'm a life member of the RSL. We both played bowls together. See the photo of Iris in her bowling

32:30 gear? She's a better bowler than me. She won a lot more trophies than I did. She was quite a good bowler. But I was only ordinary. But I enjoyed it, still do. I don't play now but I still watch bowls. I think I will be playing again soon. Soon as this knee improves.

Reg lots of men went to war leaving girlfriends and sweethearts behind and their relationships didn't last the distance.

33:00 **What was it about Iris and you that was different?**

We liked each other I think is the only way I could answer that. We were suited to each other. I won't say that we never had an argument because that would be wrong. We probably had many arguments, but that didn't stop us from carrying on with each other.

33:30 Life went on.

But it was an incredibly difficult thing to do while you were away and neither of you really knew what the future held and you both continued writing to one another. What sort of person was Iris that she was able to do that do you think?

I like to think of her as being an especially loyal person. And she knew what she wanted to do and I suppose she did it.

34:00 Her family have been very supportive of me, they're nearly all gone now. My family were very supportive of her. Very. They're nearly all gone too.

And during those years while you were POW, what did you used to think regarding Iris and what did you think when you wrote to her?

34:30 Very difficult to say. I tried to make my letters interesting. That's the first thing. Make your letters interesting. And after a bit of encouragement, a bit of juicy sweet stuff. And anyway, it worked

35:00 whatever it was. Mind you she did not have to wait for me. She was free to do what she liked. She chose to wait for me. I'm the winner, I was lucky there. She waited for me. She's a nice person, a good wife, a marvellous mother. She loved her kids and even now the kids, they love her. Although she's not here to have it.

35:30 No, she was a nice person. I was a lucky fellow. Very lucky. I've never spent a day of my life unemployed but thousands of people can say that, especially at my age. Unemployment was never a thing in my day. But I always had interesting jobs. Or tried to make them interesting. When I was with the Shell company I became a leading

36:00 hand. That's virtually the same as a foreman and that was good.

When you did come back to Australia and start work again as a civilian, how hard was it for you to adjust to life back in Australia?

Not hard. I think I had prepared myself for it mentally.

36:30 That I had to start working and providing. That's what a man's put in the world for is providing. He's got to provide for his family. And that's what I tried to do and I knew I had to do it. I put a lot into it and it worked.

How do you think your war experience changed you and effected the rest of your life?

37:00 Enormously but I can't say precisely how I would have been if I hadn't gone to war. I don't know. The wartime. My wartime experience gave me an awful lot of experience, a lot of understanding of human nature. We all react different to different circumstances.

37:30 I don't know, it's a hard question, other than that.

What do you think the experience taught you about yourself?

Tolerance. Mainly. Well, that's one of the important things. I've tried to be very tolerant. Luckily my family haven't caused me to be otherwise. They've been wonderful family.

38:00 They've been very good. That comes again from discipline in the air force, or in the service. They've all been disciplined. Not by me. But they accepted discipline. And that's good for young people. Something that is lacking today.

Are your wartime experiences the strongest you have?

I suppose they are my dominant experiences now. As we get older we tend

38:30 to look back. Because there is no point looking forward, there isn't far to go there. Although who knows. See I'm eighty five now. I haven't got a lot of years ahead of me to look forward to. I hope there is a few. But I wish Iris was still here to share them with me. it's not the same now.

39:00 **Do you dream about the war?**

No. That is something that is gone. No good dreaming about things.

Did you used to dream about it?

I don't think so. I wouldn't let myself. I know you can't stop yourself from dreaming though. No, I don't think I've dreamt about it. I've never let it become that dominant that It upset my personality.

39:30 **What does Anzac Day mean to you Reg?**

It means more to me than most others that are marching beside me because I've been through I a lot of ways more than most of them have been through. So Anzac is important to me but perhaps in a different way to how it might effect

40:00 other people. I still honour Anzac Day and I take part in it when ever I can. I marched this last Anzac Day here in Ipswich. But yes Anzac is important. We should be proud of those fellows. I lost at least two uncles at Anzac. A third one,

40:30 yes I think that was the way it was. There was one in Anzac and two in France or two in France and one in Anzac. Anyway, I'm not sure. They are both on Mum's side. Oh yes, Anzac is important to me.

Tape 9

00:31 **Explain to us where this diary came from?**

Before I left home to go overseas, Iris gave me this diary. She also gave me a wallet and I kept those two with me right through the whole of the European campaign. The whole of wartime campaign. I never ever gave thought to the idea of

01:00 losing it. I was determined to hang on to both of them. Now this diary, it obviously starts at the very first day of January '41. Now the morning I was captured on the 29th of April I ripped out all the pages from when the diary had begun until that date, the 29th of April. So the diary only really starts from

01:30 the next day when I got time to write, the 30th of April 1941. That's when it starts.

And Reg how often would you get to put an entry in the diary? Would it be everyday or every few days? How often?

In this case every day for the rest of the year, is in here. Except a couple of pages is lost I believe. And later on as the war progressed it became nearly impossible,

02:00 or more difficult to get notebooks to write my doings into. So I might go a week without an entry. But if anything or interesting or unusual cropped up, yes that would go in. And then towards the finish I had to stretch it out to a fortnight between entries because paper was just not available.

So could you read us a few entries from the diary?

02:30 Yes I can. And here's one which I, it's very strong in my memory. It starts off on Saturday the 7th of June 1941. We're on a train travelling at that time. We're on a train travelling from Corinth where we had been in camp, up to Salonika. That's where we were heading for.

03:00 We marched some of the time, we went by train some of the time. So I'll read now, "Oh my God, what a day, I'll never forget it. The worst of my life. I marched thirty-two miles in eleven hours today across the Brallos Pass

03:30 carrying all my gear. Five of our men died and one Jerry guard. Reached Lamia at four pm. Had a snack and got on train again. Will travel all night. I feel almost dead. Locked in again and fifty-three of us to a cattle truck."

04:00 It wasn't really a cattle truck it was a box car. Not enough room to all sit down. That was the worst day of my life. I still think now even sixty-three years later. That was the worst day of my life. I'll go on now. At random.

04:30 "Out of bed at nine am, did my washing in hot soapy water." How did I get that I wonder? "Shaved, cleaned up and then the thing I have been wanting to do for months, I wrote a one page letter home." It's August the 24th that is, 1941. "Couldn't say too much but it should satisfy them at home that I am okay. I wonder how they are at home?

05:00 Hope Jim Ray and Sid haven't tried to enlist. Sorry I can't write to Iris but we are only allowed to write to the one person whilst a prisoner. Had a look through my few snaps this evening, it seems to bring them a little closer to me. But wish I had a few more snaps."

05:30 The next one at random again. Diary is starting to fall to bits, that's why I'm re-writing it all. "Wednesday 3rd September 1941, spent all the morning swinging a fourteen pound hammer. Driving in round poles

06:00 as stays for the stable doors. Quite a solid job but it kept me warm as I have no shirt now. We have been able to scrounge a few tomatoes and cucumbers from the garden. But they have finished. There is plenty of vegetables in the garden but they all have to be cooked. We are doing fairly well."

06:30 Now next one at random again. "Friday the 31st of October. Snowed heavy all night and then a heavy frost this morning which turned all the snow into ice. There was about two inches of ice all over the ground making it very slippery to walk on. Although the sun shone all day the snow has only thawed very little by dark tonight. What is

07:00 surprising is the warmth of the snow except on our feet. Today I wore wooden clogs which just about crippled me but they are warm and dry. The sergeant major was taken away to hospital today." Don't know why, don't remember why. This is a very important one on November the 6th. Thursday November the 6th.

07:30 "At last thank God I have received word from home. One letter from my dearest mother dated on the 8th of the 9th '41. And one letter from my beloved sweetheart written on the 24th of the 9th '41. Everything is quite well at home. Ray and Athene, that's my brother and his girlfriend. Syd and Phyllis, another brother and girlfriend and Eileen and Max, my sister and her boyfriend, have all been married.

08:00 Iris is working in Brisbane. What a great kid she is. Jim has shifted to Grafton. Kevin is in Palestine. Oh boy am I happy tonight. Thank God for the Red Cross. I am prepared to wait any length of time now." That's just different feelings as wartime effects us. Another at random. December the 7th Sunday 1941.

08:30 Up at 7 am marched to work and started at eight o'clock. Worked until four pm and then the corporal

said finish. We had worked well. Fancy working all day on Sunday. Bit of a cow. But the chief, that's the German major, wants the fence finished. Tonight I am writing a letter card to Iris and a postcard home. This evening we were issued

09:00 with new pair of socks. A pair of putties and a neck tie, supposed to be a scarf." Now we'll move on a bit further. This is Friday the 26th of December, that's the day after Christmas isn't it? Boxing Day.

09:30 "Today was something the same as yesterday, just a continual round of eating and sport." We're in the guesthouse at the horse hospital at this time, all this diary. "It is twelve months today since I last saw the ones I loved, at the station at South Brisbane. It has been snowing heavily during the day but it's not cold.

10:00 Tonight I wrote I very sincere letter to Coral." That's my younger sister, just near the end of her life. "And may also write to Iris. I am very thankful to the Red Cross and all others who have helped make this Christmas such a pleasant one. Although I am prisoner of war, and in Germany too."

10:30 Becomes Saturday 27th December 1941. "Went to work this morning but only groomed horses. The boss told us to knock off at dinner time

11:00 so we came home. Gave the place a good clean out and some washing and all received another parcel from the Canadian Red Cross. The German radio admitted today that British troops have once again occupied Benghazi." That's in Libya. "That's very good news for us. But I am still very worried over the situation in the East. Those cross eyed Japs may do some damage for a while.

11:30 But they can't get too far I hope." Now this is the last entry in this diary. And it's also the last entry for 1941. It says, wait on I must go back one because it's a continuation,

12:00 "Tuesday the 30th, worked again all today. Terribly cold the mercury is almost zero, 32 below freezing point. I have the toothache result of extreme cold. Well, as the year 1941 gradually draws to a close, I am very busy with my thoughts. It has been a very eventful year for everyone and likewise

12:30 for me. Last new years day saw me on board the Queen Mary bound for death or glory. Well, so far I have found neither but at I have at least found much adventure. First a month of almost pleasure in Palestine, a month of hard work in Libya and then three weeks I was held in Greece.

13:00 I was part of the capitulation and so I became a POW. Then came three months of extreme starvation, hardship and neglect and then to Marburg and then to Gosting where I am writing this. But I have much to be thankful for and many to thank for it. First comes my loved ones at home, my mother and Iris for their kind letters of comfort and the parcel they sent me. And then comes the Red Cross

13:30 for the parcel of food we have received. I am very thankful. Today I had two teeth out so my gums are rather sore tonight." And that's the last entry for the year.

When you look back now on the war experiences what do you feel most proud about your service?

My own personal service?

14:00 Well, I never did anything really wrong my whole career. I have never been held up for drunkenness or disorderly behaviour or anything like that. I have never been an unruly soldier, I have always tried to do the right thing. it may not have suited everybody but it's what I thought was the right thing. I am also very pleased to have come through without much

14:30 personal damage. I'm quite happy about that. And a lot of that credit I know must go to my father. Because he instilled in me to always do the right thing. He couldn't do much better than that.

Did you hear from your father while you were over there?

I did get a couple of letters but he used to let my mother do most of the writing. But I have had a few letters

15:00 from Pop. They were great, an extra special treat was a letter from Dad. Who I always called Pop for a long time because the grandkids did.

What sort of things do you remember him writing about?

Well, I don't know that he wrote about anything special except perhaps family or local news.

15:30 That's all. He never tried to tell me anything that might have possibly been scratched out by the German censors. Or sometimes by the Australia censors too. One thing I'd like to mention is during the whole of my wartime career I've always tried to write home as much as possible and give them news that

16:00 may have been interesting to them. When I was a younger person, Keith Virtue was the local pilot. When planes were very scarce, Keith Virtue was a pilot. And he grew up eventually to be a very important person, so any mention of the air force bombing I said, Keith Virtue did this or Keith Virtue

did that.

16:30 Another person in my life who played a big part in the letters I wrote home was a bloke name Snowy Potts. Now Pottsville, a seaside resort on the coast of NSW is named after Snowy Potts. At that time he was the only person living at Pottsville, now there are thousands. Well, more or less. And Snowy Potts had the reputation of being the world's

17:00 greatest liar. He could tell lies. Terrible lies. But we all knew it was a lie so anything I wrote home that I want the people there to understand the exact opposite, make sure you tell Snowy Potts about this. So they knew then the exact opposite was the case.

It must have been confusing sometimes to have to

17:30 **work out these codes?**

They knew. It was confusing for the censors though. A lot of stuff got through. As a matter of fact I got a letter from the military authorities wanting to know if I had any information that was really valuable. They knew I was passing information to my family. They could tell by the letters. But the German censors couldn't pick it up.

18:00 That's very interesting. Beat the buggers. Anything I could tell them that I thought was worth telling I'd camouflage it that way.

Did you talk to your family about your experiences in later years?

Not much. They wanted to hear happy things. They didn't want to hear problems.

And what about your sons going into the forces. How

18:30 **did you feel about that?**

I liked that idea. I knew the service would do them good. it would teach them discipline which is very lacking and they have all been very disciplined. Very good, they are. I didn't mind them going into the services. What better job can you do? And it's worked out that way I think. They're all quite happy.

19:00 See Graeme did twenty years in the air force before he dropped out and went to the university and now he and his wife are both teaching. Good jobs in Singapore. Just signed new contracts as a matter of fact. Les, the second son was twenty-seven years in the air force. He got out. Married an American girl, met her on one of his trips over to America.

19:30 And they both have very good jobs now. He's still doing important work with the public service section. Doing much the same as he's doing in the air force. And his wife works for the premier of Victoria in his office. It's worked out that way. Rhonda my daughter, she married an air force bloke and well

20:00 they've never done the wrong thing. And Steven who was here this morning, he's doing the right thing. I'm sure discipline is a big factor with them.

But you experienced some real hardship in your wartime. Did you ever regret enlisting over that period?

Well, firstly a lot of other people have put up with more hardship than I did. But no I never regretted enlisting.

20:30 It taught me such a lot. Such a lot about human nature. About tolerance. And patience. That's one thing in the army, the prison camp, you need is patience. Time drags very slowly at times.

I think now that we have heard your experience is there any final comment that you have to say

21:00 **about your war or life experience that would be heard by future generations?**

No, I don't think I'd like to teach the following generations anything. They'll find out. Take a better man than me to teach them anything.

21:30 **Thanks Reg, it's been a pleasure to talk to you today. I appreciate it.**

Thank you to you girls for knowing how to present leading questions. That's the secret of it all I'm sure.

INTERVIEW ENDS