Australians at War Film Archive

Maurice Fitzgerald (Fitz) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:30 **If you could give us a brief summary of the major points in your life?**

Well, I was born at home at number one Grey Street, West Brunswick, in Melbourne. That was on the 16th of September in 1914.

01:00 Some people blame me for the First World War, but it is purely a coincidence. I grew up there, and I had an elder sister and eventually I had two brothers and two more sisters.

01:30 I lived there until I was about... I went to school at Princess Hill, which is near the Carlton AFL [Australian Football League] Football Ground, and of course I have been a Blues supporter ever since. We moved to Hampton. Now if you know Melbourne, it's like Sydney,

02:00 north of the harbour and south of the harbour there is a little bit of a distinction as far as, "Oh, you live north of the harbour, do you?" So we moved south of Melbourne. And I would say that in Carlton I had a school fight everyday. I went to Hampton and I had one.

02:30 I stayed at the Hampton High Elementary School until the intermediate certificate, when the whole house and the family were all upset. My father died at the age of 51, my mother was pregnant with the last of the six kids, and I was fifteen and I left school.

03:00 I was cook and bottle washer and God knows what, and looking after these little kids. I started working at the grand old salary of fourteen dollars a week. When I turned fifteen, I got fifteen dollars a week. This was more or less Depression times

03:30 and we were a Depression family. Fortunately, the house that we had in Hampton, well my father and mother, they had more or less bought the house, so we were more or less secure as far as shelter was concerned. But poor old Mum, she took in a bit of washing

04:00 and that sort of thing. There was a bit of a boarding house over the road, and two or three fellows there bought it over. My mother's name was Daisy. So I was stoking the copper at odd times. There was no such thing as a washing machine in those days. So you could say that my beginnings were rather humble.

04:30 The funny thing was, I answered an advertisement and got a job, as I say, at the age of fourteen. It was a company called Chambers and Seymour, they were hardware people. I was there for about three months, and the place went broke. But the manager of that show,

05:00 one of the owners, he had interests in another one, Rank Brothers. So virtually everybody was sacked, but I went along, I don't know what I had... So by three months, I was in another job, in another company. The same thing happened about twelve months later, and I finished up with another one,

05:30 Careo Brothers. So I had been in three jobs, the company had gone broke, the company had gone broke, there I was. And so I was there until the age of eighteen I think. I thought, 'Oh well, I need a change.' So I looked around for some other jobs, and just down around the corner

06:00 was a company called James McEwen, it was a big hardware store in Melbourne, right on Elizabeth Street and Little Collins. So I went down there I got a job down there. It was quite good, I was a salesperson. And I was there for, I would say,

06:30 twelve months, eighteen months, and I thought, 'Here I am, sitting here. What will I be?' So I looked up the papers again, and there was a company called McPhersons. Oh yes, they were a big shop. So I answered their advertisement, went down and interviewed, and I got my...

07:00 The first thing, "Oh, Mr Fitzgerald? What is your religion?" And there was a hesitation. Then I said, "I am Church of England. I am a member of the Holy Trinity, Hampton Church." "Oh yes, yes, and where

do you work?" And so and so. Then, "When can you start?" Now I found out later that this company

07:30 employed only Protestants, no Catholics. And they had one lady in the office who was a Catholic, but her father was a Mason. So there you can have the point that… So I was there for the next fifty years. I moved from,

08:00 when we were married… This is my business side of the thing. We moved up to Sydney, I lived in Ashfield, then as I say, they wanted someone down here to go from here to Bega and back again. So they set up here and opened an office.

08:30 Then eventually we opened a warehouse down at Kammet Street, and I managed that. I had a couple of girls in the office, and about five travellers, and I was responsible for the southern half of New South Wales. From here to Bega and down to Deniliquin, and Wagga, and all that area.

09:00 And I retired at the age of 64, a little bit early, and lived here ever since. Bought the house and that was it.

Can you tell me briefly what your war time service was?

09:30 I didn't have all that much of a social life. I joined the boy scouts at the age of thirteen, and we had some good times with that. They put on, for the older boys, a dance in the scout hall every Saturday night. So I learnt to dance and jolly girls along and that sort of thing.

10:00 But eventually, I met Lorna. I was at a… It was the Bank of New South Wales in those days, and it was their Christmas party. So they had taken the account of one of the Melbourne places. So I attended with a couple of fellows, and Lorna

10:30 had attended with a couple of her friends, we had never met before. So you meet in the dance where you swap partners as you go around, an old time dance. So here I am, and I'm, "How do you do? I'm Maurice." "I'm Lorna." "Well, that's nice."

11:00 So we danced around and I said, "Gee, you're a good dancer. I'd like to dance with you later." "All right." So later on, I thought she is not a bad sort of a girl. I said, "Where do you live? North or south of the Yarra?" Because I wasn't going to date some girl that was ten miles away,

11:30 because ten miles in 1937 was a long way away, and I didn't have any mode of transport. So we eventually got to know one another, and engaged. And we were going to get married in twelve months time. That was the 10th of August, 1940. So the 10th of August when we engaged, was more or less the start of World War II.

12:00 And so, "Do you have to join the army?" I was still working at McPhersons and they didn't do anything like that. So when the fall of France, when the Germans

12:30 came in and they took Paris, that was in June, '40, my brother and I went and joined up, June of 1940. So that is where we were. That is how I joined the army. "Righto, report next Monday at the Caufield Racecourse."

13:00 So we turned up the next Monday at the Caufield Racecourse. "Bring this that, these and those." So we slept in the grandstand.

13:30 Well, I joined up as I say, with the 2/23rd Battalion. But I joined up as… I knew medical stuff,

14:00 and I joined in the medical side of it. We did all our training and then they said, "The 2/23rd is moving out. So and so Fitzgerald fall out." And I was transferred to another training section, and I finished up with the 2/5th Field Ambulance.

14:30 We went over to the Middle East, and that was May or June in '41. We went to the Middle East, we camped in Gaza, the unit was in Tobruk, so I was on twenty-four hours notice to go to Tobruk

15:00 when the unit came out. So I joined up there and connected with the unit. As General Blamey said, "You've done a fine job in Tobruk. We're going to reward you; you can go next week up to Syria." So we moved up to Syria, Damascus,

15:30 Hims, Baalbek and onto Aleppo. And there we spent quite some time, three or four months in Aleppo. Then the Syrian campaign was over, Tobruk had fallen. Japan had entered the war, so the whole 7th Division was coming home,

16:00 and they said, "Where are we going?" "Well, it starts with A and ends in A. " So everyone said, "Asia, Africa, America, Australia. We're going home to Australia." But we weren't. We were going to Singapore. But Singapore fell, so we got out of the big ship at Bombay, and Bombay we got into little tug steamers,

16:30 and set sail again, and whacko, we finished up back in Trincomalee. And then we got home to Adelaide. But the Japanese altered the way we went, because they had taken over. There was no good going to

Singapore after they captured it.

17:00 So that was where we were, so we did a bit of jungle training there, then we went to Milne Bay. That was where the Japanese were defeated. We were there for about nine months, then we came home.

17:30 More training and then we had a week's leave. That was the first, second leave I had had. From there we went up to Moresby, from Moresby we flew over the Owen Stanleys to Lae, then up to the Ramu Valley. All the fighting was around Shaggy Ridge.

18:00 So we went and set up camp at Dumpu there, and I would say we were there for about nine months and then home again. More training in Queensland, and this time we were down on the beach, doing mock landings, off little boats.

18:30 So we didn't land off the barges and run up the beach and that sort of thing, we just run up the beach. We had one practice there, oh yes. So we got on barges and we called in at Milne Bay on the way. These big LST [Landing Ship Tank] American things, where the front falls down.

19:00 They were American manned and we were the Aussies in it. Then onto Morotai, we finished up. That's when we had our last training, and from there we went over to the invasion of Borneo. Our section, 7th Div, was Balikpapan.

19:30 So we were at Balikpapan and I was, at that stage I was a sergeant, and I got a commission up there. And because you've got all your mates around there and they wouldn't salute you and all this sort of crap, I was transferred to another unit, which happened to be in Jacquinot Bay in New Britain.

20:00 Well, from Balikpapan, I came home.

20:30 **I'd like to go back and talk about your childhood. Can you tell me a bit about your mother and father?**

Daisy Annette Shepherd married Arthur George Fitzgerald. How, when, and where, I have no idea. And they had this little single thing, house, as I said where I was born. I think my mother

21:00 was born in the Richmond area, which is a suburb of Melbourne. Brunswick, of course, is another inner suburb, if you would like to put it that way. My father's people came from Bear Island,

21:30 in Ireland, off the coast of County Cork. His father was a member of the Indian Army, the British Army in India. And a lot of the Irish people used to join the British Army, as something to do, sort of thing. So he was there. And their headquarters was in the Channel Islands,

22:00 Jersey, Guernsey. In India he blotted his copy book, and I don't know what he did, some misdemeanour, so he was sent back to Guernsey Island. (UNCLEAR) was there, he served a couple of months there,

22:30 then he remained there for the rest of his life, and at the age of forty-five he was discharged with a good conduct medal. And he had married a girl there, from the islands, and they were mainly French speaking, they were just off the coast of France. And they went to…

23:00 They emigrated to Dunedin, in New Zealand, and there they raised their family and they had six boys. Then they decided they would come across to Australia, so they set sail and they settled in Brunswick in Melbourne. And that is where my father grew up, and

23:30 he married this Daisy, and they settled in West Brunswick and that is where the family…. As I say, at the age of eight, we moved down to Hampton. My elder sister was farmed out to two aunts, who weren't really aunts, but they were

24:00 handy, and I was the father of five. When I say my father died, he died in hospital. He worked for a company called Sydney Cook and I think their arrangements….galvanised nails and that sort of thing,

24:30 and I think he got some of these chemicals in him, whatever they do. These days of course, there is all the restrictions and there is none of these dangerous stuff. He was wheezing, of course he smoked cigarettes, too, but he did die at 51, and he left us, the family…

25:00 Pat wasn't there, and I was the eldest of four kids and it eventually became five kids.

You mentioned that you had some memories of World War I?

Oh, I was in Brunswick there. One of my first memories was getting a spank on the bottom because I wet my pants, but

25:30 I was playing in the yard, I wouldn't have been school age, and I sang out, "Pop, pop! There's a soldier coming down!" There was a path from the front gate down the side of the house, these single fronted houses on thirty-five foot blocks. "Don't be silly! Come inside."

26:00 I said, "There is. There's a soldier." And there was this fellow coming down there, with all his uniform

and his pack and everything. So Mum came out and "Allan!" It was my Uncle Allan. So that was Mum's youngest brother, and he had been…

26:30 He joined the army at eighteen, because they had call up at the end of the First World War. He had gone overseas, and when they landed overseas the war was over. So he had a trip over there and a trip home again. So he was welcomed. "Allan! What did you do?" "Nothing."

27:00 I do remember that. Well, it was close to, but it would have been 1919. The war finished in '18, so by the time he got back and all this sort of thing. So I would have been five years old

27:30 and that stuck out in my mind.

What do you remember of your first family home?

You went in the front door and on the left hand side there was a bedroom, there was a passage down and further down the passage was another bedroom. The first one was the boys and the next one was the girls.

28:00 Mum and Dad, they might have been in that. Then there was a sort of dining room into the kitchen, and out the back of course, was what they called the wash house, which was the laundry, which had a couple of tubs and a copper.

28:30 You lit fires underneath and you heated the water and that sort of thing. They had a little back yard. They had a small lawn. At the back of that, there was a wire enclosure where they kept half a dozen WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s. So we always had eggs. And that was it.

29:00 I remember Mum going out one day and saying… I think I might have had measles or something or other, so I was kept in the dark in a room. "Don't play with the other kids while I'm away." I was kept away. Of course, as soon as Mum had gone off down the shops,

29:30 we were all in a roly-poly. Guess what? Two weeks later the other kids were in the darkened room. One of them was a sister. So German measles, that did her in fine form. Another thing, my brother was three years younger than me,

30:00 but I got him… We moved, about when I was eight, because it was too rough at school. This was not the place to bring up kids. Plus the fact there was only two bedrooms, the kids were expanding. We had to get into a bigger place. So two things that I remember.

30:30 One was that I could climb up on top of this wire cage to keep the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s in, and there was a bit of corrugated iron on the roof. I could climb up there and jump off. I said, "I bet you can't do that, John." So my brother, eventually I got him up, and I said, "Now jump." My mother came out,

31:00 so I got another walloping. "He'll break his legs! Come down out of there!" The other thing that I do remember there, Mum and Dad with this little patch of lawn, with little shears cutting the grass, we didn't have a mower.

31:30 I also remember when my sister Kathleen was born, there was no such thing as hospitals, there were midwives. The midwives, Marka Seena, she was the midwife for my mother.

32:00 So the kids were put up there, and they were out in the kitchen, so possibly she was born on the kitchen table. I have no idea. I could have been six or seven at the time. I remember this lady rushing in and saying, "Where's the sheet?

32:30 Oh, there's a tablecloth, that will do!" And she ripped it in half. And I said, "My mother will hit you! That was the tablecloth!" "Get away! Get away!" And off she dashed. So they were little memories of Grey Street in West Brunswick.

33:00 Just early recollections that come to mind when you talk about it.

Do you remember seeing your baby sister for the first time?

No. Her brother, Bill? No. I don't remember his birth at all. And the last one, Kathleen.

33:30 Kathy, she was born in Hampton, but I think she was born in hospital, but I'm vague on that. I used to know that. We had a routine. Sunday was roast lamb,

34:00 Monday was cold meat from the roast lamb, Tuesday was meat patties from the roast lamb, Wednesday, if there was anything there it was curried, from the roast lamb. Thursday, Mum would make some pies. Friday, was fish day, even though we

34:30 weren't strict Catholics or anything like that. And when we moved to Hampton, we lived on Ocean Street, and there was a Church of England there, and that is where I went to Sunday school and I sang in the choir, and all this sort of thing.

35:00 **Did your parents talk much about World War I and what that was like?**

As far as I'm concerned, never. They must have, but they never talked to the kids. "You kids go to bed." But I remember later on, going to Hampton and going to first year high school, and we were taught French. Who was top of the class?

35:30 Fitzgerald, because my grandmother spoke French. That is all she spoke. So my father, being the son of her, he knew quite a smattering of French, so he used to help me with my homework. The next year I was bottom of the class because he died, and I didn't do much

36:00 as far as school was concerned. But as far as talking about the war, I don't ever recall it, no.

How did the Depression impact on your family?

Well, as I say, we were fortunate that we had a house to live in.

36:30 But that was it.

Do you remember other families, how that impacted on the area?

Well, '29, fourteen, fifteen…

37:00 Well, we lived in Hampton, and it didn't seem to mean much. Hampton, Brighton, like the northern Sydney suburbs were reasonably affluent and well kept.

37:30 We were one street back from the main street, Hampton Street, and if you walked over Hampton Street, you got two blocks down you were on the beach, on the main. And we had a bathing box.

Can you describe them for me?

A bathing box was… Around the bay, back from the edge, there was usually cliffs around

38:00 Brighton, from St Kilda down to Brighton, right through Sandringham, people had a little box. Ten foot by eight foot, something like that, up on stilts with a window and a door that you could lock up, and that was where you kept all your bathing togs and your towels, and you had a chest there

38:30 with a Primus stove and plates, cups and saucers, and all that sort of thing. "So let's go down for a swim." We'd walk down there, open up the bathing box, where we could get undressed and hang your clothes on the hook, and there's your bathing togs and towel and everything else, and dash into the water. Then you could light up the Primus and have a picnic on the beach,

39:00 or have a picnic up in the park, which we did. Sundays in the summer time, down to the beach and the bathing box.

What colour was the bathing box?

Brown. But I still see photos of them, but after World War II, this was after we were here,

39:30 a lot of those boxes disappeared, the council said they were eyesores. But I know that in some suburbs, they have still got this row of boxes, they were little huts, and they've got to be kept in good order, and they are very handy. Of course, when you grow up and you're in your teens, you could say, "Come down the bathing box and have a bit of a cuddle."

40:00 **Did many families have bathing boxes?**

Not everybody had one. I think the one that we had came to us from the Dark family. These two aunts, that weren't really aunts, they were maidens, elderly ladies.

40:30 Jane Dark, Aunt Jenny, she was a school mistress, her family, her father built the bathing box and you had to have them registered with the council, but that was handed down. If you had a bathing box and you wanted to sell it, you got nothing for it.

Tape 2

00:30 **I just wanted to pick up on the Depression. Your father passed away at the start of the Depression. How did your family survive financially?**

Well, as I say, we were fortunate in as much as we had the house. These two maiden aunts,

01:00 the Dark sisters, they had a house in Thomas Street, with quite a large backyard, and they were on the corner of Ocean Street. And my father and mother were well known to these ladies, as I say, we called them aunts.

01:30 And they chopped the backyard in half and that is where they built their house, facing Ocean Street.

They chopped it in half, and they still had a big backyard and we had a house there. My father didn't drink,

02:00 he smoked cigarettes. But our house that we grew up in there was never any such thing as grog, so you can't say that he wasted his money. But I think they ploughed it into the house, and if they didn't own it when he died, it was close to it.

02:30 So all we had to do was get food into the place. As I say, I've got an idea that they might have got some sort of recompense from the Sydney Cook company, I don't know. As I say, my ma would take in a bit of washing.

03:00 One of the fellows over the road was butcher. "Oh God!" She would say, "Look at these aprons! Blood everywhere!" But she'd wash them and ironed them. The two shillings fed a family, it's surprising. My clothes,

03:30 when I grew out of them, went to the next kid and the next and the next. It was all hand-me-downs and that sort of thing. But we survived. I went to work, and as I say, fourteen shillings a month, then fifteen shillings a month, and I worked in Sydney, Hampton was ten miles away by train.

04:00 I'd buy a monthly ticket, which was ten shillings, for a monthly ticket. So that was one week out of my fourteen, we only had four shillings, but that was what we left on. I left school and started work. So I didn't go onto

04:30 sixteen, when they had their leaving certificate as they called it then. And, if you wanted to go to university, you had to have your leaving certificate.

What was your reason for leaving school?

God, we needed the money. We didn't have any money. So Mum brought in a bit of washing, and I went to work, that was it.

You mentioned that you were a big Blues fan,

05:00 **did you go to many matches at Princes Park?**

No, I never attended a game, but going home from school we used to deviate from school and have a look at it. So, I would see the fellows training and that sort of thing, but I had to be home by quarter to five, because…

05:30 From here to Crown Street, that would be from where we lived in West Brunswick to Sydney Road, and then it was as far again as that. So it took a long while for a kid.

06:00 There was trams up and down Sydney Road, and I had to cross that. And so at the age of six, here I am, walking across Brunswick Street, across Sydney Road, through Princes Park, around the football ground to Princes Hill School. That's a long walk. School got out at four o' clock and I had to be home by quarter to five. They were longer school hours in those days, apparently.

Did many children make that walking journey to school?

06:30 Everybody walked to school. Everybody. I think I was the longest. Mainly the schools were around there, but there were no schools at West Brunswick where we lived. So they must have all gone somewhere.

So how did you follow your football team if you didn't go to matches?

07:00 You listened and you read the papers and the kids would say, "How did you go today?" "Oh well, yes. What's your team?" "Carlton." "I'm Richmond." "I'm Collingwood." "I'm Fitzroy." They were the four teams. There were other teams, but they were the four big ones.

Who were your sporting heroes at the time?

07:30 I never had any. Didn't know what sport was, until I joined the boy scouts, as I say, at thirteen and I took up running, so I used to run a half mile. At high school, I did sports there, and I was a high jumper,

08:00 and represented my house, the house sports, and fell over. In the boy scouts, Hampton was a renowned team,

08:30 they were in all sorts of competitions. The scouts at Easter time would go up to Dandenong, up to Gillwall Park, and they had a big place there. And the scouts would come from all over the state, and they used to have competitions there.

09:00 There would be running and there would be fire-making and first aid, and all that sort of thing. I got interested in the first aid. I was in the scouts there until I was seventeen or eight, a senior scout.

09:30 They had patrols. There were five in a team, a medical team, and they would go out. For instance, you were wandering in the bush, and you come across this poor fellow. He's a woodchopper and the tree has

fallen over him. So he's got this and that and that.

10:00 So what do you do? This was a competition that we had. So I led that team. So right, here's the patient, they didn't have the tree across him, but he was lying there. So the first thing you do in first aid is stem the blood, then you do everything else. So I got the fellow and we stemmed the blood and did that,

10:30 there was broken legs, and we splinted that, and everything had to be done with what you wore and what you could get. So these boy scouts had belts and buckles and lanyards, and they all carried a tomahawk and a sheathing knife. So they would cut down trees and they'd take their shirts off, and put their sleeves

11:00 up through the sides and button it, so three shirts, and you could carry a bloke, so there we are. I met Baden Powell, he was the chief scout, he came out. And Lord Hopeton, he was the governor of Victoria at one stage. It was a great big thing. And we'd won the

11:30 Colonel Cohen Shield, I think, three years in a row, and I bombed it. Because there was this fellow and everything else, and we were first finished, they'd carried him, and they could not halt the whole thing. But I was disqualified. I didn't lift the tree off the poor bugger first.

12:00 Of course, there was no tree, but he was pinned by a tree, so we should have pretended to lift it off. And from there, I thought, well, someone has to look after the poor kids during the war. So I joined the medical side.

12:30 **Was there a cinema that you went to near the house?**

There was, in Hampton Street, as I say, we were only one street off. And to go to the pictures, and the pictures were there every Saturday afternoon. I went to the pictures once with my father. So it must have been very early.

13:00 It was a Saturday afternoon and he wanted to see… He was a pugilist in his youth, apparently. And he wanted to… I think it was Gene Tunney fighting somebody. And there was the 'Total News' and that sort of thing, so he took me down to see that. That was the only time.

13:30 Although I went to the pictures, we didn't have any money to go to the pictures. My father was alive then. Of course, the film was cowboys and Indians, and that was murderous. I screamed out, "Look out! Look out! There's Indians!"

14:00 And he's got his arrow against the white fellow. Scared me stiff.

What did the cinema look like?

Dark, that's all you could say. It was on the street, you went in, you bought a ticket and you went in and sat down. As I say, I didn't go until…

14:30 I was a bit more affluent.

So once you had got a job and you were earning money, did you go to the cinema?

No. The first couple of years all my money went into the house-keeping. I just gave it to Mum, that was it.

So what were your day to day tasks in that job at McPhersons?

15:00 When I joined McPhersons, that was a different thing altogether by that time. I would have been twenty, twenty-one, a man about town by then. Incidentally, I mentioned that I had left Chambers and Seymour, Brent Brothers,

15:30 Careo Brothers, and then I had broken away from that group and I went to McEwen's. And from McEwen's, I went down to McPhersons. My younger brother Bill, he came home and he said, "I got a job today." I said, "Did you? Where?" He said, "Yeah, McEwen's." I said, "What?" He said, "Yeah.

16:00 I went in there and I saw a bloke and I said, "My brother worked here, I want his job."" And they gave it to him. And he spent the rest of his life working for McEwen's, he never worked for anybody else. And I worked for McPhersons. I joined the army when I was

16:30 twenty-three, I think. So yeah, I would have been twenty when I joined McPhersons.

So what would you do there on a day to day basis? What would your job be?

Well, when I started off down there, they said, "We need a man in the bolts and nuts department." And I was old enough to say, "Bolts and nuts? God. How many bolts and nuts have you got?"

17:00 I said, "At present, I'm at McEwen's, I'm in their tool department. That is far more interesting." I said, "I've got a wide scope, for all tools and bands and so and so." "Oh, all right." I don't know whether that was a good thing or a bad thing, but I served on the counter in the tool department at McPhersons for twelve months,

17:30 and then I was made a traveller, and what they termed the city traveller. So I walked around the city for twelve months. Then I graduated that to a suburban traveller, where upon they gave me a Vauxhall Wyvern car.

18:00 I had a group of suburbs in the northeastern corner of Victoria. And that was my area. And then later on I became a country traveller, and I had central Victoria. So you'd go up from Melbourne to Echuca,

18:30 from Echuca along to Swan Hill, Swan Hill down to Bendigo. And I also had Ballarat and down around Geelong. So the whole central area of Victoria was my territory. And then they decided McPhersons, who had branches

19:00 in all capital cities... In Sydney, they couldn't get travellers over there, so me, I was shot over to Sydney. And I stayed there for couple of weeks and then they gave me this area down here.

19:30 From Wollongong to Bega, as a traveller. Of course, at this stage I still lived here as we were starting to expand, and I was doing extremely well. So I put a proposition to them that we should do something about it. And so they said, "Righto, we'll make an office down there."

20:00 So I had a young lady and an office and a car, of course, and a house, and we were living on top of the world.

Is this after the war?

Yes.

What do you remember about the declaration of the war?

20:30 We all heard the prime minister say, "We are now in a state of war." Oh, God, well, I was not happy because I knew... I had Uncle Bill, Uncle Allan and Uncle Sid,

21:00 all in the war. And Uncle Bill was closest to us because he spent some time hanging around, but he had been badly gassed. And I think he died about 1936, so he must have had ten years at home, and he couldn't work or anything like that. He had a little plot of land.

21:30 But he was terrible to see. He was really gassed. Uncle Allan of course, he just went there and back, for the ride. But this Uncle Sid,

22:00 he was Uncle Sid because married my Aunt Alice. He was in the war and he came home DCM, a Distinguished Conduct Medal. I think it was about 1920 that the Victorian Government said, "All men..."

22:30 And they got all these fellows that had got these medals and things like that to go to Melbourne Cricket Ground, and there was a big parade, and all these blokes would be presented with their actual medals. So Uncle Sid fronts up there, and the governor comes around and fronts up to him, and says,

23:00 "Oh, I see that in an act of bravery you saved the guns." Now, if you know about the First World War, in all the mud and slush and flat plains, that they had these twenty-five pounder guns, but they were all drawn by horses. And there was no such thing as

23:30 trucks and all that sort of stuff. They were all horse drawn. So the guns would come up and they would fire away. But of course, as soon as they opened fire, the other mob can pinpoint where they are, so they would open fire on them. So they came along to support an attack from the Australians,

24:00 bang, bang, bang, but the Germans eventually located where they were firing from and started firing back at the artillery again. So what he did was pulled the guns away, so they could be deployed elsewhere. They didn't want to leave them there to get blown up. So he got a DCM for acting beyond etcetera,

24:30 and saving the guns. And he said, "Bugger the bloody guns. It was the horses I felt for." But the horses got attached to the guns, so he drove all the horses away and they took the guns with them. So that was Uncle Sid.

Did your uncles talk much about the hardship of World War I?

25:00 Uncle Bill did, yes. He had a funny lip. And we always kidded him. His story was that, he was somewhere and so and so, and they were all in the trenches and they were going to make an attack. So you have an attack and you jump out of the trench and you rush forward. He jumped out of the trench,

25:30 took one step forward and tripped over, and the whole battalion ran over him. So he said, "I got kicked in the mouth." So poor old Uncle Bill. The family said, "He had a lip that could trip a donkey." That was just an expression, but it's a family one. So there he was,

26:00 coughing his lungs out and spluttering. But he used to tell his stories about the conditions, so I was very unhappy when war broke out, particularly when it was going to be over there. But there was a 6th Division, and they went overseas.

26:30 For the first nine months of the war, there wasn't very much happening. And then Hitler invaded the low countries, Belgium and so forth, but France had the Maginot Line between that and Germany. But they invaded through Denmark, Holland and Belgium and came in that way.

27:00 They just went around…

How would you follow the news of what was happening?

In the paper. There was no TV, we didn't have TV. The radio, yeah, you'd put your earphones on. There were Mickey Mouse radios later on, but that was it.

Were there any recruitment drives or enlistment stations in Hampton?

27:30 Yeah, you went to the town hall. But my brother and I, I was at McPhersons and he was in Norman Brothers and…

Were there many men enlisting in the area,

28:00 **at the time that you can remember? When war first broke out?**

When war first broke out…Before the war, they had an army of volunteers. My brother was one and they used to go into camp during their holidays,

28:30 and weekend army manoeuvres, same as they've got now. And a lot of those fellows joined up. And of course, it was the tail end of the Depression, and there were quite a number of fellows out of work. A high percentage of them joined up

29:00 and gave themselves a job. So that was what the 6th Division was. Well, a lot of the fellows from the… A percentage of fellows from World War I joined up again. A lot of the, as I say, the unemployed.

29:30 I can't say others, but the 6th Division were known as the rough-tough fellows. They joined the army because the army was something to do and they paid. And then there was the… from that time, until Germany

30:00 made a swoop over the low countries into France, and Paris fell, at that stage there was an influx of all sorts of people, like myself and my brother. We joined up at that time, and that was more or less the 7th Division.

What was it about France falling that made you enlist?

30:30 The thing was, "God, if France has fallen, who is next? And if Britain goes…" So we all had to go and fight the war and that was it.

And at your time of enlisting, what were your expectations of the longevity of the war and how easy it would be to recapture France?

31:00 Well, of course, the war was only going to last six months, and it went nine months, in that peaceful area, where there wasn't much doing as far as we were concerned.

31:30 I've no idea. "Someone's got to stop these coots, so we better do something about it." That was it.

Where did you go to enlist?

We went into Melbourne, just at the town hall. And there was a queue of fellows, all lined up. "Righto, what's your name? Where do you live? What do you want to join?"

32:00 I said, "The medical." "Why?" I said, "Well, I know a bit about it." "Righto." My brother said that he wanted to join the artillery, so okay, he joined the artillery. I don't know if he's ever forgiven me. But later on, it didn't matter what you did,

32:30 you went straight into six weeks training. At the end of six weeks, you could fire a rifle, fix a bayonet, charge and all sorts of things, salute by numbers. And then they sent us up to Albury from Caufield, and that is where we did our training. They formed a battalion

33:00 and it became known as the 2/23rd, and because they trained in Albury, that was Albury's own. But prior to disembarkation, they called out all sorts of old fellows. I remember there was two fellows called out, "Aside." They were sixteen years old.

33:30 They weren't dismissed and told to come back in two years, they sent them down to Royal Park, and that was where the headquarters were, so they just gave them duties there until they were eighteen then put them up as reinforcements to wherever they went.

How young did they look?

Well, we all looked young.

34:00 I was twenty-three when I joined up, so I was an old fellow. I was saying that there were men who had been in the First World War and had joined up again. I know later on, the RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] of our ambulance was a First World War soldier.

34:30 And he had his son in the same unit. So father and son had joined up and were in the same unit. But old Dick, because he was… He was English, he was the RSM.

Did you do your basic training at Albury?

Yes.

And what did you do in those first few weeks of basic training.

We froze,

35:00 because it was June, and June in Melbourne is cold. And Albury is flat country and the frosts. And, of course, winter time there is no wool in the big wool shed, so we were sleeping in the cattle pens, which were fresh and open.

35:30 You were up at six-thirty in the morning on parade, and all that sort of thing, seven o' clock breakfast, etcetera, and by that time you had shaved and dressed…bloody cold. And they marched us down to the wool stores and that is where we did our rifle training.

36:00 And then when it got a bit warmer, August, we'd go route marching and scuttling along and firing, and learning how to shoot bullets. Then in October, we sailed away to the Middle East and ended up in Tobruk.

How did you travel from Melbourne to Albury?

36:30 Train. And at lunch time…everything was by train.

What were you initially paid when you joined the army?

Oh, I think it was six shillings a day.

37:00 I think it was six. I know I gave Lorna four and I kept two, and that was the most I could do then. I was extremely fortunate in that direction. Lorna and I were going to be married twelve months after we became engaged.

37:30 But in the meantime, I had joined the army. So it came around to August, and we still got married. By that time, we were in the army, so she was a child bride. So I mailed money

38:00 over to her from my pay, and it was a private's pay. But, McPhersons paid me the difference between what I was earning and what the army paid me. So there was that gap, so I put that over to Lorna. Lorna, she got a job, and she had that little bit there

38:30 and she had my army pay, so she was coping.

Was that stipulated by the government that that gap should be filled?

No, McPhersons did that. They were a good company.

So did you get married before you enlisted?

No.

39:00 We were engaged in August, '39, I think it was. We met in '38, engaged in '39, married in '40.

So what sort of a wedding did you have if you were in basic training?

Well, Lorna and her mother…her mother organised that wedding.

39:30 It was held in the Brighton Town Hall, and it was going to be just a few friends and relatives, about twenty, but Lorna didn't know the Fitzgeralds, there were hundreds of them. So eventually from a little thing…We were married in

40:00 St Andrew's Cathedral in Brighton. And finished up in the Brighton Town Hall. It was the first time the town hall had ever been used for a wedding reception. So we took over the big town hall. There might have been two hundred people there. Lorna and her friends…

40:30 Lorna would say, "Well, Mum wants to invite so and so." I said, "Oh well, we'll bring a few more Fitzgeralds along." "Well, if you're doing that, Mum wants…" It just went out, and I was up in Albury and she was in Melbourne, so that was it. So my brother came down. There was a few other fellows, so we got weekend leave to come down

41:00 for me to get married. They had weekend leave, so they had to be back on Sunday night, and I had one week. So we went up the Dandenongs and had a week’s honeymoon. Then that was it, back to Albury.

Tape 3

00:30 **Did restrictions due to the war impact on the kind of wedding you were able to have?**

Yes, there was no beer. But when you know people, and Lorna had a grocer around the corner and in Melbourne they had licensed grocers, occasionally.

01:00 So he was able to get a nine gallon keg of beer, but they had wine on the table. There was no problem with wine, for toasts and things like that. And the beer

01:30 was in an ante room, down a flight a stairs from the main ballroom where the wedding reception was held. It was a magnificent wedding. We had a six-piece orchestra for the dancing, I was out of my depth.

02:00 And Mrs Chenowyth, Chenowyth was Lorna's maiden name, bit Cornish, a couple of her friends were there, army captains in uniform. And here's me, private.

02:30 But it came to the bridal waltz, and where's the bride, where's the groom? They were having trouble opening the keg, so the groom went down and showed them how to open a keg.

03:00 There was a titter, titter amongst the…"Oh Lorna, how can you marry that man?" Missing. There I was, tapping the keg, instead of dancing with my dear devoted.

Was it common for men to get married in uniform during the war?

03:30 They all liked to have their uniform, and the papers always had photos of the men in uniform, married at the weekend.

And what did Lorna wear?

Full white, yes, beautiful.

04:00 **Was it difficult for her to get a wedding dress?**

Well, she had one made for her. Mama bought the material, and she had an old friend of hers make it. She had a number of fittings, such as it was. She had a full-time getting ready for this wedding.

04:30 As far as I was concerned, we had weekend leave and came down from the army. The only thing was, as things drew nearer, "Where are we going to hold it?" So and so, so and so. But I just said, "Yes dear, yes dear, yes dear." And it just went like that. Her mum was a businesswoman, and she could organise anything.

05:00 **Was there rationing at that time during the war?**

Oh yes, tea rationing, clothing rationing, neither of which, because I was in the army more or less the whole time, it didn't worry me. But Lorna took a job with the St Kilda Town Hall.

05:30 And she was in charge, more or less, of air raid wardens and the fellows who would walked around at night, "Put that light out." She had a boss and Lorna worked in the office, and that was that.

06:00 I came home on leave, towards the end of the war, and I arrived in Melbourne Saturday lunchtime. Lorna wasn't there to meet me. They were having air raid drill, all over Melbourne, and she was organising the air raid drills.

06:30 So I had to wait until the air raid finished and I said, "Oh God, you people don't know what an air raid is." Because we had just had a hundred bomber raid. That is something, to see a lot of planes flying overhead. Swish, swish, swish. Anyhow, that was that.

I might just ask what you did in training at Albury, what that was like?

07:00 As I say, it was very cold. I got chilblains in the winter, so I was a little bit ham-fisted with rifles and pulling triggers and stuff like that. It was rigid discipline,

07:30 right from the start. The instructors were English army personnel, mainly sergeants and staff sergeants. And they were just like they are on TV, all this sort of thing.

08:00 The men hated them. They'd swear at the fellows. And marching, left right, left right, one hundred and forty steps to the minute, the paces would only be twenty inches. That is training.

08:30 A hundred and twenty is ordinary marching, but a hundred and forty is recruit stuff. That was drilled into us. The first six weeks were just walking, training, saluting,

09:00 falling in by numbers, then rifles, rifle drill, then out on the rifle range and just practice.

09:30 **Were you earmarked for a certain role at this stage in the training?**

I didn't know, but I've got stuff there that says I was a lance corporal, and I thought lance corporal is the lowest form of infantry. Apparently I was at one stage. I know I was an acting corporal,

10:00 but in training… No. I thought it would be very nice to be a sergeant.

Did they ask you at any stage what you wanted to do?

I can't recall that. I know when I enlisted and I said, "Well, the army medical would do me."

10:30 "Okay." Nothing was ever said until five years later when I attended an inquiry, "Would you like to become an officer?" I said, "Yes." They said, "Why?" I said, "Well, I think I could handle it, no problem."

11:00 I thought, this is good. They will send me back to Australia for training as an officer, but they never did. So that was that.

So when you were in training at Albury, were you already in training in that medical division?

11:30 No, as I said, it didn't matter what you did. You had basic infantry training, everybody did.

What is the camp like at Albury? Can you explain where you slept and what the conditions were like?

They took over the Albury Showgrounds, and that was it. They had an open flat,

12:00 where you could assemble. They had a cookhouse there, where the kids came in and got fed. And you slept in the cattle sheds, which was open to the wind. Had a roof over our heads, but that was all. As I said, it was June and there was frost on the ground every clear day.

12:30 But after the battalion, and I was in medical, they put me into what they called an RAP, a Regimental Aid Post, but the army had taken over a house, in Albury. It was just an ordinary three bedroom house.

13:00 They put us into a little mini-hospital. There was a sergeant in charge, and there might have been half a dozen fellows, I was one of them, a medical orderly. This was after all the infantry training had completed, and they'd disbanded. John, my brother, went to the artillery.

13:30 I went to the medical, but I didn't leave, they put me into this thing there. At odd times, I spent so many hours at the Albury District Hospital, and I was training in nursing, in the hospital. And that entailed in the theatre, watching,

14:00 bandaging, dressing. That was Albury.

Where did you stay when you were working at the hospital?

We lived in this little house, it was a double storey thing, and we all slept and lived in the top. We had a cook.

14:30 Before the battalion left, they opened a camp, it went Albury, Wodonga, and out of Wodonga, there is a place called Bonegilla, and they opened that place up as a big army training centre. So the 2/23rd Battalion

15:00 went from the Albury Showgrounds, they closed that and opened Bonegilla. And that place could have taken a division of troops, it was big, huge. They had the standard army huts and all that sort of thing. So the whole battalion marched out of the Showgrounds.

15:30 Marched down the main street of Albury, over the bridge to Wodonga, from Wodonga out to Bonegilla. It was virtually a day's march. That was the end of Albury and the start of Bonegilla. That's where they went from.

So had you joined the battalion when you were sent to do the training at the hospital?

16:00 Everybody in that… They just formed the battalion from the people that were in there, irrespective of age or anything else. It was only about a fortnight before they sailed they said, "We'll go through these people."

16:30 As I said, my brother was shot off to artillery; I was shot off to medical. There was a couple of young kids shot back to Royal Park, because they were underage. They weeded out people. So they said, "Do you want to sign up to so and so?" I said, "I joined the army to be in the medical."

17:00 **Can you explain that training, and whether there was any specific training for a combat situation in terms of the medical that you were doing?**

No, as I say, the first twelve weeks were purely infantry training, everybody did it, that was it.

17:30 When I was put into this little medical unit, which was put there in Albury, to look after anything that

happened in Albury… In as much as,

18:00 a fellow getting into a fight in the pub and getting hit over the head, he would be brought in with a split skull and we would bandage him up. Or fellows with, "Oh, I've got a terrible earache." And we were taught to use syringes, and in this

18:30 particular case I syringed out this bloke's ear. I found about twenty maggots when we squirted it out. Apparently, he'd got drunk and fell asleep in the park on the grass, and got fly bitten. What happened to the end of that bloke was, "Oh God, we can't send him to the Middle East. There are too many flies over there. He'd never be free from this ear problem."

19:00 So they made him B Class and sent him back home, and he never went overseas. So that was the training. I could fix ears, do eyes, bandage up people, stop blood. We had a bit of a thing there. In the hospital, that is where we learned

19:30 how to fill a syringe, do this, use auto-clamps, etcetera.

What were you taught about what you would be doing in a combat situation?

Well, in a combat situation, that's what I would be doing. If it was a combat situation, well okay, people were wounded

20:00 and I was there to patch them up.

Were you taught particular techniques about how to use the limited equipment you would be working with? What kind of techniques were you taught?

Well, the line of the command is, you have a battalion. The battalion has a band, and in action

20:30 that band becomes stretcher-bearers. And the battalion has an RAP, which is a Regimental Aid Post. So anybody that is sick, anybody who has had an accident, anybody who is wounded, they are dragged in there to be patched. From there they are taken to an advanced dressing station of the Field Ambulance.

21:00 The next step was to the main dressing station of the Field Ambulance. This was Middle East stuff, because they had roads there and they had ambulances. In Tobruk, they had ambulances, they could drive out and pick people up. Except on night patrols.

21:30 We were trained in all that. Our first aid, they had panniers, and in that pannier, there were so many medical things. Number nine tables for people with bowel troubles. There was eye drops, there was everything else. There was a bottle of whiskey, too, give a bloke a drink.

22:00 Bandages, splints, we could patch anybody up, from that pannier.

Could you go through what was in that pannier?

I've just gone through that there were…

22:30 I forget the expression now. For battle wounds, for bleeding, they had these bandages. They were cotton wool with gauze around them and the tape, and you could slam them onto a wound like that. And in fact, every man that went into action had one.

23:00 They could just pull that out and slam it on. As I say, there was all medicines. There was iodine, acroflavine, because iodine was very harsh.

23:30 I don't know if you've had iodine put on a cut, but it stings like blazes. I remember these Careo Brothers that I worked for, and that was number three job, there were two brothers and one was in the First World War, and that arm was cut off there.

24:00 So he was 'Wingy' Careo, he drove his car to work. The other bloke, he didn't go to the war, he had two arms and he had a chauffeur drive him to work. And this Wingy Careo told this story, "I'm there and they carried me up and they took me into this bloody RAP station,

24:30 they said, “Righto, squire, dip it in here.” And they had a bucket and they put my arm in it and it was just iodine." He said, "I just passed out, I don't remember." That's what they did for a man who had his arm shot off, they dipped it in iodine. So acroflavine did the same thing, but they didn't pass out.

25:00 Bandages, there were names for splints and things like that.

The reason I ask that question, as someone in charge of medical first aid, it is interesting to know what equipment you had to work with.

The Field Ambulance had…

25:30 We were the first area where a man got proper surgical work. This was Middle East practice down there. But when we came home

26:00 and got into the jungle, that line of communication and transport wasn't there. There was jungle, there was no roads, and a bloke could be shot down, and how the hell do we get them out? So they created what was a surgical team, and these surgical teams

26:30 would go out near where action was. In the Middle East, you wouldn't get a surgical team within ten miles of action, but up there, well, you could be wounded and if they pulled you out, you could almost be operated on in the rain,

27:00 within ten minutes or something. Apparently, in Vietnam the story was, I was talking to a fellow and he said, "No, no, we don't have stretcher bearers now. We have a helicopter." So if a bloke gets wounded, machete, clear a space, a helicopter comes down and he is flown straight to a hospital. But in those days,

27:30 the A and B Company of a field ambulance, were attached to a battalion. And so they had the regimental aid post, which was their own thing. Then they had the advanced dressing station which was part of a Field Ambulance, and then the main dressing station. And I was a sergeant, nursing, in charge of the main dressing station. I was senior nurse.

28:00 **So in terms of that pannier that you had, you had iodine, what other medicines did you have?**

We had everything that was known to medical stuff. We had aspirins, we had sulphur drugs,

28:30 we even had linctus for coughs and colds like I've got now, and the main one there was linctus heroin, which I would say about 1944, that stuff was called back, because the blokes used to like it, because it had heroin in it. Linctus heroin.

29:00 That would stop any cough, because it would just relax the throat.

Did anyone get addicted to that?

Yeah. That was why they took it out. And they took out the bottle of whiskey, too, eventually. You see, we were under British rations in the Middle East. Therefore, everything was as per there.

29:30 **So once you left Albury, you went to the second camp near Wodonga, how long did you spend there?**

I was there over Christmas. Because when Lorna and I got married, she came up and lived in a pub in Albury, and I was in this little camp thing.

30:00 So when I wasn't on duty, I was down to the pub and there was Lorna and I. Later on, when we were out at Bonegilla, John and myself would come in, and Lorna would have a room at this hotel.

30:30 So my friends would, "We're going to see, Lorna, Fitzy's wife." So with the nine o' clock curfew, up to our place, so it was very handy. We had Christmas in this little RAP sort of thing, in Albury. Mind you, our best customers were the drunks.

31:00 It was more or less to get them off the streets. The MPs [Military Police] would pull them in, shove them on a bed and sleep it off, and we'd look after their cuts and bruises. But the sergeant there, Sergeant Fanaski. I think he was a First World War fellow, but he liked the bottle. He just liked being in charge,

31:30 a pain in the neck. So that didn't suit me. I just did what I wanted to do anyhow. So he decided we would have a Christmas Day luncheon, so Christmas dinner was put on and we all put in extra money.

32:00 So there was WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK , poultry, pork, all this sort of thing, Christmas pud, bottles of beer around the place. See, the army had two bottles of beer per man per week.

32:30 We had a couple of friends come in, so I had Lorna in. So Lorna sat down with the troops in there for Christmas luncheon. And old Fanaski, Lorna had to sit next to the sergeant in charge, he was having a drink, and nodding along, here was this nice girl sitting next to him.

33:00 And he said, "You must have been a big baby." And Lorna was a little plump, and you could never ever criticise the fact that she might have been a pound overweight. "You must have been a big, beautiful baby." Lorna promptly forgot everything and went whack, took him right across the chops.

33:30 "Don't call me big." True story.

How did the sergeant react to being flattened by a woman?

He took it.

34:00 **How did he respond to you?**

It didn't make any difference. He was no match for us. We ran the place.

Leaving Australia. What was it like to say goodbye to Lorna?

I don't remember that.

34:30 Don't remember. I know it was pretty harrowing, but we were in Darley, in camp, and this was at Bacchus Marsh in Melbourne. From Albury

35:00 we went down to Mornington Peninsula, and from there we went to Darley, from Darley we all got movement, so a train to Spencer Street, Spencer Street to Albury, change trains, Albury to Sydney and Sydney onto the

35:30 [HMS] Queen Mary and we sailed to the Middle East. As far as as…I can't remember why or how. I must have been home on final leave.

36:00 Well, we did patronise the Australia Hotel at odd times. But I can't recall, I don't know.

36:30 **What do you remember of the journey over in the Queen Mary?**

Well, we boarded the Queen Mary in the night-time and we took off in the morning. I was reading my diary, the other day, and it said,

37:00 'And as for these things going hush hush when the ship goes out, there was ferries hooting and everything else as the Queen Mary took off from Sydney Harbour'.

Did it go out with other ships?

It had an escort, a cruiser.

37:30 We went down via Melbourne, and by the time we hit there I was seasick. And I was seasick until we left Perth a week later. I was not a good sailor then, but I've never been seasick since. The Queen Mary, and it was a beautiful day and we sailed around.

38:00 The Queen Mary, the [SS] Aquitania, and then we joined up in Bass Strait with another ship full of New Zealanders. So there were three ships in the convoy. And we had three or four navy ships, around and about. So we left Sydney,

38:30 we called in at Fremantle… Something to remember, it was blowing when we took out from Fremantle, we went into a gale. The Queen Mary, there was a big thing there,

39:00 wings out either side, and there was this army captain standing there, and the wind just blew his cap off, which would take some doing. It dipped like that, but by that time, I was a good sailor.

39:30 **What did you do to try and combat the seasickness, coming across the Bight?**

I just went into a prone position. When we got on board, we drew the short straw, we were on D deck and D deck was right down,

40:00 and there was this open space with all hammocks hanging down from the ceiling, and if everybody got into their hammocks, you were like that. If you moved, you got the bloke next door to you. So we went down there. I came up on deck,

40:30 and I slept on deck, and I didn't go down to D deck until we got Tewfik, around the corner from Aden, and picked up the gear and off. Because they had a hospital on the Queen Mary, so fellows were sick, and they would fall down stairs and things like that,

41:00 so we being a medical thing, we worked in the hospital. So I didn't go down to D deck and sleep in the ruddy hammock. There was a bed in the hospital so I slept in that. The hospital was on the Queen Mary, they had one. It was good.

41:30 There might have been forty beds. The Queen Mary was big, huge, there was five thousand troops there. Out of five thousand you can always find somebody that needs a bit of attention.

Tape 4

00:30 **Where did you first arrive in the Middle East?**

At a place called Port Tewfik. That is at the southern end of the Suez Canal. We disembarked at Tewfik, because the Queen Mary was too big to go through the [Suez] Canal. They wouldn't take us through there anyhow, because of security. So we got in a train from Tewfik

01:00 up to… I forget the name of the place, in Egypt. From there, the next morning, we crossed over the Canal into…. another train,

01:30 there were cattle trains. So there were twenty blokes to a cattle truck sort of thing, and that went up to

Gaza, in Palestine. That's where we were, in tents, and there was half a dozen of us nominated for 2/5th Field Ambulance

02:00 as reinforcements, and we were there for, I suppose, about two weeks.

What were your impressions of Gaza?

If you can imagine. We left June, '41, we left Melbourne in June, dressed in the heavy khaki,

02:30 and to arrive up there and they decked us out in what they called Bombay bloomers. That's what the English army wore. Khaki shirts, no collars, no forearms, and these wide flapping shorts.

03:00 Not neat and tidy like the Australian ones, these were big flappy ones. The first day there, "Righto, you blokes have got to be toughened up. Get used to being in the Middle East." So a route march, we go down to a place called Ashkelon, it was down on the beach from where we were in Gaza, and

03:30 that was a decent sort of a hike. Fortunately, we had our hats on. But being delicate and white-skinned and coming from Melbourne, the next morning I woke up with blisters on arms, around my neck and on the back of my knees. So I reported to the RAP sick.

04:00 Oh my God. So in the pannier we had pitric acid. So pitric acid was applied, bandaged up. I didn't do any route marches for about three or four days. Light duties, which meant you worked in the kitchens.

What were your living conditions like there?

Oh, good. We lived in tents,

04:30 we had a sort of a palliasse, and a blanket which went under there. And don't you believe that when you sleep on the ground nothing happens. I had been there,

05:00 not too long…They had a canteen, so after dark and after dinner, okay, you're on your own, so down to the canteen. They sold beer. Where we had a ration of two bottles per month, they had local wog… everything was wog stuff,

05:30 if it wasn't Australian, or Pommy, if it was British, wog beer. Terrible bloody stuff, but the wogs would drink it. I came home, because it was lights out at ten o' clock and you had to be back in bed. So I rolled out my blankets, in boy scout fashion, made up the bed and rolled it, so when I came in all I did was roll it out and get into bed.

06:00 Which I did. I was just dropping off to sleep and I could feel something. "What the devil is that?" So I went, slap. Oh, the most excruciating pain. Oh God, what the… Lights on, and I'm screaming.

06:30 Bang again. Damn scorpion. So I was bitten by a scorpion in Gaza.

Were many men bitten by scorpions?

I don't know of anybody else. I was enough.

Were there villages nearby?

Oh yes, there were wog villages. And we were told, "Don't go to the wog villages,

07:00 because the Arabs don't like you." Because Palestine, at that stage, was controlled by the British, and the Arabs were wanting to get their independence, because Syria was all French and Palestine was British, and they wanted them out. So,

07:30 we knew that there was going to be trouble between the Arabs and whoever was there. Most of their buildings are the mud bricks, which they got together. But I know that one battalion was resting, and they had their pickets out at night-time.

08:00 Guard duty and all that sort of thing. There might be twelve men, and there would be four out at a time, sleeping in shifts, or they were supposed to be. Come the morning, there were eight rifles missing out of the rack. The wogs had come in in the middle of the night and pinched them out of the guardroom.

08:30 They searched the villages but they never found them. But the idea is that the old Arabs, with the mud huts, they would put them in the wall, wrapped them in oil and everything, then cover them over. So they knew that after the troops were gone and all that sort of thing… There were a lot of Jewish people that were still coming in.

09:00 And this was before the United Nations had created Israel as such, and the British, of course, there was people in Jerusalem, but the Nazis were getting rid of Jews, so people were getting boats from southern Italy and Greece

09:30 and going to Palestine, and the British of course, would not allow them to land. So these boats would come in at night, and get them in. So they'd come in and they would be met by Jews who would smuggle

them away. Sometimes the boats would run aground. And the Jews were buying land

10:00 off the Arabs, and the Arabs thought they were very, very clever. Sand that was just like Bondi Beach. "Oh yes, how much do you want for the land?" So he'd buy it, because it was only damn sand.

10:30 But the Jewish people dug a well, up came the artesian water, and they'd have an orange grove there soon. The old Arab, "I have been robbed." So the Jews were making the land flower and the Arabs were saying that they had been robbed.

So how far were these Jewish settlements from your camp?

11:00 In Gaza, I don't know. But we went up to Jerusalem on a one day pass. We didn't see anything apart from the bar

11:30 and then home again.

Can you describe the bar that you went into in Jerusalem?

It wasn't a bar, it was an Australian canteen run by the army. But we did walk out and have lunch, in an ordinary café.

12:00 And the waitresses were obviously Jewesses and one of them came up to me and said, "Will you marry me?" I said, "What's that? I'm already married." She said, "If I marry a nice Australian soldier, I go to Australia." "My brother's there, he's not married."

12:30 So she walked up, "Will you marry me?" My brother is not racist, but he said, "We've got too many bloody Jews in Australia now." So we didn't get served. I was very, very surprised at my brother saying that, but that was the feeling at the time.

13:00 **So the British Army allowed you to go to Jerusalem?**

Jerusalem was in Palestine…

But not into the Arab villages?

The Arab villages as such were scattered here and there, but it was more or less the northern part where they had a few,

13:30 what they called, Jewish settlements, where they had taken over. But they weren't around Jerusalem. But Jerusalem was all Jewish. It was the old city. It had been there for years, yonks.

So despite the instructions, what sort of fraternisation was there between troops and Jews and Arabs?

14:00 Well, the Arabs were all wogs, and the Jews were…I forget their name…Yahooties, that was a word for Jews, Yahooties. Got on very well with them, as far as we were concerned.

14:30 **At that time, in terms of peoples' opinions, what was the difference between Jews and Arabs?**

Well, the Jews were civilised and they were there because they had been hounded out of their countries, and they were nice people. The Arabs were,

15:00 subservient, they were just wogs. It's like, you've got us and you've got Aborigines. The Arabs were the Aborigines. They were good people, but they were wogs.

15:30 The kids would run around your legs, "Money, money, money." And they were very what they called shifty people. Anything that they could get out of you. They didn't trust them, but they trusted the Jewish people.

16:00 **How did you spend the rest of your time in Gaza in terms of army operations?**

Route marches, and I say, that route march and sunburn and off, then back again. Then we had training, route marches again, with tin hats on and gas masks.

16:30 The tin hats were fresh and new, and you had a leather insert, you didn't have the tin sitting on your head. It was that damn hot, and you sweated, and the black stuff out of the leather ran all down our faces. And I was sunburnt,

17:00 so I had three lots of that, off duty. And then, as I say, a unit came out, we joined the unit, the unit went up into Syria, it was getting, August September, it was getting cooler then. We moved into Syria, and when we finished up in Aleppo, we were there for Christmas.

17:30 We had our winter woollies on again.

So while you were in Gaza, given the advance of the Africa corps through the desert, were you being prepared at all for a war against the Germans?

Oh yes.

What instructions were you receiving?

Well, they were the enemy.

18:00 But as far as I was concerned, we were medical, we were there to fix anybody up, irrespective of whether it was a German brought in, wounded, we would fix him up, too, no trouble. But we didn't go to Tobruk. But that was the training that we had. We had the medical training, but it didn't matter which way we went.

18:30 **Were you expecting to go to Tobruk?**

Yes, we were on twenty-four notice. Which meant that you sat on your kit in a tent, and you weren't allowed out of the camp, in case of, "Here's the truck, there's a boat, you're going."

So if you were summoned to Tobruk then, what of your equipment would you take? How would the mobilisation have worked?

19:00 I would have walked in with my pack on and that was it. What you had on…You'd got to a unit, the unit had all the unit stuff.

So can you tell me about moving from Gaza to Syria then? What your instructions were and how you travelled up there?

Well, we travelled in…

19:30 Well, the whole division, the 7th Division, the 18th Brigade, that's three battalions, the 2nd, 9th, 10th and 12th, the 2/5th Land, the 2/5th Artillery, the 2/5th Light Artillery. We got in transport,

20:00 we moved north and crossed into Syria, into Damascus, from Damascus to Baalbek, from Baalbek into Aleppo. Aleppo was of course… Well, Damascus

20:30 might have been the head of Syria, but Aleppo sure was the city. It had buses, trams, cinemas, that was a city, it had everything. And we, as an ambulance, we took over the Italian Consulate. Because the Italians had been occupying

21:00 Syria, so they were the enemy with the Germans and we took over there and we made our hospital in there. That was beautiful. There was four of us and we had one room. There was beds and sheets and we had a bathroom, with a bath heater.

21:30 So I wrote home and I said, "I've had my first hot shower in so many months." And we were living it up in the height of luxury. They had a medical section there, and boy, did the officers of the Field Ambulance,

22:00 they swiped on that. The Italians had beautiful medical equipment. In fact, in the desert, the field ambulance captured and took over a similar Italian thing, and they had these big EPIP[English pattern, Indian product] tents,

22:30 a European patent, an Indian design or something. They used those and even too them up to New Guinea. These tents were surgical theatres.

How far away was the hospital you set up, from the action?

There was no action in Syria. The action was over, finished.

23:00 We were occupying troops. We took over from the British. The British moved out. So we had taken over this MDS, main dressing station, in the Italian Consulate, and the British drew out.

23:30 They left us a few passengers, a few of their own blokes were in the hospital, and the Australians took over from there.

So what was the nature of the treatment that you were giving to patients at the time? What sort of conditions were you seeing?

24:00 Mainly medical, non-surgical. There was one fellow there, an army corporal I think he was, he was an Englishman and he had pneumonia, and he was propped up in bed,

24:30 so I took over, and said, "Righto, Arthur Johnson. You've got a high fever, old bloke." So all you could do was nurse them, there was no penicillin, it hadn't been invented.

25:00 Well, if it had, it wasn't there. So I jotted him along, and talked to him. And if you talk to people, they take a…I gave him a bit of an interest. I said, "You ought to come to Australia and see the kangaroos, sport." This sort of thing.

25:30 "Where do you come from?" "The north of England." "Yes, yes, yes." He said, "I hope I don't get

pneumonia." I said, "Why?" He said, "I will die. I had pneumonia when I was twelve, and the doctor said, 'Look after yourself, son, because if you get pneumonia again, you will die.'"

26:00 So I said, "Is there anything you would like, Arthur?" He said, "I would like a bottle of beer." I said, "Coming up." So I went around and saw the officer, and said, "A bottle of beer for the pneumonia bloke." "Yes, yes, no problem." So he wrote down a bottle of beer a day for this bloke. It was Fosters Export lager.

26:30 So I took it along, and he drank his bottle of beer and he didn't look back.

And he survived?

He said I saved his life. But, just prior to that, we had Captain West, sent out from Australia, to see the troops,

27:00 and he was a chest man. And he was seeing any patients with chest complaints. So he came along to Arthur Johnson, and picked up his thing and said, "How is the pneumonia patient today?" And Johnson went…I said, "Thanks bloody much for nothing, son." He said, "What do you mean, sergeant?" I said, "That man has got a phobia.

27:30 He's been told that if he gets pneumonia again he will die. And you've told him that he has pneumonia." "Oh, sorry." And he moved on, so that's when we gave Arthur the bottle of beer and he survived. Not only did he survive, but he was like the old Chinese fellow. If you save their life, they belong to you, and you've got to look after them. He wasn't a famous cricketer, but he was a King cricketer.

28:00 And whenever England visited Australia, Arthur Johnson came to Australia and watched the test matches. And so Arthur Johnson came to Australia and stayed with us and watched the test matches. He did that in Melbourne

28:30 and when I moved to Sydney, he stayed with my brother John in Melbourne, and watched the Melbourne tests, then he came up to Sydney and stayed with us, because we lived in Ashfield at the time, and he watched the Sydney matches. When we moved Wollongong and he was up here years later, I took him up to Sydney and put him in the pub opposite the cricket ground. And that was his last one,

29:00 because he got pneumonia again and went home and died.

Did you ever treat people with sexually transmitted diseases?

No, we had nothing of that. But the army did.

29:30 In Gaza, when we arrived there, we drove past a camp and there was a wire fence and there was troops there, Australians and English, you could tell by the uniforms, they were just walking around. And we had some nurses with us in the truck,

30:00 and these blokes sang out, "You'll be sorry." Everybody that came there, "You'll be sorry." And one of these nurses leant out and shouted, "Not as sorry as you are, old sport." Because it was VD [Venereal Disease] camp. Anybody with sexually transmitted diseases, that was where they were sent. They had a camp and it was well patronised.

30:30 **What was the treatment for VD?**

Well, as I say, I wasn't connected with them, I don't know. As I say, penicillin didn't come out until 1944, so over there there was a lot of what we called, 'old maid's treatments.' Pretty harsh, pretty solid.

31:00 **Such as?**

There was M & B, May and Baker, sulphurlidamide [actually sulfonamide]. But as soon as the penicillin came in, gonorrhoea and that sort of stuff, it was a nine day wonder. The blokes were a fortnight off then back in camp. It didn't worry anybody, it was treated as a cold.

31:30 **So where were the most frequented brothels?**

In Aleppo, we had the biggest brothel in Syria. My brother John and I, we got up to there, and being the medical team, we were put on brothel duty.

32:00 And despite everything else, we eventually persuaded somebody else to take our place, so we didn't do it. But Pension Blighty and Madame Fifis. The British Army had run both of these brothels for their troops.

32:30 There was a medical staff to see that they were clean. The girls were examined on a regular basis, so that they didn't transmit diseases to the troops. But it was the out of bounds brothels

33:00 where the fellows got venereal disease. And I think, as far as the British were concerned, if a bloke got venereal disease he was charged with self-inflicted wound. That meant he did his pay and everything else.

33:30 We took over…We closed Fifis I think, or Blighty, took over the other one, so that was it.

Why would blokes go to out-of-bounds brothels if there were these military run ones?

Well, the military run establishments, I don't know about the girls,

34:00 but Number Seven…We had this one bloke come over, "I'm in love with Number Seven. Oh, she's beautiful." And we checked on Number Seven, she had come on work at seven and knocked off at ten o' clock, and in that time, she had serviced fifty men, of which they paid two francs,

34:30 and she received one franc. So she was on fifty francs a night, but she would service fifty people in….on off, on off.

And where would the other franc go?

To the people that owned the brothels.

But these were army run brothels?

They were, but as far as the Australian Army were concerned, nothing to do with them.

35:00 Because our troops went there, as I say, we closed one off, and the other one was allowed to go, but it was under our supervision as far as the medical side of it was concerned. If a new girl started, she had to be examined.

35:30 **Did you say it was Fifis you closed down?**

I think it was, Madame Fifi.

What was the reason for that?

Well, they reckoned one was enough. That was a big brothel, as I say, it was the biggest one in Syria, and the British don't do anything by halves.

What did it look like?

I've never been in one.

From the outside, what did it look like?

I've never been near it.

36:00 **So when you say you were on brothel duty…**

My brother and I were put on brothel duty, but we got out of it.

So what did brothel duty mean?

Well, everybody that came in, the fellow had to recognise himself…

36:30 Incidentally, that was another thing…. Anyhow, you give them a condom, and give them a bottle of Condis [crystals], so when they're finished, "Wash yourself and get out." As far as the British were concerned, they treated it as a club. They might have had the same things, I don't know. But there was a little bit of music there,

37:00 and they could sit down and mingle with the girls and so and so, have little dances. But as far as the Australians were concerned, "That's a brothel." You go there, get in, get out. And it was open seven nights a week, but on Thursday night, that was officers' night.

37:30 The brothel was open from four o' clock to eight o' clock, and from eight o' clock until ten o' clock was officers…

So when you say the women were examined, they would be examined back at the hospital?

No, no, they would be examined on the spot.

38:00 Have a look under the microscope, "You've got VD, out." They'd treat it, oh yes. They would give her something, do this, do that, take this.

So what was your impression of these women and their background?

As I say, I don't know.

So you didn't actually treat anyone?

38:30 Me personally, no. I had nothing to do with brothels, except that our unit was responsible for it. There were men who liked that sort of thing. I wasn't one of them. The medical side was there for prophylactics,

39:00 to see the fellows did the right thing. A lot of them didn't want to use condoms, "Oh, it's not the same

thing." But they were given one and if they ever got VD, as they called it then, they were in trouble.

39:30 **What sort of contact did you have with any of the Vichy French that were left behind, after the fighting?**

Well, the Australians invaded Syria,

40:00 and the Vichy French were there, and the Australians…"Oh, this will be a walk over boys. The French, they love the Australians. We fought together at so and so…" Well, when we came in, "Wear your slouch hats boys, and they'll recognise you as Australian and they will put your arms down."

40:30 Tin hats the next day, they didn't mean a thing. What had happened was they had brought in a battalion of Foreign Legion from Morocco, and shipped them up into Syria, and our Intelligence didn't know. Those blokes were…"Look at those blokes without hats. Look at them. Kangaroos. Bang bang."

41:00 There was hell to pay after that, but they got stuck into them after that. They thought they were just going to march in and say, "Righto boys, here we are…" Which they did, bang bang bang, heavy casualties. But in Aleppo, we met up with…It was a city, it had everything.

41:30 The garis of course, were a horse drawn thing, and you had to have a ride in a gari…But you could go in and they had hotels. We were on shifts…

Tape 5

00:30 **You were talking about Aleppo. I wanted to ask you about the tent where you worked, the Italian tent. What did it look like as you walked in?**

Well, it wasn't a tent, it was a brick building, a double story building.

01:00 So we had army admin down below, and up top we had that floor as wards for patients. To see the patients, there was an entrance and a flight of stairs, straight up. There was one memorable day there

01:30 when Lady Blamey, who was in charge of Red Cross Middle East, decided to visit the medical centres and came to Aleppo, and her driver pulled up. And we had the 2/9th Battalion on guard, a fellow there with a rifle, and Lady Blamey pulled up.

02:00 Of course, the driver ran around and opened the door and Lady Blamey stepped up, and this soldier brought up the rifle to salute and he fired off a shot. Lady Blamey thought, what the devil? She went straight up those stairs. Never seen a lady run so fast.

02:30 The outcome of that was the sergeant of the guard became a corporal, the man on guard got fourteen days in the boob, and Lady Blamey had a change of underwear. That's not a bad story.

What did the men think of Lady Blamey?

Well, she took one of our fellows away with her.

03:00 He became a Red Cross corporal. He was a corporal in our unit and he became a sergeant. But all his job was to give out cigarettes, and despite what we think of cigarettes these days, the British Army gave out five packets of cigarettes, or a two ounce tin of tobacco ration.

03:30 The Red Cross gave away packets of ten Capstan. There was no filter tips, or anything of that nature, it was just straight, full strength, or medium strength, and that's where I learned to smoke. "Have a cigarette, sport." Fellow would be lying back, "Light me one." So I'd light him one.

04:00 "Are you going to join me?" So that's when I started smoking cigarettes. That was Aleppo.

What did the men think of Blamey?

Oh, they treated him as a joke, and Lady Blamey. Right from the very start, when the 6th Division went over there,

04:30 certain officers' wives also went over, and so men were billeted in hotels and things like that. The officers had a good life under British jurisdiction. But then the orders came out, "No wives, no distractions. We're at war." But Lady Blamey came over

05:00 as head of the Red Cross. But Blamey and his wife never met. If he was in Cairo, she was in Aleppo. If she went down to there, he went there. So he was, "No wives allowed." So he never met up with his wife. And she was there for two years.

05:30 When the 18th Brigade came out of Tobruk, a week later, he had the whole brigade out and Blamey came around to address the troops and thank them for what they'd done in Tobruk. And since they

seemed in such fine fettle, they would be pleased to know that they were going into Syria very shortly

06:00 And you wouldn't believe it, all these soldiers, "Boo!" All these fellows, all they wanted to do was R and R [rest and recreation], and visit the flesh pots and things around Jerusalem. So that was it. So they did treat him as a joke.

06:30 **What was your daily routine when you were based at Aleppo?**

Well, I was on night duty or day duty. Day duty was seven in the morning, until seven in the night, night duty was seven at night until seven in the morning. Twelve hours shifts. And in action, that is how we worked.

07:00 There was always nursing staff, there was no females. Just the fellows. And I was a nursing orderly. I was a corporal, then I became a sergeant, and of course a sergeant doesn't do all that much nursing, it was more specialised perhaps, organising that the job was done. And also, there was a surgical team as well.

07:30 So that was the day, from seven until seven.

What kind of surgery was done at Aleppo?

Well, there was no battle wounds as such. But when you've got a brigade around, and there's three battalions, all sort of things happen. There was one fellow, his father was in the First World War

08:00 and told him all about the Turks, so this fellow… Aleppo was forty miles from the Turkish border, and the 2/9th Battalion were aligned across that border. So on pay day this fellow got full and he thought he would go over and talk to these fellows about his old man and the Turks, in the First World War, who were against us. Of course, in this war they were neutral.

08:30 So he went and got his gun and then charged into Turkey, whereupon he was arrested, and he was kept in Turkey. Eventually, he joined his unit when we were in Milne Bay, about twelve months later. They had to have talks about getting this bloke back again.

09:00 **Was he kept in jail in Turkey?**

I have no idea, but we didn't see him.

And what kind of operations would be done in the hospital in Aleppo?

Anything. If there were no battle wounds and things like that, there is broken bones and ear, nose and throat jobs,

09:30 appendicitis, that sort of thing.

Were there many accidents that you had to patch up?

Well, there's always some accidents. You've got trucks and ambulances and there's the ASC [Army Service Corps] Service Corps. I remember at one stage there,

10:00 there was an AFL football match between the 7th Division Army Service Corps, which were truck drivers and they were the mobile stuff, and the 2/12th Battalion, which were South Australians, and they played that. And one of our fellows, Percy Thorbes, he was an umpire.

10:30 And they had it on a barren patch of ground in Aleppo, and I wouldn't have liked to have fallen over, because it was hard and cold, being around about Christmas time. You can almost see the glass shining on the surface.

11:00 When the game finished there was a line right across there to the bookmaker. Bets were on, this battalion against that battalion. But in sport, there were a number of injuries, legs broken and that sort of thing. And whilst these battalions are R and R-ing,

11:30 the medical side still keeps going. So we were continuously at work.

How would you deal with infections? What kind of medicines were there for that? An infection in a wound, or if something had not healed up properly?

12:00 Well, an open wound, they would clean that up, acraflavine, dust it with sulphur milaphide [actually sulfonamide], bandage. And they'd have anti-tet [tetanus] injections, all that sort of thing. After this '44 business,

12:30 we had penicillin.

Was that later in the war, was it?

Oh, very late in the war. The war was almost over. That would be in the last twelve months.

So before penicillin came in?

We had M and B, sulphur milaphide [actually sulfonamide]. M and B was May and Baker, they were the American manufacturers of these tablets.

13:00 **How did they compare to penicillin?**

It had its moments. But penicillin was a cure all, it was magic. Sulphur milaphide [actually sulfonamide], it was better than…

13:30 They didn't have anything like it in the First World War, all they had was iodine. Dip in that. But sulphur milaphide [actually sulfonamide] superseded all that sort of thing.

So if you were on a day shift and you walked into the hospital, what would be the first thing that you would do if you were on duty?

14:00 Check all the patients. You would get the night bloke and say, "Who is who and who is what? Who came in during the night? What was wrong with them? What has been done?" And then you would go around, you would say good morning, you would check everybody out, see that they were medicated. Some were on four hourly stuff,

14:30 some were on PRN [pro re nata], 'when required,' others were moaning and groaning, so you'd check and you'd probably go around, temperature, pulse and respiration, four o' clock in the afternoon, the same thing. At eleven o' clock there would be rounds by the doctors.

15:00 In the meantime, this bloke, he's got so and so and so and so. Well, put him on the surgery list.

What was the relationship like between the nurses and the doctors?

Between me and the captain?

15:30 Some of them remarkably…. "Good day, Maurie." None of this saluting and all that. We had Doc Walker, Norm Walker, he was a GP [General (medical) Practitioner] from Wagga.

16:00 At one stage there, we're getting away from Aleppo, we were in New Guinea, and all the young doctors…. A man did his university medical, then you had to do your twelve months in hospital before you would go out and practice. But in the war, you didn't have to do that twelve months in hospital, he'd join the army.

16:30 And he became a captain and he got paid and kept. So his army service would allow him, when he was discharged, to go straight into practice. These young blokes they loved it, straight out of university. They came into the army and they stuck out like a sore thumb, they were so raw, they knew nothing about army. One fellow came on with his army hat

17:00 up on the wrong side, this sort of thing. "You've got your hat on back to front, son." "Oh, yes." And these fellows, they were as keen as mustard. So if a fellow came in, "Oh God, he's got appendicitis, we better whip that out. Righto, whose on duty?" "I can do it." "No, I'll do it." At eight o' clock one night,

17:30 there's these two young fellows and they can't find the appendix. I said, "Get Doc Walker in, will you?" So old Doc Walker came in, "What's the matter at this hour? Oh, you young blokes, you don't know anything, do you? You see, sometimes it gets stuck down behind there. There it is." Snip, out.

18:00 So there was no trouble about who was what, it was all togetherness, one big happy family. There was a couple of snarlers, one or two fellows were… We had one major come in at one stage and he was a pain the neck. He wanted everything done by the book,

18:30 as per the army, and we were just…fellows.

What was Aleppo like as a town?

Well, as I said, it was a city. It had everything in a city. There were cars, buses,

19:00 trams, trains. There were no aeroplanes, apart from the army. There was theatres, and apparently there was some night life there. You were talking about the Free French earlier, we met up with one fellow.

19:30 He came over and talked to us, we were having a beer. "Can I buy you one?" Any bloke who buys the boys a beer, he's welcome. There were the four of us, and he said, "Would you like to come home to my place." I said, "You're French? You speak good English."

20:00 "Oh yes, well, I'm attached to the headquarters here of the Free French, but I'm French." So we strung off French, and I did a bit of high school French as you know, not very well. So we went back to his place.

20:30 He said, "Help yourself." And there was a fridge, and little bottles of beer. So we had a few beers. He said, "Look, I've got to change, I've got to go out." So he changed and we were…He was in a beautiful suit and uniform and

21:00 a cape, a blue cape, brilliant scarlet insert on the inside. Oh, it was straight out of Hollywood. He looked

magnificent. He said, "Sorry fellows, I've got to go." I said, "So do we." So off he trotted. There was some French thing on that night,

21:30 and he was Intelligence. He mixed with us, and I think he was getting to know what Australians were, as opposed to the British, so…

How much activity was there from the Free French in this area, at the time? Did you see many?

That was the only contact I had with them.

22:00 Because, as I say, we didn't mingle except when I was off duty and we would go down and have a beer. As I say, the medical team, they never stopped their work. It was continual.

So what would you do with your time off when you were in Aleppo?

Sleep.

Where were your quarters?

22:30 Upstairs. There was four of us in a room about this size, there was four beds, and we had a heater, a bath heater. As far as the accommodation was concerned, it would beat a tent anytime, with scorpions. Yes, that was the happiest time that we had there. And come Christmas

23:00 there were a lot of orphans in the town, and we had kids running around, so we went down to one of the French sort-of hostels, and we entertained about two hundred kids for Christmas lunch.

23:30 **Was there much impact of how much the civilians had been impacted by the war?**

Well, life went on in Aleppo. There was all sorts of silly things that happened. For instance, one day after the Australians took over, all the buses and cars stopped. When the British had it there,

24:00 apparently the petrol depot had a little job on the side, and they were selling army petrol to bus companies and things like that. And the Australians took over and stopped that, all this corruption, and it brought the town to a standstill, sort of thing.

24:30 The theatre, we went to the theatre to watch ‘Dombey and Son’, or something or other, it was in French of course. But we went, and the theatres were not like our straight-laced Victorian sort of theatre. There was the ground floor

25:00 and the ground floor was like that. Wogs in the front and whites in the back. And the dress circle up top was a semi-circle and all little compact things, tables, chairs and a little bell. You'd press the button,

25:30 in would come a waiter, two drinks here. So you could have a little something to eat, as much grub as you could purchase. That was something that we went and seen in St Kilda, but they were very definite on the trams

26:00 and the cafes, no Arabs. They treated the Arabs like our people used to treat Aborigines.

How long were you based in Syria for?

Six months.

Where did you go after that?

We went back to Palestine, and after Palestine we finished up in…

26:30 some creek thirty miles north of Adelaide. As I say, we did a couple of detours. We trained down to Egypt, down to… And there was a big Dutch liner, she was a beautiful big ship, and that was what they used to use in their trans Atlantic… The same as the Queen Mary, but the Queen Mary only went

27:00 from New York to Southampton and back again, until the war. And there was this beautiful big Dutch ship, and away we went. But we heard on the radio and everything that Singapore had fallen. Of course, we weren't going to Singapore, no, no, no. When Singapore fell, we pulled into Bombay and got unshipped.

27:30 We were there for two weeks, I think, and there were these small steamer boats, and I think we might have had a couple of hundred on board.

What was the feeling when you heard the news that Singapore had fallen?

The end of the world.

What were you thinking about people in Australia?

28:00 We didn't think about people in Australia, but we thought about people in Singapore. As I say, my brother and I went down to our wedding with two other fellows. Well, one joined the 7th Div Cav [Division Cavalry],

28:30 and Tank Corps and Light…things, and the other bloke finished up in Singapore. So poor old Jim, we thought of Jim, 'What's happened to Jim?' He was in our photos with us. But Jim survived the war. We didn't see much of him afterwards, he became a schoolteacher, but he was a wreck.

29:00 We were very, very upset for the poor old 8th Division, because in Albury, when the 23rd moved out, there was a whole scheme of Tasmanians came up. And they were the 2/40th Battalion. And the 2/40th Battalion

29:30 moved to Singapore, so they were taken, and we knew quite a number of fellows there.

Were you getting much information about what had happened in Singapore?

Nothing. It was jungle warfare, it was different.

Did you get leave when you got home?

One week. We got on a train from

30:00 …I forget the name, some creek. Sandy Creek, to Melbourne, we had one week's leave then up to Queensland.

Do you remember what you did on your leave when you came home?

Yeah, honeymoon.

30:30 **Where did you go on your honeymoon?**

Home, stayed in bed. There's a story there. Back into tents, now if you've slept in a tent, you're lying on the floor and you wake up in the morning and it's just like looking at that. If it's sunny, it's white. It's exactly like that.

31:00 And we had been in Sandy Creek, I'd say, for a couple of weeks before we moved onto Melbourne and had our leave, because it was a Victorian unit, you see. Ninety percent of the fellows were in Victoria.

31:30 And in Sandy Creek, righto, you've got a sausage bag and a kit bag, and they're both under me, and there are so many blokes to the tent. You wake up in the morning, sunlight. So first night home, I woke up in the morning, “Bloody kitbag,” and went like that, and it's Lorna.

32:00 I knocked her out of bed. And she fell out of bed. It was a wire mattress with something on top, and her little toe got caught in the wire, and it finished up at right angles to the rest of the… Oh dear, oh dear, first night home,

32:30 I kicked her out of bed and I broke her toe, it was dislocated. So I said, "Breathe in," and crack. "That's bloody sore!" "You're all right." So that's Lorna's story, kicked out of bed on my first night home, how romantic.

Did you notice many changes when you came back to Australia?

33:00 **When you had left it had been the fall of Paris that everyone was talking about, and now it was the fall of Singapore. How vulnerable did people feel they were?**

Oh, much more so, because Paris didn't affect them materially, in any way, but after Singapore, "My God, these Japanese, they're good. They could worry us." So there was all sorts of panic stations,

33:30 because it wasn't long after that, that they came down the islands, down through. And they had reached New Britain, and we had a battalion in Rabaul. They just landed and wiped them out, literally.

34:00 They were overwhelmed, Jacquinot Bay to their various bits and pieces. "Righto, sorry. We give in." And that is where they slaughtered hundreds of people at a time at various spots. They didn't take prisoners.

34:30 So that worried the people in Australia.

How much news were people actually getting at that time about the atrocities that were being committed?

Oh, I think word of mouth was some of it. But this Tol Plantation thing, that was reported in the papers, but they didn't give too much away,

35:00 because they didn't want to talk military.

How much did you talk to Lorna about the war in that week of leave?

Not very much. Probably, "Remember so and so. He was there. Well, he did so and so."

35:30 We met up with blokes from the 2/23rd Battalion out of Tobruk. And my brother John, his best mate, he stayed in the 2/23rd and sailed and he was in Tobruk and he got killed there. And so John was asking this fellow,

36:00 he said, "What about Barker?" He said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. He was a silly coot. You know we were going out on bloody night patrol, and they gave the blokes the English rations, a tot of rum before they went out

36:30 on night patrol." That was just to keep the cold out, to keep them big and brave. Well, two or three blokes didn't drink, but Barker did. So, "I'll have it, I'll have it, I'll have it." So when it was time to go out on patrol he woke up, but he'd left his rifle behind, he was half full.

37:00 But was killed in Tobruk. As far as we know, it was on patrol. Whether he had his rifle or not, we don't know.

So after the leave in Melbourne, where did you go from there?

Up to Tully, up the top end

37:30 of...Mareeba, on the central highlands in Queensland. Tully was the place we were.

What training were you doing then?

Oh, mainly exercise and getting ready for jungle warfare, as opposed to

38:00 open warfare, desert warfare.

How different was the training?

Well, as far as we were concerned in the medical section, there was scrub typhus and malaria and these sort of things.

38:30 What to expect and how to deal with it, that sort of thing.

What symptoms were you told to look out for?

Well, if a bloke came in, with a temperature and he's complaining of aches and pains...You could pick out malaria from that.

39:00 They were cold, even if their temperature was high. Ninety-eight four was normal, and a hundred and four was hyper. That was malaria, but you could get scrub typhus, too. You couldn't give them quinine, that was all we had then, before Atebrin.

39:30 And scrub typhus, all you could do was wash them and keep them cool.

What was the symptoms of scrub typhus?

Just like that, and a temperature.

40:00 And you take the chart quarter hourly, and it would go up to a hundred and four, and they would be at a hundred and four for seven to ten days. And at the end of ten days, either went up and they died, or it came down... All you could in that time was keep them comfortable, try and keep them cool and nursing.

40:30 Keep them interested.

So as well as the temperature, they were rigid?

They were apathetic. We didn't lose one man in Milne Bay with scrub typhus, and that was written up in

41:00 in the medical section, because in a lot of places... They would be diagnosed in the battalions and by the time they got back to us, we said, "Right, you stay here." Other places, they were flying these blokes back to Australia, and they had ninety percent death. The thing was with scrub typhus,

41:30 leave them where they are, don't move them. We'd move a bloke onto a stretcher and bring him half a mile back to where we were and put them down, but eventually it became nothing flying out and... Scrub typhus? Leave them where they are.

Tape 6

00:30 We were stationed around Kilcoy. There was Caboolture, Kilcoy and Redcliffe, and they were three spots outside Brisbane. That's where we had

01:00 a little hospital, if you like, and a main dressing station in Kilcoy. In our off time we had sports and things like that, and football. We played Aussie rules,

01:30 and they had inter-company... There was A Company, B Company and Headquarters Company. And we

had ambulance drivers, they were Service Corps attached to the ambulance, so there was four battalions. And I was ruck, the fellow in the middle,

02:00 and I rucked four quarters. It was very hard, because we didn't have these boots that they have, we had army boots. And on this particular day, I just kicked the ball and this fellow rushed in and whacked me. And I fell cock-eyed, and

02:30 this knee just came up like that. So I reported sick, "Oh God, you've got a cartilage, we'll have to fix that." So they sent me up to recuperate. There was cartilage removed, there was none of this medial ligament things that they talk about with footballers today. So they said, "Righto, Fitzgerald. Look after yourself.

03:00 We'll operate when the knee goes down." Well the knee was gradually going down and it was just about down, when my brother sent a message up, "You better get back here, Spot, we're moving." So I could walk all right, so I booked myself out of the hospital, hitched back

03:30 to Brisbane, and found that they had moved out yesterday. They sailed for Milne Bay and here I am in a staging camp in Brisbane. So a week later, there was all sorts of fellows going out on a boat, and I was amongst them to pick up with my unit. Mind you, that knee was very sore.

04:00 They'd say, "Get up on the truck," or, "Get out of the truck." You've got to jump down, and it was very sore. And that's when we landed in Milne Bay.

How important was it to you to be in the same unit as your brother?

04:30 Well, I don't agree with brothers being, say, in a fighting battalion, things like that. But we were almost non-combatants. We had a rifle and we could fire, and at odd times we were supposed to.

05:00 He was in the artillery, but when we decided that we would go, I claimed him. I was the elder brother, and I could claim my brother to join me, which I did. And I was very unpopular, for quite some time, because he had made some mates in the unit

05:30 that he was going to. And so, he was in Headquarters Company and I was in A Company. So we were in different companies in the same unit. But whenever we went on leave, we went together. So getting back to Aleppo, we saved up our beer and held a raffle,

06:00 and we had a week in Jerusalem from Aleppo. Which was very good, we saw everything around Nazareth, etcetera.

I wanted to ask you, you were arriving at Milne Bay after the Japanese attempt to land there.

06:30 **So what sort of damage and destruction was there, that you could see, when you first pulled into the harbour?**

Well, there was no town, Milne Bay, there was no town there to start with, but there was a wharf built alongside there,

07:00 and I think our blokes might have built it. I sailed up on a little boat, the [SS] Anshun. It was a Chinese crew because it was a Chinese company that originally owned the boat. We sailed out of Brisbane, up to Townsville and over there.

07:30 At four o' clock one afternoon, it came out over the speakers, "Troops, we're pulling into so and so this afternoon. We will be going onto Milne Bay in the morning, because the Japanese usually fly over in the afternoon and bomb the place." So we did. The next morning

08:00 we choofed, choofed, choofed, around into Milne Bay, up to the harbour, and we unloaded. But they had a three point seven, that's a very heavy ack-ack [anti-aircraft] gun. They had a flock of those on board, because with the Japs, they could shoot them down. But that night, the planes didn't come over.

08:30 But seven o' clock, of course in the tropics, seven o' clock is dark, six o' clock is dark, seven is dark, two Japanese cruisers pulled into the bay, and they just went boom, boom, boom, all around the shore. The Australian hospital ship, the [HMAHS] Manunda, all painted white, that was in the wharf,

09:00 and that pulled out in the middle of the bay, with all the lights, all the lights up in the rigging, every light was on in the ship, and they didn't touch it. But they merry-helled around the ground.

So they were observing the fact that it was a hospital ship?

09:30 Yeah, they obeyed that. Despite the fact that the submarine sank the [AHS] Centaur off Brisbane, later on, but that was a hospital ship, too. But this one, no. So, that was my landing. But of course I'm still in there,

10:00 my unit was at Gilli Gilli, that was fourteen miles out and I've got to wait for a truck to pick me up and take me up there. So I'm sitting there, and there's these boom boom boom going around the place. This officer came up, "Here, these half dozen blokes. You look after them. Don't let them out of your sight.

10:30 Intelligence wants to interrogate them." Six Jap prisoners. So here I am, no gun, nothing, just two stripes. Two blokes came up, "Hey Corp? Can we have one? Just want to take him out and show him something…" "Noo." Fortunately this officer came along and took them away, otherwise…that was what the troops liked to do.

11:00 There's little stories about Milne Bay.

You said that you went up there on a Chinese ship. What sort of a ship was it?

It was a little steamer. Incidentally, they sank it at the wharf.

11:30 The Japanese sank it, those two cruisers that came in. She wasn't unloaded and there were all these heavy ack-ack guns on board, so she went down. They holed it, she sunk, and she rolled over on her side and that is where she was until the end of the war. At the end of the war,

12:00 someone came along, straightened her up, plugged the hole in it, took it back, refurnished it and she was out sailing.

So what was her principal cargo?

She was taking troops, ammunition and food. We were the troops, we got off. But they didn't start unloading,

12:30 because they thought the planes would come over at four o' clock and they wanted to get these ack-ack guns off so they could fire back at them. But they didn't get them off.

So what sort of protection was there in Milne Bay harbour from a Japanese naval…?

A slit trench, a hole in the ground.

13:00 There was no buildings or anything. There was tents and things like that…There were army huts later on, but that was virtually after action. But I would say that a couple of weeks later the Japanese put on a kamikaze charge

13:30 up the airstrip…The airstrip ran straight onto the water's edge. The planes would take straight off. We had 76, 77 Squadron of Kittyhawks, American Kittyhawks there, Australian pilots.

14:00 The Japanese decided that they were going to do a charge up there as a final thing. We had a battalion there and a battalion there, and five thousand Japs charged, and five thousand Japs died. And the next day, they dug a big hole and five thousand Japs were shovelled in.

So was that before or after you arrived?

14:30 That? That was after I arrived.

So there wouldn't have been an airstrip there when you arrived?

No, there was. There was airstrip there because before the Japanese landed, there was a brigade of what they called 'chocos'.

15:00 You know, the eighteen year old call-up kids. They were there and Major General Cloves was in charge of it. They were on night manoeuvres and they were strung out all along the beach, and they each had a rifle and five rounds of ammunition, one clip,

15:30 and the Japanese were going to land, and so, and so, and so, and so, this was all make believe. And the Japanese landed. So there was absolute consternation. The other story was that the Japanese landed with, not little tanks, but they were little open carrier things, headlights on the front, and a machine gun. This thing was coming along,

16:00 and one of these officers stepped out, "Put those lights out! Put those lights out! Don't you know the Japanese have landed?" Dut dut dut dut. They were the Japanese.

Can you describe the climate and the geographical surroundings of Milne Bay.

It was reasonably flat and absolutely covered in coconuts.

16:30 It was an American…Palmolive, or something like that. It was one of their coconut plantations. That was all it was. There were a couple of missions up at Buna, there was a mission station, with the girls, some were Seventh Day Adventist, some were Catholic.

17:00 They didn't have very happy endings with the Japanese. They made sure that all the women were raped and the men beheaded.

Had you heard those stories by the time you docked at Milne Bay?

No, but I heard a lot of them when I was at Milne Bay, and since.

17:30 And after that, of course, they still bombed, they came over with their bombers. We pulled out, I think it

was February, and the Japanese made a last... You see, they were at Rabaul,

18:00 and we were at Milne Bay, and it was a nice short trip over. Our nearest headquarters was at, say, Darwin, and there was a mountain range to get over, or come around. So the Japanese were right along there. So we went from Milne Bay

18:30 up to Buna, Gona, Sanananda. Fifty or a hundred miles up the coast, and the Japanese were well entrenched in there. They had cement pillboxes along the beach. Each pillbox was that thick, with a slit, and a machine gun poking out. So anybody that landed on there, unless they got hit with a hundred pound shell

19:00 or something like that, it didn't make any difference.

So once you had docked and gotten off the Anshun in Milne Bay, can you tell me where you travelled to then?

Well, I stayed there all that night and the next morning some trucks came in, "Righto, here we are." They came in for supplies and to see if there was any mail on the boat, that sort of thing,

19:30 and I went back with them, to Gilli Gilli.

And what was the scene at Gilli Gilli? Can you describe in detail that journey and arriving there and what you did?

Well, it was wet and we went up a dirt track.

20:00 Our blokes, they had cut down coconut trees and laid down, in difficult spots, corduroy palm trees, so you could drive across it. But there was creeks, and in the wet season, of course, which is June to Christmas time, those creeks

20:30 would rise ten feet in ten minutes, with all the rain washing down. It was difficult terrain. And we were out on that perimeter. There's the coastline there, there's Milne Bay, we were fourteen miles in there. But the Japs could come around, there was a valley there, and come through here.

21:00 We had a brigade there. And these poor bloody young fellows were getting the hell knocked out of them. And Cloves came up to Wootten, who was the brigadier of the 18th Brigade, just back from Tobruk, you know, we're bloody men, and he said, "Have you got any commandos?" And Wootten said, "I've got a full brigade of blood commandos.

21:30 Where do you want them?" So our troops came in, they put on a decent act down there, that was the end of the Japanese. That was the first time that they had ever been beaten.

So can you describe what medical facilities there were at Gilli Gilli?

Well, at Gilli Gilli we were, for once, in reserve.

22:00 But they had only been there for two weeks. They've got to put up tents, they've got to do all this sort of thing. They had their main dressing station, and there would be the usual fellows coming in, "I've got a cough," or "I've got a sore eye." Something like that. And once that happened, the battalions leap frogged up to,

22:30 as I say, Buna, Sanananda, and out to a couple of the islands there. We had one of our blokes, he got a DCM, a Distinguished Conduct Medal, because Goodenough Island, there were Japs there and the 2/9th Battalion were told to go and wipe them out, which they did. They had a few wounded.

23:00 But there was a little craft came back, and of course when the battalion went out, some of our fellows went with them, to look after them. And this fellow was one of them, and when they came back they were strafed by Japanese on the way back from Goodenough Island.

23:30 They had taken Goodenough Island, it was finished, but they were coming back and they had wounded boys on board, bringing them back to us. So they pulled into the wharf, and "Righto, give us a hand, give us a hand." And there was this bloke, and he says, "Can you give us a hand up, mate." "Get your own bloody way. What's wrong with you?"

24:00 And he just went like that. And this was our bloke, who was looking after everything, he had taken a slug, in the gut. But he looked after everybody until they were all off the ship, and then he couldn't climb up onto the wharf. And that was when they realised that he had been hit.

24:30 He was pulled up and he was put into the hospital, and that was where they found that he only had one eye. He had joined up, okay, he was blind in one eye, but he worked it out, what line was which. "Read this line." So he read that line.

25:00 So he passed himself. All the boys knew he only had one eye. But the officers didn't. That was the sort of thing that went on.

Was he treated in the dressing station or a surgical...?

No, he was treated in our dressing station, there was no surgical. We had our own blokes as surgeons.

25:30 Half of them kidded themselves that they were trainee surgeons. Major Pullerton was one of them. He used to walk around, "Don't touch my hands. I'm a surgeon." Now at McPhersons, back after the war, and I moved to Sydney

26:00 and then down to here, and Lorna had trouble with varicose veins on her leg. So I went around, "Who does all this sort of thing?" "Oh, there's a bloke called Pullerton." So I went around and saw Pullerton. I said, "G'day Wal, how are you?" "Fitzy? What are you doing here?" That was five or six years after the war.

26:30 There he was, a surgeon at Wollongong Hospital. So he did Lorna's leg.

I was just wondering how you treated that man who had the gunshot wounds? What were the procedures that you conducted while you were at Milne Bay and how you treated men with injuries like that?

27:00 All wounds were treated. They cut the thing, pulled out the rounds, stitched up internally and then stitch up externally, and carry him away and say, "Righto, next patient."

What sort of anaesthetic did you have available at Milne Bay?

27:30 I was going to say, the usual, chloroform, that sort of thing. Put a thing over their mouth, and drop, drop, drop. Count from a hundred backwards sort of thing. They would give them a needle first to calm them.

28:00 **And what was used predominately for pain?**

Heroin, until they stopped it.

So given that it was the tropics and you were in tents, what sort of hygiene and sterilisation procedure was there?

28:30 Milne Bay in the wet season was… For every bloke that was wounded, there was two blokes that went down with malaria. The thing was, okay, we've got to get rid of the malaria. And the fellows, because it was still hot, long pants, long sleeves,

29:00 buttoned up to the neck…did that. All exposed flesh, you had a lotion to put on it. Daylight wasn't bad, but dusk and dawn was the two times that mozzies would visit, so that was it, and everybody slept under mosquito nets.

29:30 They had Atebrin. So you had to have your Atebrin tablet every afternoon. They would be doled out. So the story was, if anybody got malaria after that date, it was self-inflicted, and they would be on a charge. The first bloke that went down with malaria

30:00 in our unit was the CO [Commanding Officer]. They shipped him back to Australia and we never saw him again. The second in charge became the colonel.

So how prevalent were cases of malaria after the introduction of those precautions?

Oh, it dropped like that. We still had the odd one,

30:30 but we got it under control.

So how would you assist in a surgery for someone if it meant removing bullets or shrapnel? What would you actually be doing?

Scalpel, you would be the assistant, the nurse.

And what would you wear?

31:00 You had a gown over your stuff. They followed a certain amount. They had these autoclaves, which were sterilised, all the dressings and things like that. The instruments, they were kept in metho.

31:30 **I'm trying to get a picture of what this dressing station looked like and where it was in proximity to Milne Bay and Gilli Gilli and the rest of the action.**

Well, we put up our EPIP tent, a big square tent,

32:00 about as big as this room. They would leave the sides off to get the air through. But those sides would have mosquito netting all around. There was a door in, and it would be laid out. It was a surgical theatre.

32:30 The operating table, other things, everything was best of everything as far as contamination was concerned.

So where would the patients go once they had undergone surgery?

Back to the surgical ward, and that would just be an ordinary tent with two or three beds in it.

33:00 When I say beds, they were stretchers. The ordinary stretcher that they carried the patients on, but they would be on a couple of logs, up off the ground.

So if wounded were brought in, what was the procedure in terms of emergency or triage or prioritising the wounded?

33:30 Well, we had prep, they would go in there and they would be prepped for operation. Stripped off all their dirty clothes, washed down, depending on how serious the wound was. Sometimes they would just tear the clothes and hop in.

34:00 **So who would prioritise the surgery or treatment for the wounded?**

Well, in some cases, me. But usually there would be a captain, and the captain was an ordinary doctor. "Righto Fitzy, we better do this bloke before him. He can wait.

34:30 Give him a quart of morphine."

And who was usually bringing the wounded in?

Our fellows. You see, we had… In jungle fighting it was

35:00 entirely different to lines of communication. We had boongs, blackfellows. New Guinea natives. Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels, as they liked to call them. They did the same for the Japanese, whoever was in charge at the time, and fed them.

35:30 And we had those. If you read that piece that I put there about Shaggy Ridge, there were two hundred boongs in one train, and they would carry the wounded out, back to us.

36:00 **And how were they paid?**

Well, there was such a thing as ANGAU, Australian and New Guinea Administrative Unit, and they looked after the natives. I don't know what they did, fed them.

We've spoken to other troops from Milne Bay,

36:30 **who said that their rations were in shortage. Was there any shortage in medical equipment?**

Often time to time, yes. The lines of communication were… Food, of course, they probably told you how the canteen was blown up, did they?

Can you tell me about that?

37:00 Well, they had landed in, this brigade, before the Japs landed, and they had set up some huts and things and a big tent and they had all the food supplies there, for a brigade.

37:30 A brigade is three battalions and ancillary troops. These would come in on a weekly basis, and bring their order form, or "I've got so many men." They would pick up rations for so many days. Well, this was there at Milne Bay, at the time of the action.

38:00 When the Japs landed… There was a certain amount of…because it's not cut and dried, it was bedlam. If you heard a noise down there, you didn't know who it was. They had blokes on guard around this sort of thing. And if the Japanese came down, if they swooped,

38:30 they would blow the thing up, they weren't going to leave that for the Japanese. So the story goes, there's this bloke, on guard, and he sees something moving through the trees. "Halt! Who goes there?" They passed. I said, "Halt, or I will fire."

39:00 And then there was a crashing towards him and he thought, 'Oh God, here comes the Japs!' So he blew the place up. It was a zebu, white, a white oxen going through the jungle and that was what he saw. He fired a shot and the thing charged. And so they blew up all the rations and so there was a lack of rations.

39:30 **What were your living conditions like?**

We lived in a tent, and it was wet. There was no amenities. You had a whole in the ground, for a slit trench. Every trench had a slit trench, it was half full of water, in the wet season. But the Japs used to come over at night time,

40:00 and I remember the old cook had been sitting down, having a cigarette. And a lone plane came over, and he used to circle around for half an hour and when he went back, he would drop a couple of bombs. The cook house fires and everything were all out, and you weren't supposed to smoke because they reckoned that

40:30 you could see a cigarette light from fourteen miles away, from the air. So he was sitting there, and bang,

down come this…whoomp, halfway in the middle of our camp. So bang, he dived into his slit trench and the next thing, "Help! Help! I've been hit!"

41:00 The thing was, he only had a pair of pants on, he was in his slit trench, the cigarette had flown up in the air and landed in the middle of his back and he thought, 'I've been hit.' But it was a cigarette butt. That's a nice story, isn't it?

Tape 7

00:30 **How long were you in Milne Bay for?**

About nine months.

And what did you do after Milne Bay?

The unit moved out, and we went back to Melbourne and they gave us two weeks leave.

01:00 So one from the Middle East, and two weeks from there, and we are into 1942. And that was where… Lorna wasn't there to meet me at Royal Park, because she was tied up with the air raids.

01:30 The next morning, we woke up and we had breakfast and we read the papers and there was that big headline, '100 Bomber Raid on Milne Bay.' And I said, "Darling, isn't it lovely. I'm home." Because at that time the biggest bomber raid that we had, they'd come over at midday, was twenty-two bombers.

02:00 And they would just drone over like that, and they had fighter escort circling around them, and our planes were nowhere to be seen. They'd take off, and disappear, and then over would come the Japanese and bomb us. But they said they got a lot of them on their way home.

02:30 We said, "We can always tell an air raid, because our blokes take off."

What was your next overseas service?

After that fortnight, we then moved up to

03:00 the Atherton Tablelands. We were there for months, I think. Very, very boring.

Did you know what you were preparing for?

Well, back to New Guinea. We eventually did.

03:30 We sailed up to…Port Moresby,

04:00 and we set up camp there. We had been there for about a month and nothing was going on. The next thing, 9th Division had landed near Lae and were going up to Finschhafen, trudging up that way. 7th Division were going to go. And there was a range of mountains along New Guinea,

04:30 9th Division were going up the coast, and 7th Division were going up the inside. The Japs were in the mountains there. And that was the first time that twenty-five pounders were loaded onto a plane and taken to Lae. They were reasonably big guns.

05:00 So there was a whole regiment of those flown up there, and they went along the beach way.

Where did you go from Port Moresby?

From Port Moresby, we landed just out of Lae, and then we went up to the Ramu Valley, up the Markham Valley, then the Ramu Valley,

05:30 to a place called Dumpu. And I think the D-U-M-P was all right. There was no buildings, there was nothing there. They had built an airstrip and that was where we set up camp. If you looked out, it was the same as the range of mountains here, there was that, and that's where the Japanese were.

06:00 **How were all the supplies for the camp being taken in?**

Planes. Planes landed back and forth, all the time. And so the battalion were up in these hills. And that's where one of the great things were, Shaggy Ridge.

06:30 And this is where we had our…A Company was up…We had our main dressing station at Dumpu, then we had an advanced dressing station at various places, Gilli Gilli and all that sort of thing. And that's where my brother John was, he was up there.

07:00 It was a battle that teetered right and left. There was a certain amount of activities from Americans wanting to see what the Australians were doing, and there would be people coming in with cameras.

07:30 At one stage, they sent these journalists. "Can we have a photo of you guys in action around here." So half a dozen came out in the daylight, mounted a machine gun. "Righto, stand there." And they're standing up on a top of a hill. Bang bang.

08:00 The Japs opened up on them. Because they were up on top of the next hill. It was like that, you couldn't walk down there. There's another story, true or not, was that one of our fellows went down at night, down the hill to the creek at the bottom to get some fresh water, take back. Japanese bloke came down the other side, fresh water to take back. "G'day." "Hello."

08:30 Off they went, neither of them were armed, they just waved to each other and went their merry way.

What kind of injuries were you seeing from the fighting?

Everything. Mutilation, limbs blown off.

09:00 Machine guns in there, that's history. We'd have occasions…operated on, but you know, liver damage in those days was fatal,

09:30 because you couldn't stitch liver and that sort of thing.

How frequently were the casualties coming in?

It depends on the action.

What would be a busy day?

10:00 The surgical teams wouldn't stop, they would just operate twenty-four hours a day.

What did they do for lighting?

We had incandescent lighting, gas lighting. We had Primus stoves, and they had those adapted with mantles.

10:30 Do you know what a mantle is? You know the old gas lights, 'Fanny By Gaslight'? They had gas mantles, turn the gas on and light that. And there was this thing, like a gauze, in shape, and the gas would come up the light and that would expand the light.

11:00 Well they had this pump up stuff, and there were the lights. No electricity. I think at this stage we had our own generators and we had electricity. That was for the operating unit, they didn't have it in the tents.

11:30 **So how many patients could you cope with at one time?**

Well, a field ambulance is supposed to be able to cater for something like forty or fifty. At Dumpu, we had two hundred and that was like a hospital. There was just these rows of tents,

12:00 with stretchers up on there.

And how many staff were looking after these two hundred men?

Well, in headquarters and the main dressing station, there were two sergeants, and that was one day shift, and one night shift.

12:30 They would have an orderly…twenty or thirty men.

How would you as a nurse comfort those men?

Give them a cigarette. And if you had a quiet moment, sit down and have a chat with them.

13:00 I had one bloke who was always moaning and groaning. "I'm gonna die. Let me die, ooohhh." So I swore at him, gave him a smack across the cheeks and said, "Shut up. You can die but don't worry these other blokes." And I got reported. But he didn't die, that bloke, because

13:30 I had given him the spark and that was the idea of what you could do.

So what happened after you were reported?

Oh, I had to front the major, and I explained the circumstances to him. I said, "Well, this bloke had absolutely given everything away. All he was going to do was die. And I prodded him,

14:00 and I said, 'Righto, what about your family? Don't you want to see them again?' I said, 'Wake up to yourself. Get on with it.'" And I said that I kept this up for the next day. "Come on, do you want to be in it." We shipped him out after a week, not to his unit,

14:30 but back further. He couldn't move at that time.

What were his injuries?

Don't know, it could have been typhus.

Was it distressing for you to see the levels of injuries that were coming in?

Oh yeah, horrible. They happen.

15:00 You get inured to it. "What's there?" "Oh, he's got gunshots, left and right." The head was worse, because there is not much you can do about that.

15:30 **What would happen if someone died? What would be the procedure?**

Well, that was my job. Sew them up in a blanket and they would be buried the next day.

Would there be a marking where they were buried?

16:00 Oh yes. Yeah. And they would have their ID [identity] tags, so later they would know who was what. But, you had to plug them and tie them off,

16:30 then fold them over, wrap them up, blanket stitch them around, on a stretcher and take them out.

Where were they buried?

They would have a row, fifty yards away.

17:00 And these would all be noted, so that they could all be dug up later on. Because it was hot and humid, they decomposed. You couldn't say, "We'll keep him there for a couple of days and fly him back to a war cemetery," or something like that. Because they would be…

17:30 So we'd bury them. But they were all disinterred later on from these various spots.

So what kind of record would you keep about that, where somebody was buried?

Well, it would be in the headquarters admin. They would have all those records.

18:00 They didn't miss anything. They kept records of how many malaria cases, how many typhus cases, how many blokes had lost legs, how many had lost arms, how many internals. They were all meticulously given

18:30 records, and each patient. You see, each man in the army has got a file, and whatever happened to him from day one in the army. Every time he reported sick or something happened to him, that would be on his records. So if you said that you

19:00 wanted to look up Joe Smith, in 1943, here's Joe Smith, look him up on the computer in Melbourne. Yes, he was there, he had gunshot wounds and so and so. The records were meticulous.

You mentioned scrub typhus earlier. How would you treat that?

19:30 As I said, purely by nursing.

There was nothing you could give them?

You could give them an Aspro. It would ease their head, but it didn't make much difference. Antibiotics didn't affect them. It was just keeping them…sponge them.

20:00 Wave something in front of them, cools them down temporarily. Keep their brows damp. But you would do one bloke, then the next bloke, then the next bloke, then back and start again. Scrub typhus was not

20:30 of plague proportion or anything like that, they were few and far between. They would get them rolling around in the dirt sort of thing, and they get one of these fleas or a scrub tick, a tick mainly. And that was always a sign, in the early stages,

21:00 malaria, we could always treat, because we would take a blood test and take it into the next tent where a bloke would put it on a slide and dye it, put it under the microscope and say, "Oh yes, that's MT [Malignant Tertian] malaria," or, "That's BT [Benign Tertian] malaria." But if it didn't show up…Dengue didn't show up and this other didn't show up, so we would

21:30 strip the bloke and examine him under both armpits and groin. And if you've got a tick, he goes up to the warm moist spots, and you would see a lump like the size of that, develop in that area. Scrub typhus.

22:00 That's where he was bitten and that's the little lump that has gone on from there.

You mentioned earlier that there were some air raids in Milne Bay. What would you do to protect the patients when something like that was happening?

You couldn't do much. If they were walking, they would take cover.

22:30 But blokes that were bed ridden, we had no ways of having bombproof shelters. They were tents.

Did you have raids at Dumpu?

Yes.

23:00 But Dumpu, it was a swinging case, we were gradually getting on top. Because out of Lae, they had a big air base and a lot of Yanks. At eight in the morning, brroomm,

23:30 and you see fifty bombers in formation, flying up towards the Japanese areas, Madang and Wewak that sort of thing. Then a couple of hours later we would see them come back and count them. Oh well, they lost a couple that time.

Did you treat Americans as well as Australians?

24:00 We would treat anybody. But when I say that, I don't think we were in action at Milne Bay with Americans. The Americans were up further on the track.

24:30 It was mainly Australians.

At Dumpu, how much warning would you have that a lot of casualties were coming in? What sort of communications could you have with the front lines or the battle fields?

I don't know.

25:00 All I knew was that there would be boongs coming in with fellows. A bloke would come in and say, "There's twenty fellows coming in, up the track."

So you didn't have much time to prepare?

No, you were prepared for it all.

And the supplies, they were all flown in?

25:30 Yep, everything, you couldn't get in any other way, but planes.

And how long were you based up there for?

I suppose we were there for six or eight months.

Could you get an indication of how the war was going? In terms of gauging that from the number of casualties you were getting?

26:00 I thought you meant on the international scale. We had radios going, yes. But news would come back through couriers and things like that. Fellows would go out and come back, word out.

And what kind of news were they bringing at that stage in the war?

26:30 Well, as I said, we were getting on top of things. Shaggy Ridge was touch and go, there were heavy casualties on both side, but eventually the Japs moved on. We took Finschhafen, the 9th Division went up to Madang, we went around and we came down to Madang. So they pincered them that way.

27:00 So that was the end of Dumpu, Ramu, Markham Valley.

And did you have a chance to go home after that?

After that, we went home, and we got a month's leave. A month.

27:30 Then back to the Atherton Tablelands, and the next port of call was up to Morotai, and from Morotai we went to Borneo.

Once you were in Morotai, what kind of preparations were you making for the landing at Balikpapan?

Well, they put us on…We were going to land in barges.

28:00 And so therefore, depends on the beach, whether the barge can get in and land on the beach and open up. There might be a coral stretch or there might be rocks. So at Morotai, it was an island like that,

28:30 the Australians had that part of Morotai, that part of Morotai was occupied by Japanese. But the Japanese had nothing, except Japanese living there. Occasionally a hospital ship would come down. Now this hospital ship, they kept an eye on that, because it came around the islands

29:00 and picked up wounded and took them back to Japan. But when they came back, they still had a lot of wounded on board. Blokes walking around on the deck with arms in slings and a couple on crutches. They were reinforcements dressed up to look like wounded. And the hold was filled with ammunition and supplies.

29:30 So she was pulled into the wharf at Morotai and there it was. But we had our little unit, because the brigade was there, and we practised running in and out of these little barges, and up against the beach,

etcetera. Set up a tent,

30:00 bring our supplies on board and say, "We're set." We nearly lost one bloke, Titsy, he was five foot three. Now he had to be five foot four to get into the army, and they said, "Well, you're only seventeen, son. By the time you reach eighteen, you'll be five foot four. You'll be right." He never did.

30:30 And so, here we came, deep water thing, all we could see of Titsy was a hand walking through the water, he was underwater, on the landing. He was too short. Anyhow, he made it.

Previously when you had worked in these stations, flown in, set up and been ready to go,

31:00 **how were you trained differently in terms of a landing situation and what your role would be?**

Our role was always to get in there, to move up as close to the action as possible, set up a hospital. But we called it a main dressing station, because a field hospital, they've got doctors and nurses and chemists and dentists and all sorts of things.

31:30 **What kind of protection did you have in the landing situation, as far as personal protection?**

Same as anybody else. Look after yourself.

Were you armed?

No, no.

So how far behind the infantry were you?

32:00 Well, at the landing at Balikpapan, in Borneo, we went in on day two.

And who came in with you on day two?

Oh, all sorts of troops, I don't know. That was a magnificent show. Hollywood couldn't better it.

32:30 **What happened at Morotai? How long were you there for?**

I suppose about a month, six weeks. But that was mostly training and getting ready to go to Borneo. We knew we were going to Borneo.

33:00 They had, apart from training, what do you do to relax at night? So they had an open air theatre, a great big screen, and rows there.

33:30 Fellows would come in and sit down and the blokes would watch Tom Minx or something like that. And the Japanese would come up the other side, and they would sit there and they would watch it from the other side of the screen.

Could you see them?

No, it was dark. But we heard later that they had seen all our shows. We had

34:00 two Japanese come in, waving a white flag one day. And they had a female nurse and she was pregnant. But they had been starving and she was in a bad way, so okay,

34:30 we took her in. Not our unit, but there was a hospital, an AGH, an Australian General Hospital unit, and they sent the Japs home. And so, she was put into a ward, cleaned up. She was starving and

35:00 the instructions were, "Don't give her anything, nothing to eat, until we examine her diet." So some poor coot came in, "Oh, starving are you love?" He gave her a plate full of rice, and she died. Those little things happened.

35:30 **Were you told that you would be treating Japanese prisoners of war at any stage?**

They wouldn't be called Japanese prisoners of war, they would be if they came in, but Japanese wounded, yeah. We just handled them the same way.

36:00 **And did that happen?**

Never in our section, never in my section.

Did you hear of it happening elsewhere?

I can't give you an instance where it did happen.

36:30 **I might ask you to describe the landing at Balikpapan. What you remember of that day when you came in.**

Well, one thing was, the colonel got a memo. 'Fitzgerald, Sergeant, has been made Lieutenant.

37:00 And he is to move to the 4th Field Ambulance, New Britain.' So I was called into the COs tent,

"Fitzgerald? What the hell is this? You've been made lieutenant." I said, "That's nice, isn't it? What do I do?"

37:30 He said, "Well, you're going to the 4th Field Ambulance." I said, "Oh, give it a break. We're going to Balikpapan. We're going to Borneo, aren't we?" He said, "Yep." And I said, "Look, all the training we've done, I know everybody." I said, "You move me out, you've got to train someone else."

38:00 So he decided he wouldn't read that memo until we got over there. And so half a dozen days later, we were on out little LSTs, LCTs [Landing Craft Tanks]. We were on a landing ship, which means it was three hundred feet long. The big landing craft would go in and open out.

38:30 That can take a company of men or so many trucks and tanks and things like that. So we came on, and we got up. It was six o' clock in the morning and the sun comes up and we look around. Everywhere you look there were these landing craft, right out there.

39:00 And there were big ships, hospital ships, and there was navy ships. Now, that is a full division, that is three brigade, and each brigade had three battalions. So you had nine battalions. A brigade on red beach, one here, on blue.

39:30 We were 18 Brigade and we were at Balikpapan. The other two brigades were further down, and they were all lined up to go in. Where we were at Balikpapan, there was just this one big cliff. And on top of that, there must have been a dozen of these big square tanks of oil.

40:00 There were two, not... These air force had been going out and attacking these for a week before hand and blowing them up and setting them on fire. Because they had words that if the Allies landed on that beach, they had put

40:30 little furrow tracks down all this cliff. And all they did was open the cox up there and the oil would come down and they would set alight to it. Anybody who was attacking, climbed up there…they wouldn't do it. So they were getting rid of that. And so, it was about eight o' clock in the morning and the last one went up in smoke.

41:00 All the cheers. Then all these little landing craft, straight out of the line, went towards the beach. Then you saw, puff, puff, puff, puff, along the cliff and all the little landing craft turned and came back. I'm standing on the side of the thing, watching everything going on.

41:30 And all at once, there was a boom. Boom. It was right at the back of me, and there was this damn navy ship had fired off, at the ground. But it only seemed feet behind our boat. They had fired over the top of us.

Tape 8

00:30 **You were talking about the landing at Balikpapan and the Hollywood show.**

Every battalion had one navy craft at its request. So there were nine battalions, there were nine ships. Cruisers, destroyers and if they requested,

01:00 "Fire three rounds at so and so," boom boom boom. So the infantry in the landing, each one had a ship to soften the thing alongside. Well, I didn't see nothing of the first day, except ship's landing and troops going ashore. But at six o' clock the next morning,

01:30 we landed. And we went up there, and there's a building and it's a very nice building. Apparently it was the Japanese naval commander's residence. So we, as the medical team, took it over.

02:00 We got in first before the other boys come in behind from headquarters. So, we promptly set it up as a main dressing station once again. We had a surgical team there, so when our casualties came in, we could operate. But it was not exceptionally busy,

02:30 we had a few come in. But of course, the other brigades had their own field ambulances down with them, so we were just catering for our fellows. And later in that day, too, I went for a walk and these cliffs were back from the beach, you could land on the beach and then they went up,

03:00 and I sat and watched. And there was a tank come up, it's got a gun on the front of it, and the tank was going pop, pop, pop, pop. And in this cliff was these caves. You could see cave entrances, and there was this tank going pop, pop, pop

03:30 at this particular cave entrance. Then there were two more, one either side. And as this one went pop, pop, pop these two came in from the sides and they had bulldozer blades on the front of them, they went swish, just stop gap. They reckon there is five thousand Japs buried there.

04:00 As I said, we had planes circling, we had ships firing, we had tanks going in. As I say, it was a text book thing as far as warfare was concerned. Our blokes enjoyed it, because there were no casualties, very

few.

04:30 They weren't all in the caves. They had camps around about and at the back, and this was where the other brigades were chasing Japanese, and firing and doing this. At the end of a week, that was the end of the Japanese at Balikpapan.

You mention there was very few Allied casualties at Balikpapan. What sort of casualties were you treating?

05:00 **What you would say were normal battle casualties. The first night we were there, that's day two, there were quite a few casualties, but one in particular. I still don't believe this is true, but it did happen.**

05:30 **I walked up to the theatre, and this was about eleven o' clock at night, and here's this general, and he's got an Australian operating on his head. And he had cut that away, and lifted the skull up and there was the brain.**

06:00 **And he had a little pair of tweezers, plucking. And I said to the orderly, "What in the blue blazers is this bloody captain doing? Is he trying to make a name for himself? This poor character with his head all blown up." I said, "He's dead by morning. We've got blokes here that he could help."**

06:30 **"Don't ask me." So I knocked off and the next morning I went around the wards, and there's a bloke lying face down, with his head over the edge of the stretcher like this, with his head all swathed around. I said, "Who is this bloke?"**

07:00 **"Oh, he's the bloke that they operated on the head, from last night." I looked at this bloke, and I said, "Put that bloody cigarette out." Here's this bloke, the same bloke that I said would be dead by morning, he was lying there, and he had to be in that position because of his operation, inhaling on a ruddy cigarette. I said, "That won't do you any bloody good."**

07:30 **There was another fellow there, that a week later came in, gunshot wounds, machine gun stomach wounds. "Where the devil did he get these?" "He was out on patrol." These Australians,**

08:00 **I'm included, they had taken over a Japanese position, and...what have the Japanese left behind? Where are the souvenirs? And this bloke had a full Japanese uniform on, and he was out on patrol. When he's coming back in, there's his mate on guard duty. "Halt! Who goes there?"**

08:30 **"It's only me." Now the Japanese, a lot of them could talk English. "What's the password?" "What bloody password? You know I forget passwords." He said, "Give me the bloody password or I'll fire." "Look, Jack, it's only me. It's your mate." He said, "Don't give me that." He came towards him**

09:00 **and the bloke gave him some rounds. And it was his mate, in a Japanese uniform.**

How common do you think injuries were from friendly fire?

There were some. In the jungle, at close combat, you don't know who is what.

09:30 **What about say, like a landing at Balikpapan?**

Well, the 2/14th Battalion lost a lieutenant in the landing. He was shot by the bloke behind him, who tripped.

10:00 There he is running up, leading his platoon, his pistol in the high port, but the bloke behind him shouldn't have had his rifle, it should have been locked off. He just staggered, his rifle went off,

10:30 shot the lieutenant and killed him. That's the only one I know, those two circumstances.

So what happened once you left Balikpapan?

Well, I couldn't move out of Balikpapan until

11:00 there was what they called 'Rear (UNCLEAR) Movement.' When you attack, everything is geared to go forward, not back. So when it became static, and there wasn't rear movement, I was shipped out. So, as I say, I might have been there three weeks, but I know that as far as we were concerned,

11:30 we had settled down, and the Japanese sent over one plane, it must have been a little seaplane or something or other, it used to drone and drone, and eventually it would drop just one bomb and disappear. It was only one small plane, but that used to keep the blokes away at night. Of course, you can't fire at something you can't see.

12:00 But that was Balikpapan. So from there, I went to Morotai, and they've got to wait for a plane to go to New Britain.

Where were you when the war ended?

When the war ended, I was at Morotai at a staging camp.

And how did you hear the news about the A Bomb?

12:30 **I heard that they had dropped an A Bomb. The Americans thought that this would end the war, but the Japanese did not surrender. Then they dropped the second one, and the Japanese did surrender. The word came through on the radio**

13:00 **that the Japanese had surrendered. I was never more scared in my whole army career. Those ruddy Yanks. There were a lot of Yanks on Morotai, and they went absolutely bloody crazy. Everything that could be fired was fired. Big guns, bombs, everything went up.**

13:30 **There was funny moments, of course. Down at the local Australian general hospital, the matron of the nurses, who was a very strict martinet apparently, the nurses, she was forever on their back. "Don't do this. Don't fraternise with those young officers."**

14:00 **They all went down to the beach, the matron came down to call them up, one, two, three, and they threw the matron into the water. There were guns and God knows what. There were rounds going by your ears. I got into my tent and laid down on my bunk.**

14:30 **How did the Australians celebrate the end of the war?**

That was everything in that, the only thing I heard was the nurses in the hospital. As far as I was concerned, the war was over, let's go home.

15:00 And so eventually there was a DC3 plane. There was a row of benches inside the plane, no air conditioning. It was colder than this room. We had

15:30 the tropical gear on, and we went from Morotai to Biak, that was a little island. And that was only on a plane strip, for planes going back and forth, they could land there and refuel. But it was a coral atoll, and all the Yanks had done to do it,

16:00 was put a bulldozer over it and flattened it out. Because it was coral, planes could land there in very wet weather, because the rain just sank through the coral, it never flooded or anything like that. They reckoned it was the perfect airstrip for the Pacific. From there, back to Finschhafen. Now Finschhafen, after they had

16:30 kicked the Japs out, that became an airstrip there and I think it had half a dozen runways, and everything else. But the jungle creeps on them. By the time we landed there, there was one strip and everything else was just jungle. It had grown over.

17:00 Then from Finschhafen, went to Lae. And at Lae, staging camp, and of course, being an officer, I went to the officers' mess. And they were laughing their heads off, because two nights before Gracie Fields, who was an English comedienne, she was from the north of England and she was rough as bags. She sang in a very broad accent and told dirty stories.

17:30 And then for the last night, she would sing 'Ave Maria' in a straight voice, and it would always bring the house down. She was remarkable. So after the concert, back to the officers' mess, dinner, and because she was coming for dinner all the officers were

18:00 on their best behaviour, and they had their batmans serving as stewards. They had gone to the local hospital and got some jelly and cream. And for sweets, they served jelly, a little cream on the side. So when the batman came up to Gracie, by the time it had come over and the stewards had put it out onto the plates,

18:30 and up into the front and handed it over, the jelly. And Gracie had one look at it and said, in a loud voice, "My good man, there are two things I like stiff, and jelly is one of them. Take it away." And that broke the place up, and they were still laughing their heads off two days later.

Could you tell us about your arrival in Rabaul?

19:00 The next day, I landed in Jacquinot Bay, reported to the CO of the 4th Field Ambulance, "Where the bloody hell have you been, Fitzgerald?" I said, "Enjoying myself in the war in Balikpapan in Borneo." "You take B Company to Rabaul tomorrow morning." So this is four o' clock in the afternoon, I had one night with the unit, and then I went on a little boat

19:30 with about sixty fellows. And it's a little American LC, landing craft, which takes one truck, or about sixty blokes. It took us two days to get to Rabaul, and we had a bloke on board who was a dentist of all things. He wasn't very military minded, because

20:00 everything,… the sanity arrangements was, there was a bit of a ledge at the back of the ship, and you just hung on there and squatted. He said, "Hey Maurie, I've done my pay book." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, I've just been out the back and hanging on and it was in my pocket. I had

seventy quid there

20:30 in notes, and I've got a lot of back pay." Which means he couldn't draw it out and he didn't have a pay book, so it would have to go to Melbourne to get back again. I said, "Tough luck, fella," and laughed. Two days later, we land at Rabaul. There was not a building in the place, there was a big square concrete thing, but that was the

21:00 strong room of the Bank of New South Wales, when there was a bank there. There was a low brick wall, which was the front fence of the commissioner's residence, when the high commissioner for New Britain was there, and that was all. And it was all market garden

21:30 …where the flat part of the houses had been.

22:00 And that was tomatoes and eggplant. Big eggplants, and the tomatoes were the little cherry type, because over the years they had gone down. Every fifty feet there was a

22:30 big forty-four gallon drum sunk down into the ground, and that was what they used to fertilise all their plants. So all their hygiene, urine, faeces, the lot, went into these drums. Then the rain would come, they would stir it up and that was their fertiliser for their market garden, and it looked lush.

23:00 But our blokes on the medical side were, "Oh no, what is this?" So we got one battalion and one company from the field ambulance to take over from the Japanese. And they reckoned there was sixty odd thousand Japs there,

23:30 according to the American Intelligence. And when we actually did get a count, there were ninety-six thousand. They were all ready to do a bit of a push, but they had nothing. There was no air support. Of course, the Yanks had kept the ships away, so they were just living on their own, poor little Japanese.

24:00 **Those Japanese that you saw on Rabaul, what were they doing and where were they?**

They were everywhere.

Were they armed? Were they prisoners?

No, they just wandered around. But when we came down there,

24:30 we said, "Get out," and so they did. And eventually, they surrendered. We said, "Righto, put down your arms or bring them in." So they came in and put down swords,

25:00 and I went out one morning and there was…as big as this house, Japanese swords. So I went over and took one, a Japanese sword captured in battled.

What exactly were the Japanese doing in Rabaul when you arrived? Were they in the town?

There was no town. We had wiped that out, under them.

25:30 But they were in the hills and they were all in caves and down around the shores. They had a cave around the shore there where a submarine could come in and stay, all underground. A sea wall for ships and stuff like that. The only thing they had outside was a little seaplane.

26:00 Like a Tiger Moth, with two little floats on it, and that was their air force. There was Indians there, and our job was, any prisoners, to bring them out. The prisoners there, there were no Australian, they were Indians.

26:30 These Indians had been brought over from Singapore. You know the big guns that were facing out to sea? They'd brought those guns to Rabaul, and they had put them up around the top of the harbour so they could fire if Allied ships came in. But they had put them in tunnels.

27:00 The Indians, which were British Indian troops, they brought them over as slave labour to build these tunnels, put rail tracks down, bring the guns up, mount them on the rails, so they could go in and out. If a ship came in, they could wheel the guns out, go boom, boom, boom. That was what the Indians were there for.

27:30 So most of the Indians that they brought over either died from dysentery or hard work or from being knocked around.

So what sort of prison camp were the Gurkhas in?

I don't know whether they were Gurkhas. I think they were just ordinary Indian. They were all very happy fellows. We built rows of tents

28:00 and this, where they were, until we could ship them home.

What physical condition were they in, given the stories about the treatment of prisoners of the Japanese?

They weren't too bad, when we were there. What there were of them recovered very quickly.

28:30 Personally, I had fifty Japs a day. They would come in about seven in the morning, march into the camp, and I would shoot them off about four in the afternoon. In the meantime, any work I wanted down around the camp or around the town, when I say the town, I mean the area, and that was all tents,

29:00 they did it. They dug latrines, that sort of thing. Any hard work at all, they were the Japanese.

The Indians? How would you go about treating a prisoner of war as far as malnutrition or any diseases associated with that experience?

29:30 We didn't treat any Japanese, we left that to them. But these Indians, they had a lieutenant there, and he was a medical officer. There weren't that many, I think there was about eleven thousand brought over to New Guinea and Rabaul.

30:00 And I don't know how many were left. A hundred. I know there were seventeen I think, in New Guinea, and they put them on a plane to go to Rabaul to give evidence of war crimes, at the end of the war, and that plane went down. There was only one bloke saved. He got malaria the day before, so he didn't get on the plane. So there was only one Indian,

30:30 out of all the Indians that went to New Guinea, there was only one left at the end of the war. And what we had there were good, but funnily enough, this Indian bloke, amongst those papers there, he's written out his name and address and his home town in India. His father was the

31:00 station master back in that town, and he was the number one boy in the Indian town, and this was his son, and he was a trained medical officer. But our blokes didn't allow him near our fellows. He wanted to get in and see what we were having, he had never heard of penicillin and all this, and he was all ears and eyes.

31:30 They allowed him to look after and treat his own troops.

Why wasn't he allowed near other troops?

Our medical officer said, "Oh, he's only a bloody wog.

32:00 He's not up to date with what's going on in the medical world, he wouldn't know. And he probably did a medical degree in two years instead of five years. We don't know what sort of examinations he's had. They're not up to our standard." Now even after the war, when blokes came in and they wanted to be medical officers or doctors, here,

32:30 they wouldn't allow them to practice until they had done an examination at our universities. But that was a little bit of discrimination. Anyway, he and I got on famously. When we got there, the old Imamura, the Japanese general, he was still driving around in the

33:00 bishop car. Now the story of this bishop thing was at the start of the war, the Japanese…everybody out. The whole of Rabaul was evacuated, everybody went out. But there was one… Down on the harbour, there was a big building, and that was a relic of the old German times, a mission.

33:30 You see, New Guinea, Papua New Guinea was a German mandate until 1919, when it was handed over to the British. So everything prior to 1919 was German. And this was a mission, which continued on

34:00 and they had men and girls there, and they decided that they would not evacuate. They would stay and look after their flock, which were the natives. God knows the natives were big fellows. So when the Japanese landed, bang.

34:30 The bishop of this flock, I gathered that they were Catholic. And he demanded to see the Japanese fellows. And all the ladies and fellows were lined up, like Bullwinkle, in the water and the Japs had their guns on them.

35:00 Eventually in the afternoon, when they had been two or three hours in the water, "Come out, go back inside, don't come out. You're prisoners in your own castle." But the bishop had talks with the general in the Japanese, and said, "We are friends. We are your allies."

35:30 "You are Japanese, we are Austrian. Austrian, Germany, we are your friends. We will look after you." "You're not, you're Australian." "No, you're not, you're Australian." "No, this mission has been here since 1900.

36:00 Years and years. Come and look at our place." There were all sorts of things there of German origin." But when things started to go wrong for the Japanese, they decided they would get rid of these people, and they didn't want any bodies lying around, dead.

36:30 So they took them out into a valley. I thought it was an old volcano, decrepit hole in the ground, which it was. It was some hundred yards wide, and it went down stiff down like that. And all the men were dumped in the bottom of that. That's it. And around the perimeter at the top they had Japanese guards.

37:00 No-one in, no-one out. You look after yourself, that's it. So that's where they were until the end of the

war. They were all prisoners for three and a half years, but they had been in that hole for about twelve months.

Did you see the hole?

I was in the hole. And we had set up

37:30 and everything was going nicely, and I was looking for work for my Japanese, and the CO called me in one day and he said, "Hey Maurie, there's a bloke came in and said that there's a lot of Australian men and women buried out in the mountains. You better go have a look at them." "All right, where's the fellow?"

38:00 Out comes this big black fellow, so we put him in a truck and away we went. We got there. Down we went into this place, and it was just like this Garden of Eden. On the flat plots down there, there was bananas and paw-paws and tomato plants and eggplants. Anything you'd nominate was down there.

38:30 And there was a couple of thatched grass huts, and I was led into there. And there was a fellow, he was sitting down at a table, it was a rough table. "Fitzgerald. 4th Field Ambulance. What's the story?" "Well, we've been here for the last three and a half years. We eventually finished up in here

39:00 and this is where the Japs left us." He said, "We've got no contact, there is no radio. What's going on." I said, "Well, the war is over, it has been for quite some time. What have you got?" He said, "We've got some very sick girls, we've got some women and we've got a couple of fellows." So we chatted and I said,

39:30 "We've got a camp up there and we've got everything, we can look after these people." So I went back and reported and I said, "There's about twenty girls there, most of them are Australian and some of them are sick. They've got TB [tuberculosis]."

I said,

40:00 "They've got very fine spirit, but I reckon we're needed." He said, "Okay, give us a couple of days." So we organised and we built a compound of tents and we put wire around it, because we didn't know what would happen or what our repercussions were.

What do you mean by repercussions and what was the wire for exactly?

40:30 To keep girls in, men out. If you've got a lot of fellows and they're not fussy about…."White women! God! Let's put on a party!" As far as they were concerned they were white women, so we had to protect them against us and them, and everything else. So back I went, I went down and I saw this fellow and he said,

41:00 "Sign our visitors book." And he had an old school thing. I said, "All right." And I signed 'Fitzgerald.' He said, "And what is your address?" So I wrote 9 Higginbotham Street, Brighton. And we had tinned fish, which the blokes wouldn't eat because they didn't like it. Herrings in tomato sauce, that sort of thing.

41:30 I said, "We've got some food here for you." We had Red Cross cigarettes and a bottle of whiskey. He said, "That's all right. We grow our own. Would you like one of our cigars. It was about that long and as thick as my thumb. And instead of smooth it was all nobbly and wobbly, where they had got thread and wound it around to hold it.

Tape 9

00:30 **You were talking about the cigars?**

I said, "Oh well, I will have a cigar. Would you like a whiskey?" He said, "Wait on, we've got our own." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "We've boiled it up from the bananas." He said, "We've got a nice banana drink here."

01:00 I said, "Good, I'll have one of them." So by this time I'm a good smoker, and I lit up the cigar, Unfortunately, I thought it was one of those ordinary cigarettes and my lungs just burnt. It was painful. I put the cigar down,

01:30 and I picked up the drink to wash it away, and I lost my stomach. It was neat banana brandy. So I didn't have any more of that. And I wished him well, and got out. I said, "Where are all these girls. We'll take them first."

02:00 They had been living… Where the walls come down here, they had carved out caves, so that they didn't get rain when it came down. When it rains there, it rains, it's monsoonal. So the caves were up above ground level, sort of thing, and they were in there.

02:30 What they stood up in, they had taken their gear from the mission with them. But natives would sneak in at night-time with little bits and pieces of plants so that they could plant and propagate. That's where

they did that.

03:00 But when they came out to get into the trucks that we had for them, there they were in one. Each one had kept one habit, for the day that they were picked up. And they were immaculate. The shoes shined and everything. Perfect.

What colour was their habit?

03:30 It was white with black. So we drove and got them home and unloaded them. And talk, talk, talk. Of course, all the officers came around and they were yap, yap, yap, and the girls were yap, yap, yap. So they put on afternoon tea for them,

04:00 and the girls were over the moon, little cakes and…

How old were the girls?

When I say, I don't think any of them were under thirty, they could have been in their thirties, most of them.

04:30 And two or three of them were sick. Although they walked, we put them to bed. And we had beds for them. Come ten o' clock, lights out, they were still yap, yap, yap.

05:00 So we had to quieten them down and look after them. We made arrangements, "What are we going to do with them?" The army said, "We're not going to do a damn thing. They're not army personnel. They're civilians." So we went to the Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit

05:30 and said, "They're New Guinea people." "Not natives, son. Nothing to do with us." So the admin wouldn't do anything, the army wouldn't do anything, and we're stuck with these girls. Eventually we got a friendly American pilot who had just flown in, he heard about them, and he said, "Sure, I'll take these girls back to Townsville." So he flew them home to Townsville.

06:00 **How many nuns were there?**

There might have been twenty-three, all told. As far as I know, we didn't bring out any of the men. They might have stayed there, I don't know.

What stories did the nuns tell about how they had been treated?

06:30 Well, at that stage I didn't have much talk with them, because the medical staff came in to treat them. Of course, we men can't nurse girls, but doctors treat everybody.

07:00 But going ahead, eventually I left the army and come home. I have a birthday in September. I was discharged by Christmas, and I went back to McPhersons and come September, well, it's the first birthday I've had home in, I think it was seven years.

07:30 I'd had six birthdays in the army, so this was the seventh one. My first birthday at home since I'd been married. I was introduced to the neighbour next door, and she was a widow, and her husband had been one of the government.…

08:00 residing in Rabaul. So when I came home, I'd go in and have a chat with her and we'd talk about Rabaul. And she said, there was the races out at the race track. I said, "There was a concrete block and that was the Bank of New South Wales strong room."

08:30 "Oh, but we had so and so." And she would tell me all these stories. So anyhow, I invited two or three army blokes home. Righto, my birthday, son. And Lorna was busily cooking, and as things go, about nine at night, we had had a few drinks

09:00 and we were talking loudly and the phone rang and Lorna said, "You better answer it, you're the birthday boy." So, "Hello." "Oh, hello. Is that Lieutenant Fitzgerald?" "Yes." "From Rabaul?" "Yes." And I thought I was talking to this girl from next door.

09:30 "Remember those hot nights there under the stars?" "This is Sister Veronica from the mission." "Oh? This is Fitzgerald." "Remember the girls from the mission?" I said, "Yes, I remember the girls from the mission. What's happened?" She said, "Well, I'm up in…" a Melbourne suburb, McKinnon or something.

10:00 And they had a convent there, and apparently when the plane got in, and this American put them down and reported that these girls were from a Catholic mission and things like that, those that had to go into hospital did, and the others were sent back to

10:30 their local locale, the nearest convent to where they were brought up, you see. So Sister Veronica was up at this McKinnon thing. She said, "Can you come out and see me?" I said, "I'm married now." "Bring her too. I would like to have a chat." I said, "Good."

11:00 So the following day, Lorna and I got all dressed up and we drove over to where this place was. So what do you take out to her? We're not Catholics, we don't know. So a bunch of flowers. So we got a big

bunch of flowers and went up and knocked on the door,

11:30 and a woman came out and said, "Yes." I said, "Well, my name is Fitzgerald and this is my wife and you have a Sister Veronica here from Rabaul, who would like to have a chat." "I'll go and see." So there we are standing there, "I'll take the flowers." So we were brought in, sat down there, we waited for five minutes,

12:00 then in came this lady. "Hello, I'm Sister Rebecca." And I said, "I'm Maurice Fitzgerald and this is my wife Lorna." We sat down, she said, "Do you remember Rabaul?" I said, "Yes." And she said, "Well, I was one of the girls that you brought out from the mission." So she was.

12:30 I didn't remember her of course. So we sat down and we talked and talked, and she said, "All I wanted to do was get back to Rabaul and herd chickens." Because down in there, she was the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK lady. She looked after all the hens and roosters and things like that, that was her job. And she just wanted to get back to her job. She just wanted to get back to her chickens.

13:00 I was there for about an hour or so. And what happened to the other ladies, oh well, two of them had died from TB, they didn't recover, and the rest were just scattered about Australia.

Did she talk much about what her experience had been under the Japanese?

She said the Japanese had been no help, whatsoever. They didn't do anything. They always had the guards up the top.

13:30 "We don't have a very high opinion of the Japanese, because these blokes up there would expose themselves to the girls…" Not very pretty.

Did they treat them badly physically?

No, they didn't do anything for them.

14:00 They didn't go down and rape them or anything like that, because they were Austrians, not Australians, and they were friends. At the end of the war, when we came in, the Japanese general said, "I should have shot the lot of you. I knew you were Australian spies."

14:30 **How many men were there?**

I only saw the one. But wasn't the bishop. I don’t know where he was. He might have been living in a Japanese camp, I don't know. I don't know how many men were there or what happened to them. We only picked up the girls.

15:00 **When you were in Rabaul, were you hearing stories about how the Japanese had treated Australian prisoners of war? [BREAK]**

And he was very hospitable, he nearly killed me.

15:30 It was as well, I think we had them there for about ten days before we shipped them out on this American plane.

Were you hearing stories about how the Japanese were treating prisoners of war?

Well, the only thing we heard was through the press. First hand, we had the Indians talk to us,

16:00 and they said… I said that I had fifty Japs, one day, every day, different ones, and they would come with an interpreter and an officer. And one day there was this officer, and it would be a strange feeling…

16:30 There would be these forty Japanese and they’d be in a line, that's a long line of men, and the officer standing in front. He would salute, but not eyes right, the men wouldn't salute, but their eyes all focused on me. So you can see forty pairs of eyes, turn onto you,

17:00 from every angle. I had a detail out, and this officer, I had left him with a group of others. And of course, the officers, they didn't do manual work.

17:30 But this bloke, he was very friendly. "Oh, you know Sydney? I know Sydney. Very nice girls." I thought, this bloke knows everything, doesn’t he? So I said, "Righto, you can start work with these fellows here." He said, "No, me officer." I said, "Officer or not, take your shirt off. Work."

18:00 I said, "Take your shirt off. Off." Such a dirty look I got. Officers are just different apparently with the Japanese. Off came his shirt. So I went around to see the other working parties and came back to here,

18:30 and there were about a dozen Indians all sitting down on the ground, chat chat chat, and there was a major in amongst them. I said, "What's going on here, fellows." I said, "Japanese number ten." One is good and ten is… They said, "No, no, no…"

19:00 When the Indians were brought over to do their guns, and haul the guns up and put them into these caves, and roll them out and back and forth, this was the major in charge of this operation. And the Indians were falling, and he said,

19:30 "Right, this whole lot of Indians…" And he brought them over to one side, sit, and they thought, oh God, this is the end of us. And he got his own blokes, and they did the work and finished it, the whole damn lot, and just left these blokes in the shade, sitting down there. When it was finished, he marched off and they walked off. So he was 'Number One Man.' I said, "Put your shirt on."

20:00 So there were some good Japanese.

What kind of work were the Japanese working party doing?

As far as I was concerned? Having set up the camp…Anything doing with digging and trenches and all that sort of thing, they did.

20:30 I had to watch them, because our fellows were very tricky. They would sit down and they brought lunch, and I saw one bloke, he only had grass in his little tin. Another fellow came in…

21:00 **So the work the Japanese were doing?**

Yes. So we got to that stage where…

21:30 **How were the Japanese treated by…?**

By our fellows? Well, I had four blokes there and, "Can you give me one? I've got a little job of work?" And this was a couple of Indians.

22:00 I said, "I will give them the work." "Oh, oh." They only wanted one. They'd shoot him, or he'd have an accident. So I had to be very careful of that. As I was saying, this one fellow, I said to the interpreter, "What's wrong with that man." He said, "He'll work." I said, "He's not in any condition to work. Look at him." He had a face out like this.

22:30 I said, "Open your mouth." And his teeth, the bottom were more or less down to gum level, or something, they'd hit and… So I sat him down under a tree. "He'll work." I said, "Sit him down under a tree." And the interpreter came over and said,

23:00 "He no work, he get shot when we go home." I said, "Shut up you. He sits there." So I went back. We had a dentist attached to the fellows then. You know the story of the dentist earlier? I said, "I've got a Jap over here and he's in a very bad way." He said, "Sorry Maurie, I can't touch him."

23:30 He said, "There are strict orders. The dentists are not allowed to touch the Japanese prisoners."

Why is that?

I don't know, those were the orders from headquarters. Funny that way. The same fellow was telling me, "You know, I always keep a little bit of stuff there for the fellows, to see what I can do for them."

24:00 He said, "But twelve months ago, they sent out an order, that if a bloke's in the infantry and he's got a sore tooth, pull it out. We're wasting too much time on fillings, time and energy, and the average life of a man in the infantry is nine months. So don't waste time on fixing teeth, pull them out."

24:30 So all right, we're not allowed to touch Japanese. He said, "Anyhow, we would have to give an anaesthetic. But don't worry." So he went back with the bodies that night. But anyhow, when I had run out of that, we had some people, we decided that we would build a rest camp on the other side from the harbour.

25:00 And so I had Jap parties out there building a rest camp.

Who was the rest camp for?

Us. And I had it all laid out. Coral paths, and little detours around,

25:30 and there were trees and shade and things like that. I had two Japanese out, in the water and swimming, they were bringing in rocks to line the paths and all that sort of thing. Anyhow, one day there's these two fellows and I had been away,

26:00 and they were frolicking in the water. I came back with the Japanese officer. He said, "Hi!" And these two blokes, you could see them freeze, and they both dived under and came up with rocks, and they played like there was nobody there. And I said to this officer, "You will do nothing.

26:30 I told them to go out there, and they are bringing rocks in." He said, "They could come in and get rocks." I said, "They are doing what I say. Now they are under my command, they are doing what I want." So I hope they were all right, but they were in dire trouble as far as this bloke was concerned, because they were swimming and enjoying themselves.

27:00 **And at what stage did you get orders that you were coming home?**

At the end of the war, they decided that they couldn't just bring everybody home, so they decided on a

points system. So if you had so many points you could come home.

27:30 So it was staggered. The longest serving, first home. So I went to the CO and I said, "I've got points. I'm going home." He said, "No, you're not." So that went on until a couple of days before Christmas.

28:00 No, it must have been a week. I know I got to Melbourne on Christmas Eve. But we were in Rabaul, and the [HMAS] Katoomba came in. We're going home, so I got all my gear and I brought a bottle of

28:30 American whiskey, and that went home. The cooks could always get American drinks and things like that, because they made home brew. So they'd get a bottle of American whiskey for about twenty bottles of home brew. So how they made home brew was potato peelings. They would boil them and brew them down, and that sort of thing.

29:00 But home brew is a different story altogether.

How did you do that?

Well, there was several ways. This cook, he was the bloke with the cigarette burn, he made them from potatoes. He had an accord with the Americans, and they liked that. Old Doc Walker,

29:30 the bloke that showed the fellows how to get the appendix out, he had written home and got some yeast powder sent out. He had gone into the medical thing and got Saunders malt. So he had malt and yeast and he made beer.

What was the Saunders malt being used for medically?

30:00 To build fellows up. Because it was malt. Now they thought, 'Ahhh, everybody wants malt to make home brew.' And so they decided, no more. It was off rations. But you could still get Saunders malt and cod liver oil. Of course, cod liver oil and Saunders malt, that knocked all the beer out.

30:30 But not old Doc Walker. He got one of these drip things that they give the people, and he put the malt in there with the water, shook it all up, and of course the oil floated to the top, so he drained the malt off the bottom. So old Doc Walker had his brew going.

31:00 Another thing they took off the cooks was vanilla essence, all those essences. They are ninety percent proof, spirit. So they went off the menu, no more supplies. But as I say, they can make it out of potatoes, and that was it. Where there was a will, there was a way.

31:30 **And what was it like finally coming home?**

Wonderful, wonderful. When that Katoomba came into Rabaul, there was a sergeant major and he's got a roll call. "Fitzgerald," I walked up. "My God, how are you Dave?" Maurie?" He was at our wedding. He was one of the four fellows that came down from Albury.

32:00 He'd worked up and he was a regimental sergeant major. He said, "What are you doing here?" I said, "I'm going home." He said, "So am I." I said, "Good." So being an officer, I had a cabin. Other ranks were strewn throughout the ship. So I had my own cabin and I thought, this is the life.

32:30 The first thing that has ever happened to me being an officer. So eventually the ship sailed and away we went. And it's going over to Bougainville. And I thought, that's damn funny. I've got a younger brother at Bougainville. When I joined up the army, he was going to school.

33:00 So I said, "Mum, you've only got three sons. Bill's got to look after you if anything happens to John and myself." He got called up at eighteen and six weeks later he was in Port Moresby, another few weeks he was over in Bougainville. So they didn't worry about six weeks training and that sort of thing. The ship pulls in there and they take troops to take home.

33:30 That was all right. So David and myself, the fellow from the wedding, I said, "I just happen to have a bottle of Shanley's. Would you like a wee drop?" So we opened the bottle of whiskey and David and I are having a sip. And there's the cabin door there, and there was this bloke walked in and he filled it.

34:00 He was a tremendous big bloke. "Fitzgerald? "Yep." "So am I. How are you, bruv." It was my younger brother. So there we were all together. Me, my brother and this fellow from the wedding, all came home on the ship.

How long had it been since you had seen your younger brother?

34:30 Two, maybe three years. David and I hadn't seen each other since 1940, that was just one of those things. His father was the bishop of Bowral. He wasn't ecclesiastically minded.

So what was the reunion like with Lorna?

35:00 Home, came home. "My old mum knows you're here and she's cooked a big meal for us, and we've invited the neighbours in, including the lady from next door, from Rabaul." So there was a big table.

35:30 I'm all like this. And something cropped up and I said, "Pass the bloody salt." And I thought, oh God, that's army talk. Dead silence around the table. I'm home, I'm home. And that was my homecoming.

Was it difficult to adjust?

Yes, yes.

In what way?

36:00 Lorna said, "Slow down. Slow down. Calm down." Because I would talk and it would be in a loud voice. "You're no longer a sergeant taking to the troops, you're talking to me darling. Quieten down." I would talk loud, because everything was outdoors and you talked loudly.

36:30 It took a long time to do that sort of thing, and to control your language, there's ladies present.

What about being outside the army, in terms of the mateship and the camaraderie? What was that like?

Camaraderie in the army was wonderful.

37:00 **But leaving that behind, was that difficult?**

Well, you had family, you had to catch up on things. We had our little reunion from time to time. My birthday party, I had two fellows come down, from the unit.

37:30 They lived reasonably close. From time to time, we saw them. I went back to McPhersons. I didn't go near them for a month, because I had met one of the lady's from the office, and she said, "Don’t come back for a month.

38:00 Because Maswell came in last week, and he's back at work. They want you to start straight away, they're short of men." So I had a month with Lorna, on the beach at Brighton, and seeing people and meeting old friends. We had some friends called Lieberner.

38:30 Mrs Lieberner and her two daughters, and her little dog. You were talking about rationing earlier, she got tea rations and clothing rations for four people throughout the war. It was after the war, and tea rationing was still on. That was she, her two daughters

39:00 and Jack the dog. She had him registered as a Lieberner. Anyhow, her boyfriend had been in the First World War, well, he was no longer. By the time I got home, he had passed away, too.

What does Anzac Day mean to you?

39:30 Well, Anzac Day, being in Legacy, we have a wreath laying up the cenotaph before the march. I no longer march, because I’m eighty-nine and I can't march. I went down one time, two years ago, and they took me for a ride in a car but it was a covered in car and I couldn't see out and people couldn't see in.

40:00 **Symbolically, what does it mean?**

Symbolically, it means all the people that I know, and I will never see again. They were killed in action or they have passed away since. I'm a relic. My brother is still in Melbourne and we phone each other, talk.

40:30 Anzac Day is a day of memory. Lorna and I sit down here, and we watch the march from Sydney, and we talk about Anzac Day, and Lorna will say, "Oh God, I will never forget it." She was in Collins Street, Melbourne. "The war is over." She said people just flocked down.

41:00 She said she tried to get out of Collins Street and she couldn't move, she said it was frightening. As far as I was concerned, I was just as frightened. All these bloody Yanks, and boom, boom, boom, boom. But Anzac Day is a day of memory.

Thank you very much.

INTERVIEW ENDS