

Australians at War Film Archive

Rupert Wilson (Wagga/Snow Wilson) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/23>

Tape 1

00:35 **OK Rupert I'd just like to start with a few details of your life before the war. Just if you could tell me where you were born, where you grew up?**

I was born in Melbourne in 1915 and then for 3 years I was in Melbourne and then I was moved to Narrandera

01:00 and then back to the Wagga [Wagga Wagga] District and I didn't even know who my mother was or anything. It was only that I come to Wagga district then I was sent to school in Wagga and I spent at about 13 years of age I was taken out school and my brother was

01:30 older than me and just about that time he told me, "She is not your mother, she is your stepmother." My mother was born in Ballarat and she apparently died in Melbourne and she used to give me the treatment. I can't think what's next.

02:00 **Then you went to school in Wagga?**

Then I went to school in the late '30's I was captain of the school team and we won the competition and then in the next year my mother took me out of school at 13 years of age and then I was working in Colin Bros. place in Wagga

02:30 and then I become in charge of the office and that went on for some time and then next door I used to do a bit of work for the bloke there and make a few pounds. I used to get 10 shillings a week and my mother; stepmother took my 10 shillings a week. I got sixpence a week for myself and then later on

03:00 the firm Colin Bros. packed in and went broke in the Depression and I worked with my father in the stock business on one occasion and we drove 500 head of cattle from Wagga to the upper Murray [River] which was very difficult and I was on two horses and coming down the mountain was very difficult because, used to put a log on the back to make sure we got down to the bottom.

03:30 And then we eventually come back to Wagga and my father never paid me so I decided to work for myself and from that day on he used to take delivery of cattle, sheep, pigs and so on and work for the agents and deliver and I got a job with Junee and they used to come and buy cattle every, every two weeks in Wagga and I used to drove them over

04:00 to Junee which was 24 miles and they used to take them out 7 miles and leave them there for the night and then I'd come back and have dinner and then go 4 o'clock in the morning I'd be out with the cattle and I'd take the cattle to, to Junee and I'd get there by midday and I'd deliver all the cattle and then I used to make quite a bit of money there. Sometimes it was only

04:30 15 pound and sometimes it was 24 pounds and I never told my stepmother I made that and the boys used to only make about 5 pound, 4 pound a week and I used to make quite a bit of money. And then the pig markets used to take delivery of pigs for the agents and then we used to be with another fellow called Keating and we used to take delivery quite a number of pigs. We used to drove them up

05:00 by the road to where we trucked them to various places, Junee and all over the country and when we made quite good money there too but we never told anybody how much money I made.

You were still a young chap at this time?

Still young then, yes.

With all this money?

And then I had my money in the bank and not on the side because I never told anybody about it, but and then we used to,

- 05:30 my father was looking after a property on the Murrumbidgee River which overlooked there and we used to be there. I used to take delivery of cattle and stuff like that and deliver them to agents for him, and he used to go a droving all the time and he never told me anything about my background or anything at all. But anyway I got through all that
- 06:00 and during those, when I was about I think I was about sixteen they talked me into playing football. Then I became the captain of the Blade Cup team in Wagga for many years and I think it was 1937 I was the best and fairest player in the Wagga district. And then they conned me into being a boxer, and I finished up the Lightweight Champion of Wagga. I fought in Narrandera and Juneee. I didn't win in Narrandera because

- 06:30 it was a Back to Narrandera week and it was quite a big event and I think I only made about 6 pound or something like that in those days. In fact you didn't make any money much

You say they conned [deceived] you into boxing?

They conned me, this Bob Dear because I was always playing football and I was always, always moving around, the bike race and the bike race and whatever was on I'd think. Anyway later on

- 07:00 my father bought racehorses and he, and I used to have to take the horses to the thing and train them and eventually the fellow said to me how about riding my horse and one day I rode this fellow's horse. He said, "It's the fastest that horse has ever been. Why don't you ride in one of these amateur races, become an amateur jockey?" and then so I finished up as amateur jockey in Wagga and I only ran second on
- 07:30 my father's horse, I never won anything. We used to go to Tumut and Tumbarumba and everywhere with the horses and so on and I used to have to take them with, have my own pony and then take two horses and travel by that way up the road. We never had any trucks or anything in those days. But it was a great life and then I played football then I eventually joined the top Wagga Magpies
- 08:00 then we played football all over the country and went to Tumbarumba and had my leg bashed up in Tumbarumba and then I had to give football away for awhile. Then I came back to Wagga and got a job in the Narrandera district as a head stockman on Merraranbah Station, which was, which was quite, they used to make, I can't remember how much pay
- 08:30 I made, it was only about 4 pound a week or something and I was there for 18 months and there was a drought on and we used to have to get the cattle and then they had cattle and sheep. Mostly it was a sheep place but then they had quite a number of cattle too. And then one time they said well the drought was on, you'd better move the 200 head of cattle out so I had to take the damn cattle on the trucks and got 'em up to, up towards Cootamundra.
- 09:00 Up that way where there was some, where they can be fed, Goulburn and around that area and I delivered them and came back and then I come back into Wagga and my brother was working and suddenly I got a call from my brother and he said, "I'm in trouble." and I said, "Where the hell are you?" He said, "I'm in Sydney." "What are you doing in Sydney?" I'd never been in Sydney and so he said, "I'm in trouble, I've got no money and I'm here..."
- 09:30 and so on. So I caught the next train, got my stepbrother to take over here and then I got to Sydney and got him a job and then I got a, rented a place around near, just near the city and then the war broke out. And I went to the navy. Of course, they were advertising for volunteers for the navy so I went there
- 10:00 and the fellow said, "Have you had experience in the navy?" I said I'd been on the Manly Ferry. He said, "We don't want lairs in the navy, shoot through." One week later I'm in the army as the first enlistments in the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] in Victoria Barracks. And then two weeks after I'd been checked out they got me to go to Holdsworthy so they put me on this truck with a whole team of boys and took us out to Holdsworthy camp.

- 10:30 **You were in your early 20's at this time I believe?**

Yeah, at that time I was 21 I think or 22. I was in my 20's.

Where did you do your training?

Oh well what happened when we went to, you mean in the army? What happened, we went to Holdsworthy camp with the first rookies and we used to have to march left right, left right. Nobody knew our own left and nobody knew our own right and I went the wrong

- 11:00 way and it took maybe a hundred yards to make sure I knew and we had another fellow gave him away and put him in another place because he didn't know how turn left and he didn't know how to turn right and he didn't know how to march and after a few months there, that was in December and then they marched us to Holdsworthy, to Ingleburn camp. We opened Ingleburn camp up. Then they formed the 2/1st, 2/3rd
- 11:30 Artillery and everything else there and I didn't know what artillery was anyway so when they read all the names out, mine being the last on the list instead of going in to 2/1st Field Regiment I was allotted

to the 2/3rd Field Regiment and then they took me out of that and put me in another barracks with another mob and then suddenly there are all these Newcastle boys and so on and suddenly we were seconded to the 2/3rd Field Regiment.

12:00 The first mob sailed in January and we had a great time in Wagga and Sydney because this fellow I knew Chalky Bones, a bit of a con man he is, used to like the grog [alcohol] and he always caused blues [fights] everywhere and he used to always be in a bit of a bother with him but anyway he had a place in Bondi with this place there, so we used to go and stop at Bondi and I enjoyed the place there

12:30 but we had a bit of a wild time there to keep him quiet but then we used to run by Jack Krugen he used to people used to, used to look after us and make sure, used to worry us because we were doing the wrong thing and ..

We'll talk more about those sort of adventures...

In May 1940, May 1940 it would be we sailed

13:00 on the Queen Mary and we sailed over towards the Middle East and the Italians come into the war and they diverted us to Cape Town and then we had a wild time there too, oh yeah, a very wild place and I was AWL [Absent Without Leave] there for quite a number, 10 days or 12 days. I think it was sailing so you'd better get on so I finished up catching it and then we went from there, from Cape Town to England and going around the thing,

13:30 the Germans came in and looked like they were going to knock us off and Queen Mary was fast. We finished up first into Scotland. And then from Scotland we went from Scotland down to England and I was taken off there and took on a train and then he put me in hospital

14:00 and then eventually got out that one and we went in tents and then went to several camps in England and then we eventually, when we were there we used to train with a, with the army crowd and then Churchill [Winston Churchill - British Prime Minister] gave us our first 25 pounders in the

14:30 Australian Army. Then we used to in competition with the English mob we finished up the best gunners in England. And then we finished up sailing out to Australia again, to try America, via we didn't go to Cape Town, we went to the next place, next country, you know the place

15:00 then we arrived in the Middle East on New Years Eve and then we went from there to Ikingi Mariut out in the desert and half our regiment went up into the first action in desert and the other half had to go up there.

Sorry, you weren't involved in the desert action?

We wasn't, half our regiment was involved

15:30 but I wasn't involved. We used to have to watch the gyppos [slang for Egyptian person] because they used to nick everything and you used to make sure they didn't nick anything of ours.

Where were you sent to action?

Then we suddenly, the regiment all came together and the 6th Division got together. Then we all sailed to Greece. We arrived in Greece and then we moved from Greece to right up the top of Greece to the Yugoslavic border

16:00 and we were the first, we were the first 25 pounders in the Australian Army and we were the first to fire on the Germans in the Yugoslavic border and Jack Quigg was in charge of our gun and we were the number one gun in the First Regiment and we were the first to fire on the, blew all the Germans off the mountainside so the entrance you could get back and oh I can't think of his name now. The Australian bloke in charge commended us for our action

16:30 there. That was our first commendation and then we had five big actions in Greece and we fired and we had one action we'd fire with an enormous amount, I'd never known, quite over a thousand rounds of gun and one action and they, which had never been known before. We had five big actions in Greece, which allowed ... our job was to clean the Germans out so they couldn't,

17:00 so the infantry mob could get out so they all went out, everybody went out in Greece on the 25th of April and we went out on the 29th April. We were still with our guns and we had to eventually put on, put on this ship and went to Greece. Went to Crete. Then we arrived in Crete. Quick one, we arrived in Crete and then we were

17:30 all around the, it's in the records there, these things you might want to write down. Then we manoeuvred around there trying to nick a bit of meat and a bit of food and so on because there wasn't much food. We went into a village and we finished up doing alright with the village and then eventually they put us in another camp and then from the camp they selected so many of us to go to Retamon [Rethymnon or Retimo] which was the top end of Greece, Crete

18:00 and then, then quite a few of us were then in battle areas in Retamon and we had the big battles in Retamon and they had parachuters used to come over and drop over the top of us and

German paratroopers?

German paratroopers and then we were, we were very involved in, in keeping our heads down and then making sure that the most of the infantry mob

- 18:30 of the 2/1st Infantry mob were there and they the 2/1st machine-gunners and they, blokes said it was too easy, they knocked blokes off all over the place and they were about 5 days and 5 nights and the paratroopers were all involved on the hill where we were and they were all around us and they used to have lights on all night and we could never work out where the hell these lights came from. And then,
- 19:00 then eventually we were hand to hand combat and two of us, this other fellow and myself, we used to volunteer to go up and contact the other fellows and come back and so on and so on. And ran several actions like that where the two of us were both commended for mentioned in this passage after the war and old Campbell [Lt Col .I R. Campbell] who was in charge of the 2/1st [Infantry Battalion] came down and said the war's over thank goodness.
- 19:30 I've got all these souvenirs. I'll make a fortune when I get back to Egypt. And he said, "No you won't, you're going to be a Prisoner of War." We had all these Germans our prisoners, and the 2IC [second in command] of the German paratroopers spoke perfect English and I went down and saw him one day and he said, "Oh yeah." he said, "We'll be here next week." but I didn't believe him but he did. Anyway we did, we were taken prisoners then and...

20:00 Where were you first sent as a prisoner?

We got taken, we got taken off the hill there where we were and then we were marched down to a village and then we were bunged in like animals, you know and, but apparently the officer in charge of the Germans was told not to mutilate the Australians because they, they never. The Greeks used to mutilate them

- 20:30 and things were pretty bad but anyway they never shot any of us and then they put us on the road and took us back and then I fell over and was pretty crook and then three blokes carried me for several miles and put me on a truck and eventually I survived and they put you on a road, leave me and they shoot you, and you were a goner. They saved my life. Then we went to camps in Crete and then eventually
- 21:00 they came one day and took a heap of us and we went to Greece and then we were in a big camp just outside of Athens and then suddenly the Germans came down and said people escaped over the and they said they going to. Be counted, we're going to shoot every 1 in 6 or something, or 1 in 10 and then you got anything, a bit of a stink on.
- 21:30 He said everybody would take their own turn but anyway they never shot anybody. Then we marched over the mountain to Greece and we had a bloke with his bayonet pointed up the backside all the way. I wasn't in the best of conditions but he never, never stabbed me and we got over that one and we got on the train. And we got to another mountain and they took us out again and we had to climb over another mountain and eventually we got to the top of Greece
- 22:00 and into a camp there on the waterfront, and that was a bit of a lurk too because the fellows used to pinch stuff, you know, food was pretty difficult and they used to try and make a bit of bread somewhere. We used to have one bit of bread between about 8 people and a bit of soup once a day and that was it. They took us out of that camp and put us on a
- 22:30 hillside, on a place where all the people were buried and we used to be up there for several months and it was a terrible place. That's what we used to live on and you used to, you'd put anything down and they'd probably nick it and we lived on about one piece of. You'd get a loaf of bread between 8 and one soup a day and that was about it and then eventually got out of there and they
- 23:00 marched us out and took us to Yugoslavia and we stopped at a place there and then we went into, then we eventually went into Germany. And we went to a French camp in Germany and...

Near Munich?

They were French, just outside of Munich there was a camp there, several miles out of camp,

- 23:30 out of the city and they were all French mainly and that's where, you could never work out with these blokes, try and get into the shower or something with all these fellows there and they were all, most of them were queers and I didn't realize what queers were but I soon learnt there. Pretty rough mob.

You were in a number of camps in Germany?

In Germany I was at several camps. That was the first camp

- 24:00 and then there was, they wanted some people to go out to work in Munich so I went with about, about 15 of us went out to Munich and we went shifting goods from trucks to trucks and that was the greatest lurk we've ever known because we used to nick everything and the guard, we used to make sure he had plenty of cigarettes because you'd nick them anyway and then we finished up putting on weight quickly
- 24:30 and, then went to a camp there and they used to take us to work everyday and not weekends mostly, but

5 days a week and that was very good but then one day this fellow from, one of our fellows there was getting a hiding and went into the thing and there he was, three blokes were bashing him up so I went in and threw a few punches

- 25:00 and got him out and then our mob come around and then there was, it was on for young and old and then we put three Germans in hospital. Then we sat down and mind our own business and suddenly a staffer came and grabbed this, his name's in the paper there anyway and him and I were taken into a Prisoner of War place and put there for one night.
- 25:30 Then the next thing we are put into a German jail. This German jail was pretty rough. It was in a big cell overlooking a wall and apparently it was a German jail and not a Prisoner of War jail. We shouldn't have been there but the only thing they used to let us out once a day to go to the toilet but they'd never give you anything much to eat. You didn't have to go to the toilet much
- 26:00 and they used to call us pigs, English pigs. They didn't like us. So one day they pestered me to go to the toilet and the bloke give me such a thrashing I never pestered anymore then we used to look over the wall about once a week and this girl used to come out and put on an act and she'd strip off and sing out, "Washing on the Seigfried line dadidadada." Used to make our day and then eventually,
- 26:30 eventually a Frenchman came into our cell. There were only 2 of us in a cell and he said they shouldn't be, this is a German thing, put it back to Prisoner of War jail so after several weeks later we were taken out and put back in Stalag 7A in the holding area there. In a holding area for 5 months and then I was, I never, never went to trial and next thing I got a job. I used to be very involved
- 27:00 with these Frenchmen and everything and they used to tell me how to escape and so on, and there were two Russians I used to look after and they told me how to escape, so I got a job sweeping the streets in Munich and the mob got on me and said, "I believe you're causing trouble. You're going to try and escape." And I said, "That's my business, not yours." so when I tried to escape, the fellow that went with me unfortunately was a smoker and I never smoked and he's puffing a cigarette like they're gold
- 27:30 and the next thing a German came down on a motorbike and he pulled up and he saw him smoking, next thing I told him I was French and argued with him and so on and into jail again so I spent, back into jail and spent another month in jail and when I went into this jail we used to just lie on the floor, about 30 of us in the jail and there was my Frenchman and the two Russians were there
- 28:00 in the same jail as me and then and the next thing there were these aristocrats from Russia and I said, "What about your friends?" and I handed them all this food you see and they said, "You better give them something to eat." They said they won't take anything from me they're aristocrats or whatever you call them. They won't take nothing from nobody because they are all Princes or so on so I tried that but they did nothing. Anyway
- 28:30 the next day somebody tried to pinch something and the next thing there was big blue [fight] on and there was nowhere to go, all lying down like animals they just put me in the corner and said, "Nobody is going to touch you comrade." so we got out of that one too. That was that one.

You were in another camp with many Russian prisoners?

I got out of that camp and suddenly we were moved to another camp in the middle of Germany. It was 8B, I think, and it was an English camp

- 29:00 and it was a real lurk camp and when we got there we had all our foodstuff and they ripped it all to pieces and we didn't like it much and they didn't like it so they put us in the top and said we don't like you mob anyway and of course it was all and one of these blokes had been in Bothia see, so we were up there for some time and then
- 29:30 and what happened then? And then eventually had a football team there. It was a real first class side, we were easy camp so they wouldn't let us play football so I said play 7 a side so I got 7 on our side and we challenged them all to finish up the best footballers in the camp so they let us go back into the middle of the camp then. So then we went into another one, which was only for
- 30:00 people with records. We had records. The Germans used to come down and go over us everyday and they used to have their chain. There were 50 of us what you called chained up and we use to put your chain around your, chain you up, and we were put on the chain gang for several months but it was a lurk because we used to undo
- 30:30 the chain and go for a walk around and nobody ever knew except this one day, this bloke walking around and he saluted the German coming in visiting and he had his chain off and they investigated so they took the chains off so never had any more chains. The chain gang, we had a record, bad record, and they reckon we were, but that was a bit of a racket, no problem in that camp much. So eventually we were,
- 31:00 oh yes that's right, then that particular camp and this mob came in and we were all in the same barracks with this fellow and suddenly these fellows, what were they, anyway they, they were French and they, they were what you called

31:30 what do you call those fellows that used to cut your throats. I can't think of the name of them.

These were Frenchmen?

Yeah they, they took, we went out one day to get some stuff to get food and somebody came back and said the chain gang, not the chain gang, the blokes that used to stand over people with razors, oh that's right the Razor Gang and said, "The Razor Gang's taken our

32:00 table over." I said, "How many have they got?" They said, "Six of them." so I got my mob together, got six of my mob together and, and I said, "You don't mind getting off our table, you rotten so and so." and so we got this bloke by his throat and hit him on the head and said, "Get off the rotten thing or we'll do you over and put you under the sod, get off or we'll fix you over." and a bloke came over to cut him with a razor but he put it away and they slunk back,

32:30 back into the thing and then at night time we used to have a big stick like that and we used to put it up and say, "Any of you bludgers want it, here it is, cop it." and they never come near us anymore. Eventually they went to another area and then they were sent out of the camp then because they tried the same old business with somebody else and they got a bad name.

Was this the last camp you were in?

No. No, that was the second camp I was in

33:00 and eventually we moved out of that camp into Poland and then from Poland, that was a reprisal camp because if you had a bad name you had to be a , you had to have stripes on, you know, and yeah and they had about, sent us over to that place there

33:30 well that was a pretty, reprisal camp, the Germans used to come in and go through all your gear and do this and that and stand up and march and you'd have to go down and stand up and do this and that. They used to rip all your stuff to pieces and we had a big, and we couldn't play football because it was all sandy and there was a big sandy thing all up on the top, so what we used to do when they said the mob were coming in, the Germans were coming in. We got the word they were coming

34:00 to do our stuff over, so we used to go and hide our stuff on the hill but being an old, you used to know what to do, you knew exactly where to look, left right and knew exactly where ours was, so we went, and when they go we'd get out and the blokes were amongst it trying to find our stuff they could never work out where it was. So eventually got out of that camp and then the next thing we were put on a train again and then we went to another camp

34:30 they called the Fallingbostel, on top of Germany and that was a reprisal camp too and that was the worst camp in Germany. They took all your beds out in the middle of winter. You used to sleep, rain used to come down off the ceiling. It was all cattle wagons and we used to just sleep like that and everybody was, there was practically no food come in all the time and everybody was sort of

35:00 nicking stuff if they could and so on and there was army, air force mob there. Whole crowd of us, you know, and then there was, so the things used to just go on and everybody used to lie around and things were bad and one of the fellows I knew, he, he was in the air force. He got a job in the kitchen and he finished up with a dog.

35:30 And how he got a dog I don't know. Anyway I went up about a week later, I went up and said to him, "Where's the dog?" and he said, "Somebody nicked it or somebody had a feed." So that was the dog too, he didn't last long. If you had a dog or anything lived you knocked it off and ate it. So eventually that, they came to the stage where they took 500 of us out to march us to Berlin, and we didn't know why we were going to Berlin.

36:00 So we got on the road, we were put on this road with these guards alongside us and we marched, used to march down the road and the first one was a night time one and we weren't in very good nick, so this Norm and I pinched a truck a little wagon from one of the places. We used to pinch that so we could put our gear on it and eventually walking down the road and then suddenly this bloke was looking for it.

36:30 We put it on the side of the road and he never seen it and we found our little wagon pulling along and in the night time we're going along, and suddenly the truck at the front used to have all the gear in it you see, and the driver never looked behind him so we hooked on behind the damn thing and, and went for miles on this thing and suddenly.... we'd better get off because, so we jumped off on the side of the road so nobody could see us and the next thing a whole lot of Germans came by and didn't see us and a few hours of later going Toong, toong, toong

37:00 and the mob caught us up and they didn't even know, so at least we saved our lives and we went along the road and eventually we went to several places and then we used to nick everything on the road. The bloke said, "You are from the country, you know how to knock a sheep off don't you?" so I knocked a sheep off and buried it under the thing so they couldn't see it and kicked tripe out of the dogs when they come sniffing it so they didn't come near, and then we knocked a pig off

37:30 and then we used to eat everything we could on the road and we used to bribe the guard so he didn't see anything so we could cook it you see, and eventually we marched down the road 'til we come to this village and suddenly the war, suddenly the guards all disappeared and suddenly the war is over and the

next thing this woman came down. A very attractive lady with two very lovely daughters and she said, "I'm worried about my children." and she spoke English.

38:00 "Would you come to my room, to my house and look after it?" so Norm and I went down to her house to make sure they were looked after. Anyway 10 o'clock at night we were sleeping on this double bed and we couldn't stand sleeping on a double bed when you're used to sleeping on the straw. I said, "I can't sleep on this rotten bed. Norm, come on lets go." so I said, "It'll be right now, everybody's gone." So the next day we nicked a truck filled it up with

38:30 petrol and away we went and eventually going across, across this big river, an old river and suddenly an English fellow pulled us up and said, "Where the hell are you going?" We said, "We're going, I'm going to France because all my friends are in France, people are the wealthiest people in Paris." and I was going to see him you see. He said, "No you're not going there." so eventually put it down into a camp where they had all the, they finished, they'd taken our truck.

39:00 The next thing we know we were put on a plane and arrived in England on VE [Victory in Europe] Day and that was it. Is that all you wanted today?

Well that must have been some adventure, to find yourself suddenly back in England?

Then we went into, we arrived in England on VE Day and two nurses came because they said, "You don't look good do you?" I was only about, probably about eight and a half stone in those times,

39:30 seven and a half, and so they put me in a place and made sure I got food and everything else a few days later I went back into a camp they had there. Then we used to go for trips then. Went up to Scotland for a while. Had a great time up there and then back into Andaroo and then suddenly we were invited to, in London we were invited to this Royal Commonwealth Society

40:00 for dinner, for a big do. We didn't even know who they were. We had a great time there because we were dancing and going on and that's where I met my wife yet to be, and I didn't know she worked in the air force. She was an air force lady and so I got on very well with her. She was the prim and proper type though, she wasn't one of those you know, jump in and out of bed sort of thing and....

40:30 **But you had to return to Australia eventually?**

And she was, then suddenly, suddenly I found out she was dressed as an air force and she was in charge of all the food for the air force and everything else, and I didn't know 'til after the war she come out to Australia; but anyway she used to have a good, come and see me occasionally. Go and see her at the air force and eventually we set on a ship

41:00 and come back to Australia.-

Tape 2

00:10 **When you came out from England and you returned to Australia your wife came and joined you?**

Yeah, well she didn't come out for some time.

18 months I believe.

18 months I should say but I lived. When I came back I lived in, oh where did I go, can't think where I lived.

You returned to Sydney?

00:30 Came to, never left Sydney but I had a job, I had a job with Beaver Trading Company in York Street for five years and then I went from there, then my stepbrother, I was going on another job and he got me a job as a,

01:00 oh what do you call the damn thing, anyway I worked with him for some time and I can't think what it was.

Did you, when your wife came out from England did you marry here?

We married in Sydney. We had to wait one month before they allowed us to marry us. And then we went out to Bondi and lived

01:30 in a flat in Bondi several times and that was great because the woman that run the thing was a difficult person which we didn't realize. She used to give her husband a bash up, so after that Heather and I said, "Let's move out again." so we moved down to Bondi for a while, then we eventually bought a block of land in Bexley North. We thought we'd start, build a house there

02:00 and then this, Heather used to work for the, I didn't realize she was very qualified. She worked with this

group for nothing and looking after all the old people and you know all that business and then this fellow, woman knew who she used to work with said her husband is an estate agent so he got us this place here. So we moved over here. I didn't know that

02:30 Heather's background before then because she had quite a good background, but her mother was Australian, her father was English. He started the Boy Scout movement with Baden-Powell and, she was brought up when her mother left him and went to South Africa so she had just a father then

03:00 and so they went over, when she was young with her brother used to, went to boy scout movement in America and her father started the Boy Scout movement in America. Went up in Baden-Powell's [founder of the boy scout movement] name of course. And he is quite a well known man in London and which I didn't know of course, so she then eventually come

03:30 out to Sydney here and she took over the.... over one of the places in Sydney here looking after all the old dears so she used to do that. Then eventually we, eventually we had Stephen was our first boy and then we had 18 months later Helen was born ,

04:00 and then Helen got very ill and had operations and so on and she couldn't have any more children. She wanted to have five children and anyway eventually we adopted Elizabeth who was a slow learner, but she's got married too and they're doing very well and they, they both work at Concord Hospital. So I got them a place over near the waterfront

04:30 there. Down where the ships come in. Go over the bridge. I can't think of the name of the suburb.

Part of your family was English, was that correct?

No, my family, no, my father, the Wilsons were the original people in the Snowy Mountains.

05:00 I originally come from Queensland and then he started in and bought the people up in the whole, on the Snowy Mountains right from the top to the bottom Wilsons and so on. Probably related it all over the place and they all had lots of children and they're all over the place but I don't have much to do with them now of course. But they were in Narrandera and he stopped in Wagga

05:30 and we had a property in Wagga.

Your father served in the First World War?

My father never served in the war.

Did you have any relatives that had served?

Him, me?

Did you have any relatives that had served in the First World War?

Only my brother, but not any of the others that I know of.

Did he ever talk about his time in the war?

06:00 No, although I'm very involved with my army unit because I'm the past president and secretary and so on, and I wrote up histories and all that business and I'm very involved with the 2/3rd Field Regiment and march on Anzac Day and so on and so terribly involved with all that business.

But your brother had never shared any stories from his experiences?

No, no, but he's, my brother died I'd say

06:30 15 years ago now. No I never, didn't know any history much of the family's.

What did you know of the First World War?

Nothing. Knew nothing of the First World War. None were involved with the war that I, not that I, never heard of anything that had to do with the War.

You had no impression of the Anzac story?

No impressions at all, no.

07:00 It just that I happened to be in Sydney running, rather than going back to Wagga and I've never been on a horse since of course, and I never off a horse before but

You were on a horse from an early age?

Yes, I'd been riding horses from a very early age and particularly when at 13 years of age. And after then I don't think I was ever off a horse,

07:30 on horses and we had, I had a pony on my own anyway and, and my Father had horses to and there were plenty of horses.

You took a lot of responsibility from a young age to find work,

Yes.

jobs ?

I had to look after myself. Nobody looked after me. My life is what I've made. Nobody has done anything for me except I had to do it myself. When I came back

08:00 from the war my father had died when I was, last year I was in a Prisoner of War camp and when I came back I had nothing to do with them really and I found out that. I don't know what happened to the property we had in Wagga but anyway, but my stepmother didn't want to know anything anyway. She knew nothing and

08:30 so I didn't worry. Everything I made I made myself. They never gave me anything. I received nothing from my father's property at all, that was it.

Did you have a happy childhood?

Oh yes I had a, quite a happy childhood. I never remember so I found it schooling. I enjoyed the school. It was very good

09:00 and then I was very involved in football and everything else. Never a dull moment in Wagga and you know never stopped. Go go go all the time. Used to dance every Saturday night and go to all the balls and we used to ride our bike to Junee the three of us to go to a ball over there. 24 miles in those days and then we'd catch a train home and all the girls would be on the train.

09:30 We'd all come home at 3 o'clock in the morning, oh it was great. It was very, very good. Wasn't any of that silly business going on in those days that they had after the war.

You had some favourite dancing partners?

Oh yeah, we used to dance everywhere. As a matter of fact on one occasion the girl and me were the best dancers that year. Used to love dancing but

10:00 oh wherever, you'd ride your bike up the street and suddenly the bus was there and one of them would be singing out, "Hey hey Rupert, why don't you come to the ball?" We're going out to so and so, you know, 20 or 30 miles out and you'd go, "Wait until I go and get my gear." so righto and quickly go and get my gear and back again and come home about 3 o'clock in the morning, 2 o'clock in the morning or something. I used to love it. It was great. They made sure I went everywhere with them

10:30 you know.

Did you have a girlfriend at this time?

Oh yes, always had a girlfriend. When I came back from the war I remember going back in Narrandera and there's my old girlfriend was there and I never told anybody of course.

You moved around a lot with the work you were doing before the war?

Oh yes. I never stopped

11:00 me, I was going, I was always moving.

Were you leaving friends and girlfriends behind while moving from one place to another?

Oh we weren't close friends, you know, we just sort of, we used to enjoy each others company and I never went back to Wagga but I went back to Wagga with my wife on one occasion. Said we'd better go back to Wagga

11:30 and when we went all the girls were hugging me and kissing me and, "Oh, Rupert, lovely to see you. Where have you been?" "I've been at the war." and my wife said to me, "I don't like Wagga." she said. So we didn't go back to Wagga.

But you were obviously very popular there?

Oh very popular there. Oh I, never a dull moment. Anything was on, I'd been in it, you know, it never stopped.

Did you miss it when you moved to Sydney?

12:00 **When you moved to Sydney did you miss your home in Wagga?**

No, I went to Sydney because I came back from the war to Sydney. I never went back to Wagga. Only went back, quickly back, never went back to Wagga because I just stopped in Sydney. Because when I was still in the army this fellow says, "I'm in charge of getting people working." and he said, "Well they are going to discharge you because you've been Prisoners of War." so,

12:30 as soon as I got out of the army I started working straight away, I never went back to Wagga. I went back to Wagga only just for a night or a day or something when I was in the army but when I came back

I just worked in Wagga all my life. Although I worked all my life. Never a dull moment. 'Til I was sixty and then I gave it up because I had a lot of medical problems which I had from the army

13:00 but that was that. But anyway it was a great life. I've had a good life.

It sounds like you did enjoy your childhood in later years. When you joined the army, went overseas, how much of a different life was this?

Well it was a different life but I enjoyed it because then I learnt

13:30 all the business and especially went to England and we learnt to, I used to, they conned me into being a driver and I used to be a driver, and when we got to England I was a driver and I said, "I don't want to be a driver I want to be a gunner." So then I conned them into letting me be a gunner so then I finished up in the first action in Greece, the gun layer, I was a gun layer. I was, I had only been trained about a few months, you know

14:00 I was pretty, I'd trained pretty well on it and suddenly the bloke in, with the gun layer for the gun packed in, he dogged it, he wouldn't, he wouldn't get out of the, you know, it was the top of Greece and he dug a hole in the ground and just lay there because he had shells and bombs everywhere and he never come back on the gun. So I finished up number one gun layer.

14:30 And I was the gun layer for all the way through. Which was rather unusual but anyway that was it and though we had very successful.....

I imagine for someone who was quite popular, who enjoyed company of friends and girlfriends that being in the army and later being a Prisoner of War you must have ...?

Well you used to get to know everybody, yeah.

Did you find that you

15:00 **missed having that company around you? Did you find that you missed having that company of friends, girlfriends around you when you were living this different life in the army?**

No, no. I enjoyed the army life. I thought it was great. There was never a dull moment. I remembered the first time there I was, the first day I was there I had a bit of a blue with a bloke and then when I, they made me a in the early days in the army you took a job

15:30 delivering the food out you know, food delivered and given food out. And this bloke reckoned, this bloke from Paddington said, "You look after your mates, you're not feeding us." sort of thing and I gave him a punch from one end to another but he come back to have some more anyway. He never come near me and he used to come in at night time and say, "Oh my mate's hungry." Nobody ever come near me anymore. And then when I went into the Prisoner of War camps and,

16:00 and anyone threw a punch at me I fixed him up and they never come near me anymore. Once you got the word you could throw a punch they never come near you anymore.

It sounds like....

I didn't like boxing anyway that much but I knew how to throw a punch.

It sounds like the boxing that you did when you were younger certainly came in good stead?

Oh yeah. I had to be. You had to, when you get in the army you had to make sure that they knew you could throw a punch and they never

16:30 come near you any more and you always made sure you got everything. Always kept moving.

Would you credit that background with getting you through some very tough times?

No, I just. Well they weren't that tough. They weren't in my opinion. I used to love working. I never stopped working my whole life. Never a dull moment. Never a day that I didn't work

17:00 You know, all the way through life because I managed jobs everywhere I went and didn't have any problems but one of the last jobs I had was a Senior Inspector of Quarantine. But what happened there I was just an Inspector, an Ordinary Inspector and then eventually this other fellow was above me and eventually I got the Chief there to make me

17:30 the same as he was and then suddenly the veterinary officer in charge of the stock business retired and Roy Watch who was in charge of agriculture, and him and I were very good friends and he said to me, "I want you to take over the job as a veterinary officer." Well I trained. I did a lot of training as a... I held a certificate in health business you know, stock and animal health

18:00 and so I had a qualification but I wasn't a vet, so I spent five years in a veterinarian role and I wasn't a vet. And I used to. It was a shocking job. All you did was sit down at a desk and it was almost ministerial letters and so on and so on, oh it used to drive me mad. There was never a dull moment. I had to work, work, work all the time.

18:30 **Well you were working from the age of 13 I think?**

I was working from 13 years of age, yes, so.

You worked right through the Depression years?

Yes. I worked for myself.

It must have been a time when you really had to do the most you could?

I made more money. I made more money than the fellows that were, I was one of the top earners in those days. I never told anybody of course. But it was a good life but the old customers

19:00 run it, was quite a good one. Never a dull moment there.

I imagine developing that ability to look after yourself and take care of yourself must have been a help?

Yeah, but you knew how to, you never threw your money away, you know what I mean. You made sure you had money in the bank. You don't throw your money away.

And even in times during wartime when you perhaps wouldn't have money you

19:30 **you'd find other ways to look after yourself?**

Oh yeah, no problem, but oh well that's the way it goes I suppose. But it was a good life.

Rupert, you enlisted in 1939. It must have been amongst the first in Australia to do so or the...?

First in our area you mean. Wait a minute,

20:00 when was it that..

October '39 I believe?

Yeah October '39..

And that was in Sydney.

In Sydney, that's when I got my brother a job. Instead of going back Wagga I went in the army.

You must have been amongst one of the very few first. Can you recall what motivated you to join up?

Well I was in Sydney and I thought what with the war broke out so you may as well go to war.

20:30 Well why go back to Wagga and work for myself. I'd be just as well going in the army and I sort of felt I'd like to go to the war and it didn't enter my mind to go back to Wagga. I, I wanted to join the air force, well the air force. They navy didn't want me so I went in the army. First one in. What a rough mob too. Anyway I got through that lot.

21:00 **What did you think the war was going to entail for you?**

Oh I just thought, I didn't even give it a thought what the hell it was all about to go to war and you didn't think what the devil are you going to do when there, all you knew is you're going to war. You're going to fire some shots at somebody, that's about all, but it was an interesting life.

21:30 The old army was never with me anyway. Prisoner of War jobs, there was never a dull moment there. You used to look after yourself but this Frenchman used to, and the two Russians when I was sitting in this other camp I had nothing to do and they wouldn't give me a job anyway, but they reckoned I wasn't amenable to discipline. They used to come around to see me and they used to come into camp

22:00 and they weren't in the same area as I was, they'd come into camp and always come around and see me. And I said, "The Russians you come over this great wall. How the hell did you get in here?" you know, and oh god they'd do anything to someone to say g'day to me. They reckon I was the greatest man that ever lived and this Frenchman you know, oh God, he says. He gave me, he gave me a letter which I gave to some fellow to go back to France

22:30 and he never got it back, to say that I was the greatest man that ever existed and he did so much for the, it was a wonderful letter you know, because when I went to Paris years later I thought it was, and I went in there and I didn't speak French and I had this letter you see and I'd just say to them could you ring for me and speak for me. I want to contact them if I can.

23:00 Ring this number, and there's always people that come round to, Frenchmen, and they say, "Oh we would do anything for you. You are a very great man." And they'd give it to me. It was pity though wasn't it, to lose that thing like that?

I'm really fascinated with how you got on with other nationalities when you are in camps like that. We'll certainly come back and talk about that.

23:30 Terrible, the Russians and the Frenchmen, they were all starving and I made sure they got a feed because I had all the lurks. I was a bit of a lurk man you know. I'd have a little thing go down a barrel like that and you used to have to get. When I was in a holding prison and I used to go into the gaol and the people in the gaol at the back. I used to maneuver stuff in for them and they want a bit of this, that and I knew the lurks, how to get it down so I, it got down to the bloke, you put some

24:00 damn food down for me. Push it down and I'll fix you up and we used to maneuver this food down and they'd say, "How the hell did you do that?" Secret, work out how I did it. I never told anybody how I got there. I used to feed them. They reckoned they couldn't live without me. It's a pity I couldn't, I'd love to see them, to see them again, wonderful fellows, really couldn't. Of course you couldn't see the others, they go back.

24:30 **At the earliest stage of the war, after you'd enlisted. The war at that time was really a threat to Europe and Britain in particular..**

Yeah that's right. Yeah.

Did you feel or could you sense a feeling that you were rushing off to protect the Mother Country?

Well we thought, we thought we were doing the Battle of Britain. We were involved in the Battle of Britain there too. But the funny thing about it, we were standing too with our guns all over the place and the next thing we found out

25:00 the Germans were trying to invade England which was not, was not to be mentioned by anybody and then we used to stand to around then to, you know, to knock these Germans off as they came in, but we never knocked any off. The bodies used to be all around the waterfront. The air force knocked them off and nobody ever knew so we never knocked one off at all. So it was easy in England, used to like England

25:30 and six months in England was great. Never a dull moment.

How are you regarded by other perhaps later enlistments in the army as a 39er?

Well, I was an original '39er and life. I'm one of their life members and I never see them anymore because they are not as, didn't have anything to do with them and then I found out all of a sudden they were meeting again and they didn't tell me

26:00 I was very involved with them. I used to maneuver around all sorts of things for them. But then I was involved in the 6th Division crowd as well. I'm on the Committee of the 6th Division so I get involved with a lot of ex-army people quite a lot

Did you feel any pride while you were fighting that you were one of the first enlistments?

No I felt that I was the right thing to do. I thought that was the right thing to do. There's a war on.

26:30 You should get involved in it and do something. But lucky to survive Crete though because when you go volunteering to do something you're up and down then and very rarely survive, you know. They always knock you off mainly, but two of us survived and our officer was a, whereas only far away, just across the thing and we sang out to him,

27:00 "Keep your rotten head down, you'll lose it!" He didn't keep his head down, he lost it and we buried him but he wouldn't take any notice of me. You had to be under a, they're all waiting for you and you get so far to the last one I was in and this Captain Killy said, "Don't come any further Wilson, you'll get your head. I'll tell you what to do, you do this and that, we're going to manoeuvre here, you're going to manoeuvre there and so on so back you go." and 'til they did

27:30 We come in there and there was a German there. I thought he had me but I got him, so I finished up with his guns and everything. So I finished up with equipment to fight with see. Not that we did that much fighting because the other mob used to do it all for you, but you had to be there to keep going on .

At your enlistment you were placed amongst the 6th Division. The 6th Division to some people in Australia were regarded as

28:00 **unemployed and unemployables?**

No,

Did you get a feeling of that at all?

No, I don't think so. The trouble with the 6th Division was going but our numbers were all down, going down down down down. We're just wondering what's going to happen the next year or the year after, whether they have to merge with somebody else or do something because

28:30 you haven't got the numbers to march. It was going to be a bit difficult but the 6th Division mob, they're always yack, yack, yack, yack great talkers when we have the meetings, talk, talk, talk, talk.

Well they are a very decorated division of the army.

Yes, oh yes. They are all well known,

29:00 but anyway, not that we have meetings, we have several meetings a year but then we have another meeting shortly and then we got involved with a Greek crowd as well, oh very involved with the Greeks. Used to be, not so much now as they used to be. You used to know all the Greeks in the old days and, but now time go by they're all changed.

29:30 **You said you spent some time in Egypt and some of your division provided support for the Operations in North Africa?**

Oh, you mean in the first war in the desert. Yeah, well they went right up the top up there. That was the Italians coming into the war, wasn't it.

This was an area where soldiers, Australian soldiers had fought in the First World War,

Yes.

Very similar areas.

30:00 **Were you aware of that at the time?**

No, it didn't worry me. No, all you worried about was getting out of the sand. Damn sand everywhere, damn sand everywhere.

Did you see much of the surrounding countryside in Egypt while you were there?

No, no I didn't get... we used to be about 20 or 30 mile out of the main place but we used to

30:30 go down and get a train into, and then there, I didn't get to Palestine though. We were moved to Greece. I didn't get to Palestine but that's where they had a good time there I believe but we did pretty well there

Did you get the chance to spend leave time in Alexandria, in Egypt?

Oh, we used to get a

31:00 bit of time there but then you're not supposed to have so much time but you'd nick a bit of time and we used to like that place. It was very good. But you had to watch it there because there was what you called the Sister Street, where all the ladies were and there were miles of them and 'cause you moved, no matter where you moved somebody grabbed you.

31:30 Anyway that that's when somebody talks about Sister Street I know what they're talking about.

You visited Sister Street? Did you visit Sister Street yourself?

Oh we visited Sister Street because you used to visit everywhere. It was all in an area, no matter where you went, they were there. That was Alexandria

32:00 for you. No, what's its name, yeah. But anyway that was life for you. We used to enjoy life. But the desert, we didn't like the desert much. Greece and Crete was good though. Very, very good.

The desert certainly must have been a different environment to your

32:30 **first arrival in the United Kingdom?**

Oh yes, I used to like, I used to like it yeah. England was very good, used to enjoy England.

What was your reception like in Scotland when you berthed?

We stopped in, we got out at Scotland. Well we didn't stop there, we just caught a train out of there. But when I went back for holidays

33:00 we used to like Scotland, very good. Particularly after, when we went back after the war we went to Scotland too again. It was a great old time up there. There used to be the air force mob up there. We used to find out that they used to have the air force there. They used to have ladies and men as well. Used to get, used to enjoy it up there.

You mentioned that your ship had a

33:30 **stop in Cape Town?**

Cape Town.

Can you describe your time there for me?

Well, we were on the Queen Mary and we went out on, on little boats that took us to, first crowd, they sent first crowd to check out on Cape Town so they, people could go find out where to go and all this sort of business. So we were about, there were about ten of us I suppose,

- 34:00 went on these little canoes because you couldn't get that ship on the water, we were way out to sea and you couldn't get any closer so we put us in there and we were down there all day just checking everything out or anybody know what to do. So we said we've got to go back to the ship so we had to go back to one of the smaller ones, you know the Canada, one of those and we boarded that and then we said,
- 34:30 "Well we're going to take off leave tomorrow." and they said, "You're not going to leave anymore." "What do you mean we're not going to leave? We've only had a day here, we haven't done anything." So there was three of us so we wrote it up to, so what we did we nicked off the ship and grabbed this wagon that was going, cargo thing that was going past, going out to
- 35:00 where you could get out, so we grabbed that and hung on the side until we got to where we wanted to go and then we moved in with the New Zealanders and went out the gate with the New Zealanders and nobody knew where we were. So then we went out, just got outside the gate and said, "What are we going to do now?" and there was a lady, she was around about 40 odd or 50 or so. She said to me, "Where are you boys from?" I said, "Oh we're from Australia." She said, "Would you like to
- 35:30 come with me?" she said and she said, "Are you stopping for a while?" and I said yes. She said, "Oh well, leave that to me." so what she did, she took us all around Cape Town everywhere, drove us everywhere and she said, "Now I'm gonna, you're going to be my guest at this place. It's on the waterfront, you know, a guest house." and I said, "That'll be nice." and she said, "That's all right so come up to halfway there." and we said, "You better drop us off now and then we'll come back
- 36:00 and see you when we get there." So we'll stop here and do a few things we got to do. So then another fellow come along in a Mercedes car and he said, "Where are you going?" "Down to this place on the waterfront." and he said, "Oh gee that's the most exclusive place in Cape Town." so he drove us down there and he said, "I'll come and pick you up tomorrow." he said, "And take you on trips." so when we get there we finish up in this
- 36:30 luxurious place the three of us. Then they were having a bit of a dance at night, I'll go down and have a bit of a dance, all the girls dancing and enjoying myself and then suddenly Chalky Bones come down and this girl says, "How are you, do you want to go to the cot with me, I don't want to go to the cot with him." she says, so next thing we had to give up the dancing and go back to bed again. Then we spent 10 days there
- 37:00 and this fellow took us everywhere, did everything, went all over the place. All out to the country everywhere so then towards the end of the road, towards the end I said, "Jesus, it's starting in the morning, I think we better get cracking." So as we were coming down I said, "Stop here." here's the woman got all these beautiful flowers so I bought this great bundle of flowers. Took it back to the lady and said, "Look, I want you to take this just as a little thank you
- 37:30 for having us." and she said, "Oh that's lovely of you." So then I collapsed. I must have been drinking too much Cape Brandy and then the next thing they took me, two of the girls grabbed me and took me to the train and put me on the train and I was right. That's the sort of thing that used to happen. They were lovely people there.

You said you nicked some time to have all this fun in Cape Town? You'd nicked some time to have all this fun?

Oh yes, yes,

- 38:00 we were supposed to be, I was AWL when I got back I had AWL 10 or 12 days or something. Anyway said it was no trouble and fixed it up.

How did you fix it up?

We were just in border ships, what's it matter, you had nowhere to go did you.

There must have been a long ship, voyage. You were originally destined for Middle East and then diverted

- 38:30 **around the Cape?**

Yeah it was quite a trip over to Queen Mary and then, then the other trip to, back to Cape, the time we went back to Cape, to another place I can't think of the name of it. The middle there and then we, we stopped there when, I can't think of the name of the place, Cape Town, and then there's another one half way up, further on towards...

Durban?

- 39:00 When we got there, I said there's a town there so let off and pop up there for a couple of days. When we get there, there's this mob that I'd been with before. Do you know what they did? They left them behind. They stopped and probably got tiddly or something but anyway they missed their ship so they finished up going with us again. "What the hell are you doing here, you so and so?" Eventually we arrived up and went through the Canal,

39:30 tourist canal and eventually got through there.

I'm interested in what life must have been like on the ship. Spending such a long time with so many other troops?

Nothing much to do there really. Mostly playing two-up. If you didn't play two-up you lost it, there was nothing else to do.

Was it very crowded on the ship?

Well some of them were crowded and some weren't. The first one, the Queen Mary wasn't crowded. We all had cabins. Well we were on the floor there for about

40:00 one day then they put us into cabins and we all had... It was very nice. You used to look straight out on the water and no it was quite good. But the other ones, the other ones were pretty crowded, you know, jammed in like sausages but anyway we all used to not worry much.

Was there any threat from enemy shipping while you were on these voyages?

We had a few threats there but we never only that once coming around,

40:30 when we were on the Queen Mary. There was a submarine alert. "Submarine Alert. Submarine Alert." And they took off and left the rest behind because it was the fastest ship on the waterfront that one.

What would you do in a submarine alert?

Well what he did, he had a ship, the rear of the Queen Mary, he had it cut off the middle in case anything happened at least half of us could keep going and half couldn't get going.

41:00 But anyway he kept going so damn fast he left them behind. So nobody ever caught us with the subs.

Tape 3

00:33 **Rupert what I'd like to do now is go back again to before the war. You've told us this morning about your life as a stockman and riding a horse. I'm interested to know first of all why you wanted to join the navy?**

Because I,

01:00 they were the only ones that advertised that they wanted anybody at all and I was in Sydney and I thought I'd join the forces, so I didn't know anything about it. It meant nothing to me, you know, so I thought I may as well join the navy. So it wasn't until after the war that I shouldn't have joined the navy 'cause I used to get air sick. Used to get sick on the ships so I didn't join

01:30 the navy so it didn't mean anything to me. All I knew was the services, that's all.

And what did your Father think about you enlisting?

He never knew anything about it, ask me anything, nothing, we never discussed anything. He never told me anything about his, anything. I know nothing of his life. Not at all. As to why he was married, to who he was married and so on and so on, you know,

02:00 why, what happened to my Mother, you know. I know nothing about it really. They, he never told me anything. All I knew is he rode horses; he was a Stockman, that's all.

Did you have dreams of going to sea?

Me?

Yeah.

No.

No. OK and when you, the day, do you remember the day that you enlisted?

02:30 Yes.

Tell me about that?

Well I was renting a place just off the barracks, not very far from the barracks. About, about 5 minutes walk and so the first enlistments in the barracks. I was the first, well this fellow, one of this fellow was my brother's, he was a friend of his. He came up to enlist too with me so we went up to

03:00 the barracks and we were the first at the gate 'til they opened the gate. Then we went in the gate and then suddenly all the people started coming in the gate and then they said right, so we didn't know what to do around, you were walking around here, there and everywhere and then suddenly then

they're gonna check you out. So they checked you out. You had to be 5 foot 7 or over or they wouldn't have you, so I was just over 5 foot 7 so they,

03:30 and then this other fellow got through all right and then we were there for ages and before they let us go and that was about it. The fellows used to get on their toes to make sure that they were 5 foot 7. You couldn't believe the things that you saw there and, and it's incredible. But anyway we got through that lot

04:00 and anyway the next thing we went home again. Back to the place we were renting and, and then two weeks later I get a letter to say I am now enlisted in the army and I said what about the other fellow. They said they wouldn't have him so he didn't go. So I went in as a rookie, knew nothing, knew nobody, so back to the barracks and the bus comes along and then they put us on a bus and then we get on the bus and

04:30 halfway, to Liverpool the bloke wanted to go to the toilet. So they went, went to the toilet on the side of the road and I thought that was a bit weak and then the next thing you know this bloke throws a couple of punches in the bus and that finished and I wasn't involved in that either. Then eventually we get to Liverpool and then they sent us out to Holdsworth camp and that was rough as anything. You used to have to go and get

05:00 something to sleep on, you know, on the floor and it was a pretty rough place that place. But then, then we used to have to go, everyday you had to go out, well the first thing you used to do in the morning. I used to go and have a shower every morning and I had to make sure the shower was working and, then when they used to have a feed

05:30 you used to have to make sure you were in the first six 'cause I found out if you weren't in the first six the bloke used to, used to flog some of the gear anyway apparently, the permanent army mob there apparently. I don't know what used to happen but anyway I found out if you were in the first six you got a good meal. The last six of them didn't get much so I never worried about what happened too the last mob because there was a big team of us anyway and then they'd be out on parade.

06:00 Then all these officers come out and left, right, left, right, get here, get there, get there, get there, and then I didn't get there right and I had to run 100 yards and back again to make sure I knew how to turn left, turn right, so then eventually I learnt to turn left and to turn right and some of the fellows could never do it. One fellow spent, I said just before there

06:30 every time he never knew what his left and he never knew right and we used to go and watch him and blokes used to make sure he knows and he never ever worked out, they put him in the kitchen anyway. He never made it so then we, then eventually after some time they marched us over to Ingleburn. Did you want anymore of that one?

So you were fairly athletic as a young boy?

07:00 Very athletic. I was always athletic.

What sport did you like best?

Well I mainly played Rugby League in those days. Then I'd often, sometimes I'd play a game of Soccer occasionally but I didn't particularly fancy Soccer and I was... They always had Rugby League in Wagga so I always played Rugby League but then when

07:30 I went into the army and went to England in 1940 they wanted to play football, a team to play around England for six months because they had a lot of competition going there. So I, I said, "Right I'm a first grade footballer." so I get in a team and the first time I get in I get kicked tripe out of me. I found out I was playing Rugby, and not Rugby League. Played a different game altogether, so then I learnt how to play Rugby League.

08:00 We spent time a lot of time in England playing in between and at least half a dozen games there and we did very well but anyway I managed to play Rugby. Then I went to Germany. I had to, they played Rugby there too, so I knew how to play Rugby then.

I'll just check my notes for a minute 'cause I just want to check...

08:30 **So you didn't put your age up when you enlisted?**

No.

No, you didn't have to?

No.

Yeah, but did you know other boys who did put

09:00 **their age up when they enlisted?**

Oh yes. Quite a number. Some of them were only 15 and they were supposed to be a certain age aren't they and they used to put their age up, yes.

Take me back to Holdsworth and the discipline of, as you say, learning how to go left and right and marching in lines? That must have been a new experience for you.

Oh... it was.

How did you find the discipline of training?

09:30 Well, I got along very well with it. I found it was all right. But there were, it was say, they made sure you could march, you know. But eventually and a lot of them they didn't, some of them they didn't even bother. I think they kicked them out before they even went some way, you know, they didn't take a lot of them I don't think. Anyway that's the way it used to be.

Can you tell me about

10:00 **the type of training you used to receive with your guns?**

Well what I did as a gunner when I was, when I went onto the guns in the Middle East. I used to go down training on guns all the time. We had first war guns there before that, before we went to Crete before we went over to, to the other place in England but we used

10:30 to train then before we went to England, then we went to England we used to train all the times on the guns 'cause they had guns there but they were first war guns mostly and then eventually we got to the old.. the 6th.. the other ones then and we, the 25 pounders and they were completely different and they were spectacular you know, no problem, but you had to be right on, you had to be well trained to,

11:00 to get on the gun layer, as a gun layer. So I did very well out of it.

I'm not sure what a gun layer is. Can you describe what a gun layer is?

A gun layer is the one that fires the gun, but he's got to have a thing on. The sergeant-in-charge is over the top of you. He makes sure the gun is laid properly 'cause you've got to go so far to hit the target

11:30 and you got so many centimetres or whatever it was in those days and you had to get it exactly right, exactly, so you get exactly hit the, and they are so accurate our guns that you could be within a few yards of where you wanted to be and knock them off, with the Germans coming. We used to knock 'em off. We knocked tripe out of them. We used to know exactly where they were and they were devastating. They were

12:00 spectacular but you had to know how to lay the guns because it's all on the figures there.

How do you lay a gun?

Well you're there on the gun and the officer in charge gives you so and so, so and so you know, and the time, where you've got to fire, then you gotta look up the thing to make sure you are firing on that particular thing, make sure you are firing it correctly because it's got all the things on the

12:30 to read to exactly how far it will go and so on. So it's quite, you know, you've got to know exactly how to fire the gun. If you don't know how to fire the gun, you are wasting your time. So you know you've got to hit a spot there and you've got to, gun tells you exactly, gun exactly is you're going to hit the particular target.

You've described these guns as, first of all you used the guns from World War

13:00 **I and now you're using, what you're calling a 25 pounder?**

Yeah the twenty...but the pre-war gun before, they were hopeless. You'd lay the gun. Well after the war when we, lost our guns, went over to Crete and we had these other guns then and we used to fire these guns and they could never, you could never hit the damn target correctly. You'd reckon you'd be right on it and you'd finish up 20 feet away from it,

13:30 or 30 or something, you know, and they weren't good but the 25 pounders were completely spot on. You want a thing you'd be in your last yard and you'd knock tripe out of them. They were very very good.

Describe how you carried the gun. It sounds like the guns were very heavy. How did you carry them and set them up?

Well we had our trucks and we used to, they used to drive us around and pull up

14:00 then we'd, we'd lay the guns, and the guns would be in a certain position and we'd be right, and we'd follow the guns from there and we used to have a trucks and everything to take us everywhere, it wasn't any problem but it was quite good. They were excellent.

Did you, can you describe what your uniform was. Did you have to carry any ammunition on you?

14:30 We had ammunition behind us and we had the other fellows on the guns that were on the guns with us. They'd have to go back and get the ammunition for you or you'd be there, you'd put the ammunition in and look up the thing and boom, but they used to have to fetch up all the ammunition to you but, but

that,

15:00 you had to keep going all the time. You had to have a lot of stuff coming into you all the time but in Greece we had the, we fired a record number from guns that had ever been known and one part of the stage blew my ears out and I had to go back and pick up the ammunition but anyway we didn't fire the gun anymore

15:30 after that strangely enough when I blew my ears out. So the next action we went in I went back on the gun again, so. But we never had earplugs in those days. We never had any of that equipment but the 25 pounders were absolutely spot on. You knew you were going to hit them no matter what, providing you set it properly. Just like anything else, like driving

16:00 a car. If you want 60 you do 60 instead of 40.

As I was saying to you in the break, I've never been in a War so I can't image what it must be like. Perhaps you could tell me the day that you fired the record number of rounds. How did you work with your team-mates to set up the guns and what happened on that day?

No, what actually happened.

16:30 We didn't know then until later on that that was the record number of... We were firing, firing, firing for so long and then you know, but it was one of them. How I got my ears blown out I was firing a gun and the Germans had shot a gun right up, right up behind our gun and apparently I must have been doing something on the gun because it blew me ears out,

17:00 so it was a bomb that went behind the gun. So I had to get back off the gun then and I come back on the next action I come back on again, that's how it used to be. But they were excellent guns.

Was it very noisy?

No they weren't too bad. They were noisy but we should be wearing ear aids but we didn't. We used to have

17:30 to make sure you know, where it would go but it was not easy. We were lucky we didn't get our ears blown out all the time but we managed but, but the best guns I think we ever had in the army. They were outstanding. Is there anything else you want to know about guns?

Well after, after,

18:00 **you mentioned earlier that you moved then into close hand to hand combat. Was that with guns?**

No, no, that was, hand-to-hand combat is any guns. Mostly where we were supposed to be blowing out with the guns but, but then we got to the stage where it was hand to hand combat so what you used to do. Well this fellow and I we used to,

18:30 where the Germans would drop this stuff down and we used to go down and grab all their equipment and then we used to finish up.. I went behind this bloke and got all his guns and his binoculars and everything and then I could fire a gun but the strange thing about it being artillery, the infantry were doing all the, and the machine-gunners did all the firing so I never.. and I remember when I had to

19:00 volunteer to go up to the lines, you know, where the Germans were and the lieutenant said to me, "I've only got one shot left in my revolver, so take that, you can only shoot him once." so I went with this revolver and I never struck one and I still had the one when I come back so I never fired a shot, but I manoeuvred around but we used to go down and this fellow and I, I don't know what we were,

19:30 but as soon as we reckoned, nicked down there while they weren't around and grabbed the damn stuff and come back again and then you used to finish up with all these, everybody then around us then had guns. So that they'd be firing guns but I never had to fire one strangely enough. Shouldn't tell anyone that I suppose but I didn't. But I used to collect the guns. Make sure everybody had a gun.

20:00 I had guns too, but I didn't have to use it. But we were in that area, one part of the state and I was on duty at night time and suddenly I could hear these voices and blokes saying, "Come over here Bill, come over." in English you know and it sounded, there's something going on here so I got the officer in charge. "Hey, what's he up to?" The Germans are only, not far away

20:30 there, about 30 feet away and I was thinking they were going to come down on us if we're not careful so we got em all out and around. Manoeuvred them all out and made sure that nobody got killed there and then we moved back and then we moved here and moved there and then the machine-gunners in the 2/1st Battalion mob used to knock tripe out of them, but it was, we're lucky to be alive, lucky to live through that lot really. That was hand-to-hand as they call it

21:00 but I didn't have to fire a shot. I made sure everybody else had their ammunition, but that's the way it goes.

But you fired, did you fire the 25 pounders?

Oh yes, yes, oh yes. I used to have to fire the 25 pounders. Did plenty of firing there.

But you didn't fire

21:30 **a pistol, is that what you're saying?**

No, when I was hand-to-hand combat. Up on the mountain.

Yeah, in Greece?

We didn't have any equipment that was any good anyway and the 25 pounders we destroyed them in Greece because we couldn't get them out and, but the you know, you used to, used to be around to make sure everything that the,

22:00 the infantry around could handle everything and the machine-gunners and so on.

Did you have any lucky charms or any superstitions?

Lucky charms. I reckon I was a lucky charm all right. They reckon I was lucky to survive. Actually what amazed me, you've got say 20 people there and out of the 20 people there's only ever two, him and this other fellow and I volunteered to go through the lines. They wouldn't volunteer

22:30 and this officer in charge said to me when, and I was very involved with all this business, he said to me, "Mr." he said, he said, "When we are getting out of here I'm commending you for a much higher grading." he said, "Because you are one of our best soldiers." and he says,

23:00 he says, "I must commend you." he said, "You're definitely, definitely very good." And when he went to the war he committed suicide because his brother had shot down and got killed by the air force or something and he heard and he, I don't know, he committed, apparently suicide, he couldn't handle it, he shot himself so I never ever got it.

Well I can't imagine

23:30 **what it must feel like to run through the frontline of gun fire. Were you frightened?**

No I wasn't frightened. I was very, I was an old country boy and also they said to me, "What, you're mad doing that." I said, "Nobody cares whether I live, nobody in my place in Wagga would give two hoots about.. My family, I've got no family that would worry two hoots about me."

24:00 I couldn't care if they knocked me off. I didn't care. All I was doing was doing a job. Somebody had to do it. I did a job. I felt, if they knocked me off, too bad, that's the way it is, it didn't worry me but I made sure that I did it properly. You had to be careful what you did or else if you put your head up down there you lost the damn thing and you used to go down these little gullies here and made sure there and you know you had to watch where you were going.

24:30 You made sure the Germans would be running a short distance from you, you know, and you're a goner if one of them happened to have caught up with you but then there's, yeah come any further you're a goner. You didn't go any further did you, you went back.

It sounds like you were very street smart in that respect. Was there, did you have any particular strategy that would protect you?

Yeah, well

25:00 I had this, I made sure I had a gun with me, in case I was there but I never at any time thought about shooting it you know unless I had to but I didn't have to because I manoeuvred past them all. That was the idea. That was what you do to get the messages through but if you didn't do that you were wasting your time

25:30 but anyway they come back and they said, "Gawd you made it did you?" Yeah I got it alright. I used to manoeuvre around but anyway. That's why I got the decoration I suppose, Mentioned in Despatches after the war. I was very fortunate that fellow, died because he otherwise, I don't know how, I was very fortunate I got it because he's the only one that used to know what I was doing you know.

26:00 **I'll just check my notes. So when you were shipped over to the Middle East I was interested to hear you say you, you felt like**

26:30 **the Australians were some of the best gunners being trained up in England. Why did you feel like that?**

Well I knew that we were. There wasn't any doubts in my mind that we were the top gunners in the army. We had the top guns and we were hopefully out of this world. You know what we did was absolutely incredible. When old Blamey, when Blamey give us our Commendation,

27:00 about the action blowing these Germans up. We blew tripe out of 'em all the way around. We saved the Germ.. we saved the infantry because everywhere we went, we knew they were coming down the mountain side and we blew them up so they had to, they didn't have their vehicles. They couldn't keep

going so we kept right, right through the day. But it was amazing to get out because they were all gone on the 25th,

27:30 we didn't go 'til the 29th but at least we did get away, anyway.

So the first, you saw action in the desert first?

No, half our arm... half our Unit did, half the 2/3rd Field Regiment did. They were mainly the Darwin boys. They weren't E and F Troop there were the others, the Don Troop I think

28:00 and so on. They only took half of them up there and they left half of us behind in the desert. So I don't know why, I have no idea but you just do as they tell you.

And I'm just learning how a battalion is divided up into company's, platoons and squadrons and so forth. Did you, you've just mentioned that your division was divided up. Did you,

28:30 **did you mainly work...**

We were F Troop and there were E Troop and Don Troop and so on, you know, and they are all in different areas, in different areas. If we were in this area, they'd be down there like in Crete. We had one mob on the other side of the airstrip and another one in the middle of the airstrip and we were on top of the airstrip, there were three sections. And the other mob were the infantry, the other mob were the

29:00 West Australians, they were away further around on another area, all divided into little spots, you know, where to go, that's the way it used to be.

And how many men are in a Company?

Oh, well we wouldn't have had, in a Company we only had about 50. About 50 I'd say and then

29:30 I guess, our troop we'd have about 50 altogether. But then E Troop would have about 50 and F Troop would have about 50 and so on you know.

And so you, did you work with mainly with, about 50 men at a time?

Yes, oh, well on Crete for instance there was only about 15 of us altogether, you know. The rest had gone, evacuated. They got back to Australia.

30:00 We didn't because we were involved in a battle, a selected crowd. "You're off, see ya!" and that other mob go there but they only took so many of us of each troop away to that particular section so there wasn't many of us on a troop. That's the way it used to be but that was similar battle right down, that wasn't normal either because Crete

30:30 was a split up crowd you know. We had all these German Prisoners Of War and we won the battle but then unbeknown to us old Campbell come down and said the war's over but unbeknown to us the rest of the island had evacuated. We'd never been evacuated and then suddenly the Germans come in with all the paratroopers and suddenly the whole thing was full of air things everywhere.

31:00 So the war's over. They'd surrounded us. The rest of the island had evacuated so they gathered all the Germans and come back and they all come down to our area so we were all completely surrounded, we were gone. That was it, so we were a bit unlucky weren't we because it was the most campaign in Crete. We all got caught prisoners.

Were there, how many of you were there together at that time?

Oh, with the infantry and everything oh ..

31:30 **When you were taken prisoner I mean, were there just 15 of you then?**

Oh no, no. We buried quite a few. In our particular little crowd there was oh probably about half a dozen of us probably. But we had, probably, probably more on the hill but we didn't bury that many you know. I can only remember burying six people, personal friends

32:00 of mine but six no matter where I was.

I'll just check my notes for a minute. I'd like to,

32:30 **I know this might be a hard memory for you, so but I'm really interested to know how you dealt with your first day, the first day that you saw action. Do you remember that battle and what did you see?**

Oh the first action. The first action I went, that was when I was gun laying.

33:00 The other one I'd been along but I hadn't been in action, you know but that was a time when I went into action. You didn't go into action in England, but we did go there, that was in Crete that I went into action, then I finished up as a gun layer with the guns. Yes that was it. Was there anything else?

33:30 **So when you went to Greece, tell me about the campsite there?**

About the what?

The camp, when you set up camp. Tell me about life in the camp?

We weren't in any camps. No. We were down on... The first one we went into was on the mountain side and we used to dig holes so we could sit

34:00 in the thing and then it was snowing and so on. Though we never had any, we used to have to look after yourself and only your gun, we was always separate. You know I might be here and there might be another 20 or 30 feet the other side and you'd just go in there and that's it. And just hope you could make it. Suddenly the snow left

34:30 and then suddenly the Germans come down over the mountains then we went into action. But it was pretty poor on the first action I can tell you. We were all sleeping with snow on. Didn't have gear with you, you didn't have much gear with you, you know, and things weren't that good. But anyway it was certainly much better when the snow left but it was only in the first action, the first time

35:00 there was any snow and after that it was clear but it used to come down with a jab. It came down after, you'd go to the side of the road and make sure they didn't kill you. Yes. That's about all I can tell you on that one I think.

How did you eat? What was your food?

Oh, we used, very difficult to get food.

35:30 Used to send up little pieces to us all the time. I don't know, we usen't to have much food and when we were on the Crete we usen't to have any food come in, very little food and they dropped some down and the helicopters [he means aeroplanes] used to drop some down and you'd have to go down and get it you know and I used to, this is before we went into real action. I used to have a, there's a little village about a couple of miles down behind

36:00 [UNCLEAR] and two of us used to nick up to the village and tell them we want some food and the Greeks used to give us all the food. Oh yeah, no problem, we'd get all the food back. You had to manoeuvre around and get your own food. Oh, it was not easy. I can't remember when we were in action where we got any food from because we didn't have time to eat anyway. But it wasn't easy.

And how many days, when you were on the front line

36:30 **in for example hand to hand combat, how many days at a time were you doing that?**

When you're getting food?

No. When you're in battle and on the front line, how long would that last for?

Well the first one the frontline we had there we got under, we got under the Greeks and blew them up and then we packed in and went back to another section

37:00 and then they'd say right you can move back into another place then eventually we'd go and we'd go into action and then a matter of hours we'd be gone again. So as soon as you finished action you're on your way again. You didn't muck around. You just went straight out again. We had five big actions on Crete, on Greece so we moved from here to there. Made sure the infantry

37:30 and the mob got back so they, we were lucky we didn't lose a great many people there.

So after you completed those 5 actions in Greece you moved down to Crete and what did you feel about that campaign?

38:00 Well, we manoeuvred away. I was, I thought the Crete campaign was Rethymnon where we went. We went to the villages first and then eventually they sent us up to Rethymnon. I don't know. It was just straight battle there as far as I was concerned and I was quite happy about it all. The souvenirs I'd nicked off and everything else and it was just suddenly

38:30 the war was over. I couldn't believe it, you know 'cause we were winning the war. You know, the machine-gunners and the infantry were doing a great job and they were clearing up and finishing there and we were laughing our heads off. They had tons of food and everything we used to find and we were doing well. We used to knock all the stuff they dropped off on the thing, we'd nick it and that but never worried us anyway. I thought we

39:00 were going back to Palestine but we didn't.

I want to know what you did with those souvenirs?

Well what I did with them, the pretty valuable ones I dug a hole and buried them and after the war when I came back, the first trip back to Greece and Crete that we had, the Commemoration one. I went back to where it was,

39:30 I dug all around but there was none there, somebody else had got 'em. Somebody had dug 'em up. Mine wasn't there. The souvenirs you had, you know, which was valuable, but somebody got 'em but not me. But I did go back to the area after the war, the First Commemoration Service; I was back in Greece and Crete.

Tape 4

00:30 It was the old days when we were working on the goods yard in Germany, Maxie Parker, there's no doubt about Maxie, he used to love his draught. He'd never go past champagne. He'd drink it all, he'd get all tiddly. We'd have to carry, put him in a wheelbarrow, wheel him home one day.

I'd like to talk more now about your time as a Prisoner of War

01:00 **but before we move on to that. Is there anything that you'd like to say about your campaigns before you surrendered?**

What was that?

Is there anything that you'd like to add to the story of your battles that you fought before you were a Prisoner of War?

No. I used to, I used to like the battles,

01:30 I used to like the training and used to like doing everything you know. And the company was so good and everybody was good and we used to, used to like doing things, you know. There was always something to do and you made sure you knew exactly what to do on the guns.

How did you feel about the possibility of killing someone?

Telling them?

Killing them?

It didn't worry us at all

02:00 they'd blow us up and we blew them up, that's the way I looked at it. Our job was to knock 'em off so they could protect ours. Our job was to protect the people, well this wasn't going forward, we were going backwards you see and you know, it was something that you wouldn't expect to do because we were fighting to go on, not to come back were we but we had to protect all these mob to come back

02:30 so they could evacuate which is most unusual. You usually fight on, on, on, not back, back, back but that's what we were doing all the time, it wasn't very good, five big actions, very bad. But the idea was to protect you, the people so the people could get back. We were lucky to get back ourselves. But there's nothing else much you want there, is there?

And what happened, do you remember

03:00 **the day you were taken prisoner on Crete?**

Oh yes, yes. Crete, yes. I remember taking it when the bloke said you're gone, you had to give yourselves up and then you had to be walked down to this area and then you walked back down there and the you,

03:30 you know, that's it and all you can see was dead bodies everywhere, you know, and everywhere around was all dead bodies, everywhere. And you'd just think to yourself how lucky you were to be alive, you're very fortunate. When we were down the first way, we were down there already and the next day we're on the run that's when I got keeled over and they fixed me up but it was terrifying to go down and

04:00 see all the bodies everywhere and then the Germans saying they weren't going to shoot us but the Greeks used to mutilate them and so on, you know, and they didn't like the Greeks. But anyway..

And what were your feelings towards the Germans?

Oh, they didn't worry me at all. They just, just

04:30 all I'd ever very rarely, all they did was just march down when the people knew the Germans were there watching you going down, that's all, never had much to do with them at all really. Nothing at all to do with them. But when we were, when we were a Prisoner of War in, in the truck businesses they were very peculiar because these Germans that worked, they weren't appreciated

05:00 by Germany because they weren't on the frontline you see. One of the fellows used to come around occasionally and look around the side of the truck like that to see there was nobody watching him and go (gestures with hands across throat) Hitler, he hated Hitler. They didn't like Hitler. You weren't allowed to do, you couldn't, made sure nobody was watching him. But he Hitler.

- 05:30 Peculiar isn't it. That's the way it used to be. But they were easy, you could work, those Germans worked no problem, no problem at all. And they made sure we nicked our stuff that was the main thing but remember we pinched something one day down at, it was a bottle or something and I don't know, some other foodstuff
- 06:00 and I had a go at it and oh God it was crook so I shot it, took it back to the place where we put all the junk and when I got there there's another bloke, the three of them there still had the same and Michael said, "Oh dear, don't touch that stuff." so we made sure we didn't get that one again. Shouldn't have pinched it of course.

When you were first taken prisoner you, you were taken to Salonika, were your mates with you?

- 06:30 Oh yes, yeah they're all together. They got divided later on because it always, well I got divided from it because I was wasn't too good you see, and they put me on a truck and then I finished up with the mob I was with originally we were, I went in a different.. I went to Greece, they went, I didn't see them for ages, after months because we went to Greece. We were there for some time
- 07:00 before we went to Salonika to a horror camp up there. And they were in a place up there for sometime before suddenly this mob arrived that I'd been with originally but you didn't see a great many of them again you know. Just the way it used to be.

Did you get lonely?

Oh, didn't get a chance to get lonely,

- 07:30 there's too many, there was always something going on particularly when you're up on that bad camps, all you're worried about is making sure you can get some food and so on. Manoeuvre around and make sure you get something you know. You're always up to something and you get a job working, you get a job to go outside with the Germans, they could move something so you could nick something when you had to. You're always thinking about how am I going to get some more food? That was what you're mainly concerned about.
- 08:00 But they weren't good days but anyway that's the way it goes. But they used to, I used to go to this toilet. I had dysentery and so on and I used to have to run for the thing because the Germans used to shoot at it, shoot through the wires and so on in this place you are in and you used to have to run to the toilet to make sure they didn't hit you.
- 08:30 But a lot of people did get killed there but I didn't, they never got me. I finished going to the toilet and back again. It used to be dangerous, you know, they were just waiting for you. And they used to shoot through the wall to see if they could hit anybody. I don't know why they did it but anyway they didn't last too long but they didn't, only after a few days and then they didn't do it anymore but, but they used to like
- 09:00 having a go at you when you were going to the toilet. You used to have to go across an open landing to get into you see and a lot of fellows got killed, got shot there but I managed. I made sure there was nobody around when I went. I hoped there wasn't. So I got to go and that was a camp up in the top of Greece. The horror camp, you could call that one.

09:30 **And what were your clothes like in Prison?**

Well we had plenty of clothes when we were out working because we nicked everything, we didn't want anything, we made sure we nicked something so we made tons of clothes there. But in some of the camps there were no clothes at all, it was terrible. Last camp I was in was horrible, it had practically no clothes at all.

- 10:00 You used to clip everything around you, try and keep warm, you know. And there was nowhere to go. It wasn't very nice 'til you get used to it. I used to go for walks in the bad camp and other fellows used to just lie around and that's it. I don't know what happened to them anyway because I was among 500 who marched out so I don't know what happened to those fellows, no idea what happened to them.

10:30 **Conditions, you were in several different camps and conditions were different in each camp..**

Yeah. Different.

Tell me what the worst camp was?

The worst camp was the one at Fallingbostel at the top of Germany. That was the horror camp, that was the worst camp in Germany for prisoners of war anyway. The rest were lurk

- 11:00 camps you know. Even Poland was not good but there were little lurks you could do there you know. You could always manoeuvre something. But Fallingbostel camp there was nothing there to manoeuvre, you know, you just had to exist, just had to live, that's it. Live with whatever you could get and you made sure every visit stuff you had. Norm and I used to, used to put everything and make sure
- 11:30 we had something for tomorrow, you know, whereas the other fellows would use it all up and they'd be starving you know. But this fellow went doing a bit of, he used to try selling stuff. Buying it and have

that, and you have this and I, but eventually finished up, manoeuvring stuff, we had quite a bit of stuff tucked away under, bad times we'd at least have something to eat.

12:00 But the others used to use it all up all the time and then there's a lot of, what were they? They weren't French. Oh, what's there's America. What's the other place the other side of America? Not Australians. What do you call that mob there that live over in America? There's America and then there's another

12:30 place the other side. What do they call those mob?

Russia, Canada?

Canadians. Kanucks we used to call them.

OK

Well, when we were in this one bad camp we were in this place and there were fifty of us I think, jammed in like sausages and they were on a little section on their own. Well they used to get stuff, stuff used to come in on the train or something occasionally.

13:00 You'd get feed from it you know. And they used to get, all these cigarettes to come in and then the very bad time we'd be all sitting there with practically nothing and they used to sell their cigarettes for food to the Germans and the Germans used to give them food and they'd be sitting up eating this food and we'd be starving here for practically nothing. Anyway suddenly the time come when there were no cigarettes and they couldn't

13:30 do any business with the Germans and they used to sit up and fight about food and everything you know. And there were only ever five of us and the rest were about twenty of them. And they all started squabbling among themselves, you know, you're knocking my food off and this and that. Used to sing out, used to sit up on the verandah and sing out, "What's wrong with you rotten folk, can't you make it you old guys?" and we were, they were only trying to

14:00 survive on what we were used to, you know but we didn't appreciate that because they never, they would never give us anything. So the five of us we would be starving now and they couldn't care two hoots about us you know and they'd be living high, wide and handsome. We didn't like it much, you couldn't do much about it could you, so we didn't get to like it very much.

And so prison life really depended upon being able

14:30 **to trade?**

Yes. Yes.

What was the thing you used most of all to trade?

Oh you'd trade food and you get, you'd be trading a bit of food if you could get it. And you made sure that you had, I can't even think what you used to trade with now, but we used to manoeuvre around. No they want cigarettes or something, that's right. That's right I used to, they used to get cigarettes into

15:00 us to on at one stage and I never smoked, so you used to have cigarettes and I could trade the cigarettes for food. That's how I used to do it. Because I didn't, didn't smoke so the other, they, those early days they used to have smokes. I mean I used to hide them all you see and then I could manoeuvre with them when things got bad. Well that was it, yeah. That's the way we used to go.

15:30 **And in the different prisons that you were in, how many Australians were you with?**

Oh, most of them, oh there was more, mostly English rather than Australians. The first camp we were in we were all, we were all, what's the name, the French camp and there wasn't,

16:00 wasn't a great lot of us Australians there really. But then there was the English ones and then there's Australian ones so there wasn't a great many of them, but oh there were quite a few I suppose, a couple of thousand I suppose but then they'd, a lot of them would be sent out to work I suppose in different places but you could go out and work there. It wasn't too bad at all.

16:30 That was an easy camp. That was a real lurk place. They used to get Red Cross parcels and food was everywhere and oh God, I just couldn't believe it when we'd come from this other one, all like animals and suddenly we've got all this food. Food everywhere. Red Cross parcels used to come in the train. You'd finish up with a Red Cross parcel and oh wow, then the last camp we were in was different all together

17:00 but that's the way it used to go. Some were good and some were bad. The one in Poland was a reprisal camp where you usen't to get those things and you used to have to manoeuvre to get your food, you know. The last camp of course that was a bad one. Then when we got on the road we used to nick everything.

And why was the camp at Poland really bad?

Well it was a reprisal camp, that's where the Germans used to come in and

17:30 pulled you, you'd have to go and stand for hours at a time, you know, and in the snow and everything else and so on and then they took all your beds out and you had no beds to sleep with in, and they didn't, you know it wasn't very good at all. It was just one of those bad places really. That's the way it used to go. But they

18:00 didn't, but they didn't, we used to manage that one though in Poland yeah we used to manoeuvre the food in and something. We used to all manoeuvre something in. We used to always have something going. But it wasn't as easy as the others, the others were, that other ones were easy. The other two, the first two camps were like gold, no problem

And was it difficult getting news

18:30 **of the war while you were in prison?**

Oh yes. That Poland camp, we used, what we used to do. We had a couple of radios hidden then we used to get the radio news, what was happening in Britain and so on. But if the Germans found 'em and they took 'em but we used to hide it so they couldn't find them and then we used, say on the camp

19:00 there were a whole lot of people there, a thousand people that you just, you'd have to get the message, that's so and so and so and so but you never knew where the damn thing was anyway but you used to get the message that it was coming through about what's happening in England. Oh yes, things are getting better, getting better and better. But they wouldn't allow that in camp but that's how we used to get the news, concealed

19:30 **And you didn't, did you suffer from boredom?**

No, not really. No, I was never bored. I was always out manoeuvring, thinking of what I was going to do. When I used to, that other bad camp nobody would go, there was no showers or anything you know, you're out in the tap,

20:00 wash under taps and so on and I used to go out everyday and have a little bit of a wash around and take most of my clothes off and wash in the snow you know, strip off and get myself clean and wash my clothes. I only had one pair, but I used to only wash one at a time anyway and we had practically no clothes but the other people used to lie around and they wouldn't get up, go for a walk,

20:30 everyone reckoned I was mad. But in the thing like that I used to remember when I was in the camp, one of the camps, the first camp there was the, the what do you call them, Russians, they were in the big other camp and they used to have dogs that would come in and have a go at you, everything and they used to have

21:00 no things like, they treated them like dogs you know, animals the Germans did and they used to come out in the middle of the winter and take all their clothes off and snow and rush back in again. Because they never had any water, see and they used to do that and they used to say, "Oh you're going around the bend. You wouldn't do that." I said, "What would they do?" They'd want to do something so they had, they had no water, practically nil

21:30 and all they had the snow there and they used to wash themselves with the snow, not many people saw that though, but I did.

Did you have, like a best mate during your time in Prison?

Oh yes, yes, I finished up with this bloke called Norm Nesbitt from Western Australia. Him and I went all around everywhere together. We got together. He was in a, you know, a different crowd

22:00 to mine. He oh around about, we got together I think in one of the, yeah that's right after I come out of one of these working parties and eventually got back and I finished up with him. There was a crowd of us that used to go in and get a little bit of food and eat together and they had one of the fellows with us, he used to nick all the food and we used to, shot him through anyway,

22:30 we don't want you with us so I finished up with this Norm Nesbitt. He was a West Aussie and infantryman and went around all the camps together from there on, where Norm was I was. Even after the war we came back together but, and he went over to Western Australia so when I got married I couldn't have him as my best man.

Do you still keep in touch with Norm?

No, no he's dead now,

23:00 he's gone. I write to their family anyway. They're up at Queensland now anyway. There were lots of times when him and I were great mates. Norm, he's a West Aussie. Anyway that's the way it goes.

But he was in every camp with you?

Not everyone but he was in the last three camps with me yes. He wasn't in the first camp with me.

23:30 He wasn't working with me in those early days but he was in the second camp I went into and that's when we got together.

I image it must have been really important to have a best mate when you're in prison?

Oh you always, you always like to keep the same ones didn't you, all the time. Where we went just that,

24:00 never a dull moment with Old Norm, we were always great mates. We shared everything. There was no mucking around with us, we made sure we got everything we could but oh it was a pity that he had to go to the West anyway but that was the way it was. Couldn't stop in Sydney.

Have you seen him very many times after the war?

24:30 No I didn't see him any at all. We used to write to him all the time but then he's.. Oh that's right I went up to, that's right went up to Queensland once on a trip with my wife and we went into Norm's, we stopped in at Norm's place. It was up towards Queensland, he had a unit, he had a place, a house there so we stopped with Norm for a few days and never seen him since.

25:00 Because I never went out again, Heather died anyway but he'd been gone 12 years anyway. Oh that's the way it goes. What more can I tell you. Nothing? Told it all.

I'm just wondering how you're regarded your captors?

25:30 What the Germans?

Your prison guards?

Well, we didn't have any trouble with guards, we never had much to do with them except when I tripped, when I was on the road, well we had nothing, no worries with guards at all. Because they didn't want to see us much anyway because it was probably getting towards the end of the war but what happened there, we're coming down

26:00 up this big road running down with all trees up it and we were going up this day, one day the guards there alongside us and the American air force come over and blew us, blew us out of the place and we lost a lot of people, we lost several guards, they got killed and lost a lot of our fellows, and I rushed out and Andrew went out and it was going boom, boom, boom and I went out and they had a shot but they missed me

26:30 and I went back to where all my gear that we'd pinched and I went in there and I thought oh Norm he's gone one way and I went another way and anyway he was alive but all our gear we had was all shot up and we lost a lot of people there. We never knew what happened because the guards took us on the road buried them and that was it, yeah.

What about when you were actually in

27:00 **prison, what was your relationship to the Guards like then?**

We never had any trouble with the guards. If you wanted to do anything you could always manoeuvre something through them, you know and they never was much trouble at all, you know. You could always do something.

To give them cigarettes or?

No I never did much no. I never give them anything but they, except when on that walk I made sure they got everything and that was on the way home. You made sure he got his cigarettes and he never saw anything but that was, we never had much to do with them really. But that working party mob didn't like Hitler anyway so they were no worries, they treated us as friends

28:00 but oh that's the way it was. I never had much trouble with the Germans.

And you were in Germany when the war ended?

Yes.

Can you tell me a little bit about that?

I was in a, come to this village, that's what I've told you about didn't I, and suddenly the war's over and the Germans vanished and that's when we,

28:30 that was it for us, that's when we went to that woman's place and got out of there and couldn't sleep in the bed, the double, because it was too, we hadn't been in a bed for four years. Like that and suddenly you couldn't sleep in the double bed. Oh.

What about the day that you were released from prison?

The day what?

The day that you were released from prison?

Oh, that's when we met

29:00 this lady, met this lady.

That was the same day?

The same day, that was it. Never saw 'em anymore. They vanished. Never saw us, didn't want to see us anyway just in case we did, did something to them but the guards weren't so bad anyway. I think they knew the war was going to be ended anyway, that's why. Made a difference but anyway we,

29:30 that trip down to when we used to stop at barns and cattle barns and things and that was where we used to nick everything you see.

So you had to make your own way back to Britain?

No, they, well when we were there we pinched a truck and then took off. We were going back to Paris but we couldn't get there. This fellow picked us up

30:00 and told us to go back into the camp and fix you up there and we went to the camp and I didn't get back to Paris I went to England instead so they flew us back into England and that was it. One of those Hurricane Bombers, suddenly we were on an aircraft and the next thing we know it's V.E. Day in England when we arrived there which was unusual.

Did you find it strange, or sorry I'll just ask that question again, did you find it hard

30:30 **to adjust to life after prison?**

No I didn't find it hard at all. I found it quite easy, no problem. I used to like moving around a bit and I used to enjoy the company, it was very good. There was always something going on you know. Nothing, never a dull moment. But that was the way I used to like it. Used to like getting around.

31:00 No, I enjoyed the trip back to England, that was very good but when we got back to Australia nobody knew us. We arrived back in a ship there and, and nobody cared who we were. That was it. You wouldn't even know we'd been Prisoners of War. They put us in a camp and that was it. Then I got discharged then

31:30 I didn't want to carry on any further anyway. Just when they check you the bloke said you don't look that good anyway.

Were you sick?

Oh, I had a few things wrong with me, you know, had legs and things there, and the hip business and so on, a few things. I'm a TPI, what they call a Temporary Probably Incapacitated Serviceman [actually means Totally and Permanently Incapacitated].

32:00 'Cause when I went out I had this, that and I said, "There's nothing wrong with me." "That's what you think." he said, "You have got something wrong with you." the first thing the Doctor said, and he suddenly found I did have problems, terrible, I managed. You always keep moving, but I'm not as good as I used to be.

And when you first came back to Australia

32:30 **did you have a sense of not knowing what to do with yourself?**

Well they had me worried there because when I got back I thought what am I going to do and then suddenly the bloke that I had enlisted with was there and he said, "Oh you've just come back from the war, great to see you again." And he said, "They're

33:00 only going to go back and they're going to discharge you shortly." and he said, "No worries, I'll fix you, I'll fix you up with a job. We'll get you a job straight away." I got a job immediately. I didn't even know anything about work at all. I'm a great manoeuvrer you know. Got a job in a store and, you know they're selling goods and selling all types of furniture

33:30 and things and so on and eventually they put me in charge of the store anyway. So I took a bond had a lot of , took out, made investments in the Company and so on but then I decided after they made a Public Company that I'd go out you see. That's the only reason I gave it away. It's no longer in existence anyway

34:00 I soon learnt how to work. Then when I got to, got other jobs I used to know how to do it, you know and but, I can't think of what the other job was. I used to manoeuvre stuff around there. Anyway, when I went, when the ad came out they wanted an Inspector for Agriculture, I thought oh I'll apply for that one

34:30 so I went down and applied for it and, and the bloke said to me, "You've got a very good record." he said. "You know, you know all about stock and everything else like that." and I said, "Yes I do." So he said, "I'm going to commend you." he said. So the next thing I had to give them notice. They didn't like that but I said no I can't go for a fortnight.

35:00 But anyway then I moved over away from that and then Agriculture from that day on. Never a dull moment.

And it didn't matter to them that you had been in prison?

No. No, they didn't even know that I don't think anyway.

Yeah

But anyway I soon learnt because then when I started, first migration came in and I got very involved with the migration and my job was to seize any goods

- 35:30 that you know, that you couldn't import into Australia. So I used to have a little truck and I used to fill the truck up with stuff, especially that had come back from Greece and Crete and Italy and everywhere and they used to seize all the cheeses and all sorts of things and they used to have truckloads of stuff and you used to have to burn in down the Incinerator. Miles of stuff. And I was very involved with dogs and cats and monkeys
- 36:00 and I've had my name in the Sydney Morning Herald on one occasion on the front page, did I do the wrong thing because I seized this animal from this girl. But it was interesting. They went out with us this once. I shouldn't talk about it should I? I went out with this Customs said we want you to come out with us. We're going out, way out the other side, going through the heads in and we'll be out a long time, we want you to come
- 36:30 because there's a woman with a dog on board this ship there and the skipper doesn't want it on board and he won't take a bond out for it. You'll have to seize it. So I went away out, miles outside the heads and they said, "She won't let you take the dog." and I said, "Oh well leave it to me." So I went, there were three girls in this cabin and I said to them, "Look I'll go down and see." so I went down and saw
- 37:00 the girl on the cabin and she had this dog and they said, "She won't give it to you." And I patted the dog on the head and I said, "That's a lovely dog you've got there." She said yes and I said, "Well I'm a Quarantine Inspector, I'm just checking all these dogs and you don't mind if I take this back to the Skipper's cabin do you." And she said, "Oh no." so I go back with the dog to the cabin and the bloke said, "How the hell did you get it?" I manoeuvred it, and she thought, I didn't say I was going to knock it off of course. And,
- 37:30 so when we were coming out, I said to the Customs, "Now I'll tell you what, when we get to the wharf down there, I want you to make sure that she's not there." and they said, "Oh leave it to me." So I said, "Right, are you ready to go now?" So out I go with the dog and there she is right there waiting for me and she all the way down the gangway, she wrestled with me for the dog then outside was all the newspapers. They got the message that there was going to be trouble.
- 38:00 I thought, "Oh cripes." So the bloke said, "What are you going to do with the dog?" "That's my business, forget about the dog!" and the Skipper wouldn't take a bond and eventually I got it to the gate, struggling with this damn dog, you know, manoeuvre the dog so she couldn't stride away. I said to the bloke on the gate. "As soon as you open that rotten gate, let me through with the dog, and then shut the gate immediately in her face, don't, don't let her out."
- 38:30 So I just got through the gate and shut the gate on her and she, next.. About 11, suddenly get a call from Canberra. "I believe Mr Wilson, you've been involved in the dog coming into the.. where's the dog?" "In the Quarantine Station." "Excuse me." I said, "But it's a Prohibited Import you can't put it in the Quarantine Station because it could be a Disease Control. You're gonna infect it with other dogs in the Quarantine Station." I said, "No it's just,
- 39:00 as a matter of fact it's well and truly incinerated right now." They said, "Is that right?" "Yes." I said "It is right. It's down where the.. " the next day in the paper, boom, boom, boom, that used to happen often though. In fact a woman with the little cap she come from Western Austral... come across with this damn monkey, small little one, and she said,
- 39:30 she come from Western Australia and what's it called, that other little things, but anyway they said she disappeared with it. So I said, "Well, ship's coming into Sydney so you better see so." So when it come into Sydney I found out that she was stopping at Rose Bay with very top people in Sydney. And
- 40:00 I said, so I got, got a lady with me from Customs and another Customs boy with me. And I said, "Now we're going to Rose Bay. We'll just wait. The ship's just coming in now and they are going to come down and get their cargo out because they didn't take their cargo with them, didn't take their gear with them." you see. So I said, "We'll just wait. She'll have it on her, pretty sure she will." So they come out, we followed them all the way down to the wharf. Went into Customs
- 40:30 and told them what was going on and I said, "Now just wait." I said, "Let them come off the, the ship with all their gear." then we followed them all the way to Kings Cross and then we got to Kings Cross and I said to this girl with me, "Now come with me." So they said, "Oh look I want to go inside here. I want to discuss something with you. I'm the Quarantine, Customs people." and I got in the door because he couldn't lock me out and
- 41:00 then she sat down on the lounge so I said to the lady, "Now look....."

Tape 5

- 00:33 **OK Rupert I'd like to start today by talking about the time when you were taken by troop ship to Britain. You were there at the time of the Battle of Britain?**
- Yes.
- That's correct?**
- We'd spent 6 months in Britain.
- You arrived there in the summertime?**
- Yes, it was summertime. We arrived there at the time we came down one end, come back into England we'd be past the people that were
- 01:00 come out from Paris from France. Remember the English evacuated from Paris and then evacuated, all the evacuees were coming back and we were just coming into England at that time. So we used to be on the train, suddenly that mob oh there, there's that mob from, from Paris, you know. So we arrived, we arrived there then yes.
- Did you come into contact with those English soldiers?**
- No, no because we'd been on a train. Didn't even, we never come in contact with them
- 01:30 whatsoever, but we, you used to see them everywhere.
- You knew what had happened?**
- We knew what they were, yes. Yeah, but that was. Is there anything else you want there?
- What was the feeling of the people around you in England, you talked a lot of the...**
- People of England, we were treated beautifully. They treated us as top people you know. Wherever we went we were always no problem you know.
- 02:00 We were very nicely done. They used to think we were marvellous.
- What sort of things did they say to you about their troops coming back?**
- I don't think we ever discussed it with anybody, never.
- Did they tell you what they thought?**
- Oh somebody would say when our troops come back, thank goodness, they're still alive, you know. That's about all they'd ever talk about but nobody ever knew what the hell they did over there or anything. All they knew that they, they were lucky. Some people would tell you how well they got on
- 02:30 a little boat there and someone else had fallen over the side and they get in any sort of canoe or anything as long as they got out of the place. But they come out all sorts of ways, whatever was available. It was very difficult apparently to get out of there. But anyway we were on the Queen Mary, we didn't have to worry. We come out the easy way.
- Did they greet you, not as rescuers but as someone that was going to help defend their Country?**
- Yes,
- 03:00 yeah we were treated extremely well. The Royalty used to come down to us quite often to meet us because they thought we were marvellous people, we had a great name over in England and Churchill and all the whole thing. He'd be walking around our huts one day and walking around the thing, and suddenly you'd say, "Who's that over there? Oh that's the Royal Prince of So and So." he'd come down to make sure, have a look at you fellows, see what you look like.
- 03:30 And then the Royalties often came down and visited us, you know and they'd, they come down and what the Royalty now, she was only a lady then, a girl then of course. And they'd come down, then they'd come around and, you know talk around to everybody sort of thing and they used to come down quite often. So we were considered really nice people to visit you know.
- 04:00 **Did any of them ever speak to you personally?**
- Not to me personally, no. But I was always busy doing something I suppose. I never got around to personally or anything but to come around to groups and just talk to the groups, you know. They talked to the General of course, but not to the gunners like me
- Were you ever presented on Parade to these visitors?**
- No, no. We did have a parade but then they'd, well the Royalty

04:30 just, used to say there were visitors here and then just a few words and that would be it, but they were always visiting us, the Royalties.

Where were you based at this time?

We were based in, I don't really know where we were based, can't think of the name of the place now..

It was down in England though?

Down in England yes,

05:00 it was the area for the army, the army area. I can't think of the name of it. Can't think of the name but..

Was it close to London?

No, no it wasn't close to London. It was right down the bottom part. I can't think of it right now but I'd have it down in the book.

What do you remember of the countryside?

Well the countryside was great.

05:30 That place was all, you know plenty of sporting things going on there and plenty of room and old army area. Salisbury. Salisbury Plain I think they called it. Around the Salisbury area and they used to have dances there and everything else. Used to have a great time. I remember dancing around with this lady and I was escorting her home to one of the little villages and then suddenly all these West Aussies

06:00 come down full as a goog and started talking so she shot through and left me. Never saw her again. That's the thing that used to happen. We'd have to look after them because they're all drunken, you'd have to wheel them, get them back, back into the tent. We were living in tents. Down at Salisbury Plains.

How many of you would sleep to a tent?

Usually about 6, about half a dozen. You'd sleep on the floor, on the ground you know, with a thing around you.

06:30 **And these were all men of your same Division?**

They were all out of whatever regiment you were with. That was in F Troop we used to call ourselves. And some of our troop, , when I went down there I went into hospital because I had a visit for a while and I got out of hospital and suddenly I was in this dashed tent and I said, "Where's the rest of them?" Oh well they took them away training them for infantry, then suddenly the big change come over and they came back and we formed the regiment

07:00 again so then we went from Salisbury Plain up to other parts of the island. I can't think of the name of the places, there's other big army barracks in other places where we were in big army barracks where you all had beds and everything you know

The camp around Salisbury...

But I'd have to.. I might have put it down in my records but I can't think of the name of the places.

07:30 **The camp around Salisbury, was it a large military barracks?**

Oh yes, it was a big area there.

It was stationed by all sorts of personnel from..?

Yes, it was mostly English and then there were just around the corner was the air force. They had a lot of the airplanes used to take off from there but around, there was about half a mile away from us was where they used to, the planes were up and down all the time you know because there was a lot of activity with the planes

08:00 Particularly they used to you know, the Germans would come in and they'd drop bombs everywhere but they never did much damage to us but we got the word they come in and look out, they're going to drop one here but they never, never got near me but when we went to London though they were dropping bombs all over the place but they never dropped any on me.

Were there medical personnel at the Salisbury camp?

We had medical, yeah, we had medical

08:30 people there all the time. We always had people, medical looked after you if there was any problem.

Well if soldiers were coming back drunk of an evening they might have had to visit a...?

No they just shot 'em into bed.

No calls to the Doctor?

Hmm

No calls to the Doctor for them?

No, no, no, never talked to the Doctor but you just had to get them, make sure you got them into the, shot them into their hut, into their place

09:00 wherever they were you know.

Did you ever have to visit the Doctor, or any medical personnel?

No, only when I went to the Hospital there and I got out of that one, I had dysentery or something I don't know what it was and they, after several days they let me out and I came back and I said, "What the hells this?" I was sitting in little, getting on the floor, lying on the floor there on the ground in tents. I couldn't believe it. Tents everywhere.

How had you been

09:30 **housed before that?**

Oh we were on the Mary before that and then we came down and straight, when I come out of hospital we were all in tents and then they used to go and training, a bit of training around you know and keep you fit and everything and then a lot of, we used to always have visitors come in and we used to have to get up and be together so General So and So would be there and so and so and then they'd have to do the right thing.

10:00 Walk him there, another crowd to go around and make sure he was right.

As a gunner what sort of training did you perform?

Well we didn't train there. We went to a Training School which was on the other side of Salisbury and you used to have to get down and train on the guns there and then we used to have, used to have to, English gunners used to, used to

10:30 then determine who was the best gunners and we used to have this thing that firing the gun to test who was the best gunners and we left the English fellows for dead, tripe out of 'em especially with the 25 pounders.

Was this the first time you came across these guns?

This was the first time we'd ever been on 25 pounders and they were so accurate you couldn't, but we've been training on guns in Europe before in the Middle East anyway but we were

11:00 training on old stuff then but now we've got this.. Our blokes were fairly well trained people. We'd been over six months in the army then, had nine months in the army and they pretty well trained. So we took the top, we won all the, all the contests they had we won every one of them. The English didn't like that either. Anyway that's how it was. We learnt how to fire the guns.

11:30 **How did you, how did you know the English didn't like your..?**

Well they liked to win didn't they? We always like to win. But that's the way it used to be when you're winning anything. They didn't like you much when you lose either. When you're losing it was different but when you're doing a good job well they couldn't believe that we were so well trained you see. They didn't realize we were, they weren't so well trained as we were.

12:00 They were sort of learning, learning to train on the guns where we were trained gunners. But anyway I was only training then myself anyway. But anyway that's, that was very good.

What was your role when you trained with these guns?

Oh just a gun layer, a gun layer, gunners they called us, just gunners.

Were you using live ammunition?

12:30 Oh yes, they had enough ammunition there for us yes but I can never work out, we didn't fire that many you know because we didn't want to fire too many out because they wanted to make sure they had plenty of ammunition.

Were there ever any accidents in training?

Hmm?

Were there ever any accidents in training?

Not that I know of, no. We didn't have any accidents. Everybody was pretty fit and well those days, no problems.

13:00 **How long were you at this base near Salisbury?**

We were only there for a couple, two or three months I think and then we moved from, moved from there to another base halfway up towards London area, up that, not to, not quite to London but up, up that area but I think I got it my, I'm not sure whether I wrote it down or not. I can't remember the..

Was it a good time?

Oh yeah a great time. I used to,

13:30 had a wonderful time in England. But the thing in England you had to watch out. When you went on leave they only allow you to have so much leave and then when you went on leave you had to make sure when you went somewhere so they couldn't find you and everybody was always AWL anyway. I don't think there was any, we used to, the oh the Police, I can't think of what they call them in the army there

14:00 **Provos? [Military Police]**

Yeah, they were all around London everywhere watching to people went AWL you know. So we made sure they never found us. We went up in the East End and we got involved with East End then. It was at a big barracks there where they had a lot of English air force people used to be there and was only the 3 of us and we used to get up and had a very nice bed and everything. We done very well.

14:30 **So you'd stay with these air force ?**

No, we were only, only come back when we were... We used to always go out and only come back at night. We were out all day doing this and that with one another and used to go out and made sure we went to all the dances and things around and the nightclubs and made sure you went down to, when they were bombing there you made sure you went down so they couldn't bomb you. Certain places you go where they couldn't bomb you and they had all sorts of nightclubs everywhere and we used to like

15:00 the nightclubs. They were very great. So we had a great time there and we made sure that we got back in time. Only that when we were there for a while we were, we used to, oh that's right we took a trip up to York and the three of us and I think I told you about this but when we went to York, we'd been there for several days and then

15:30 we had to catch the train at 10 o'clock the next morning and one of our fellows was missing and Shorty Wright was missing and where the hell is he so we went around the East End area, we knew the area and the Police were excellent because I said to the Policeman, "We're looking for a bloke, you know he's only Shorty Wright. And he's sure to be here with one of these sheilas somewhere." And he said, "I know 'em all." he said

16:00 so we walked around about half a dozen of them and eventually there he was. Got him out of the cot, "Come on you rotten so and so you're going to be late to catch the train." So we caught the train to York. And we were the first Australians to visit York and we had our photo taken with the Royal Prince of York and I never got a photograph back of course, but we entertained Royalty there. We couldn't anything wrong 'cause when you went to the Castle, York Castle

16:30 they put us on bus with all these, what do you call them, aristocrats, but one of the blokes he said, "I was the Governor of Victoria in 1901 and so and so." and were you, oh well that's right, you know, Victoria and so on and then we got off the bus and then of course the Princess wanted to take a photograph of us with her you see so the four of us, three of us were there with a photograph and then we used to go down

17:00 all around York. It was quite an extraordinary place. You'd go down tunnels and everywhere you walk in one place and say that's where that pirate blokes used to come down and rob everybody. Oh I can't think of their name now, used to have a special name for him. Used to rob people so he was always, he used to stop here. We didn't like him. So we went all over the place then, had a great time. We enjoyed England.

17:30 **It sounds like you had some enjoyable times in London itself, particularly the East End?**

Oh London was marvellous, oh yeah. We knew London. We knew exactly where to go there. Yeah it was great.

What sort of places did you frequent?

Well night time we used to make sure we went to a club. We'd go to the clubs that were there. They had some very good clubs and then, then they used to have nightclubs as well where you could go down and dance and fool around

18:00 and the clubs are very good there you know ex-army clubs and so on and air force and so on and we were always invited to go into them without any problem and we used to enjoy the company. It was great. Very enjoyable.

Your mate Shorty who you spoke of before, had he been dragged out of someone's cot you said?

Not really, no, not me. Him.

Yes, he was dragged out?

Well he was lying in a cot there

18:30 and we never saw her but anyway she didn't, you didn't get robbed did you. No. Didn't get robbed. So we figured out he been stopped there the night.

Was she someone he'd just met at a club?

Oh just somebody he'd met there, yeah. Of course, there were plenty of them around there where he was. But the Police knew where he was, we didn't know it. It's a great place London though really great, but it was sad

19:00 one of the ladies that used to come around with us. We used to go around the nightclubs and everything and have a great time with them and take them home and so on. And it wasn't that you were going to sleep with them or anything but you were going to have a good time with them you know and they'd invite you to nightclubs and so on. But one of the girls that we just left and then suddenly they blew her house up so we never saw her anymore. I think she...

19:30 I don't know whether she got killed or not. Anyway we left England anyway after then.

London was obviously under threat of bombing pretty much 24 hours a day?

London was what?

London was always under threat from bombs?

Oh yes, they were bombing London all the time, everywhere.

How did you feel about that threat?

Well we never worried about it. We were worried about making out and having a good time. We used to go to all the nightclubs and everything else. That was what they were there for, it was very good.

20:00 And we had this place where we were stopping there. They made sure we had nice beds there and we had, it was quite good. I remember the night before I come home and there's one of the boys was asleep in the damn lift. He'd been drinking too much and I wasn't a drinker you see so it never worried me. We got him to bed and we had to get Shorty out the next day that was the problem. We got him though. We got to York.

20:30 **What about the Londoners themselves. Did they seem concerned?**

Well everywhere in London was all getting bombed everywhere, but they used to enjoy going out to the clubs and things you know and always liked going to clubs and it was always, was always nice in the clubs you know. There's always something going on there. It was very good. I used to enjoy it.

21:00 But anyway that was London for you. You had to go around, look around all over the places. Like other places we used to go to we used to go there but, and enjoy their company but it wasn't those days when you went to bed with them. They didn't like you going to bed with them but they used to, we used to enjoy their company you know. A lot of people think, oh well, go out with her but that wasn't so. We used to have a great company there with them. It was very good.

21:30 That's London for you.

Did any air raid sirens ever go off in one of your nightly visits to London?

Oh yes they used to go off but not right alongside me. You'd hear them coming down.

Would you hear them?

There'd be a noise, yeah, yeah like in same in Salisbury Plain, there'd be a BOOM but it didn't hit us.

Would you feel it more than hear it?

Oh you could sometimes feel them yes

22:00 it affected the ground you know, it was enormous. And most of the things you used to do is go down the tunnel so they didn't, you couldn't, so they couldn't knock you off.

Did you have to evacuate a building at any time?

No, never, never at any stage. We just was interested in looking around the city and having a good time which we did. We enjoyed the place. Yeah, that's London for you. Anything else?

22:30 **Indeed I do. When you left your base at Salisbury where were you next stationed?**

I think it was Tidworth I think, Tidworth, I think yes where we had huts there and that was very good. So there used to be always something going on there because you'd go out with a crowd and go around in the nightclubs wherever they were

23:00 and we used to, always had a good time no matter where we went.

Were you still doing training there?

Yeah, we were training there. Yes. That was a big Training Centre there but you always, you always had to do a bit of training and it was left, right, left, right sort of thing, made sure you did the right thing.

How much of your time would the training take up?

Oh not very much. It would only be about an hour or two on the training. You'd get everything right and make sure mostly

23:30 but when you're on the gunning business you mainly concerned with using the guns you know and so on, but you have to make sure that you knew exactly what to happen, what to do and so on and so on. They'd train you to make sure that you could do it.

So you were confident in all the men around you?

Oh yes, yes. Never worried about anything

24:00 you know in those days you didn't worry about bombs or anything like that whereas other people.. It was terrifying in London for people but we were only visitors you know. But none of our fellows ever, I don't think any of our fellows ever got bombed. We never lost anybody anyway. Only one, we used to have fellows who were AWL they used to have to do a bit of time in the thing, so many days and things for being leave

24:30 on leave a lot of them.

It sounds like you had a fair amount of leave time, or at least spare time?

Well you would go on leave about every 3 months or so, 2 or 3 months. Every couple of months or something you'd go on leave and but you only went to York once and London a couple of times you know. I've been to other, there used to be other places where you were camped you know

25:00 and there was always something going on there. There was always plenty, they used to have nightclubs and everything else like that and we used to get to know all the nightclubs. Yeah, it was great.

You'll have to forgive me but it sounds almost like you were having a great time in the war?

Well we used to, we didn't worry about the war then. We didn't care about bombs. We were just having a good time, get to know the place. We got to know the place all right but you got to know a lot of people in the areas you know and it was quite good.

25:30 But we were only, only learning to go into battle weren't we. All in the Middle East because I mean that was our first training into the first real battle area you know.

While you were there, I believe you were used, your Company was used as a part of the Coastal Defences..?

One part of the stage, yes we were.. Churchill gave us the first 25 pounders and then we were stationed on this water,

26:00 towards the waterfront there, one of the places and our job was to clean. This was the time when the Germans were invading England and they knew they were going to invade but the word went out that it was not to be mentioned under any condition that we were doing this but the bodies were washed up. The air force knocked them off. We didn't have to fire a gun on them at all. We never fired one gun on any German in England because the air force, as they

26:30 come across on their boats they knocked them off. The bodies turned up all over the place. They were all Germans, dead, gone.

Would you or your men have to retrieve these bodies?

No, no, no we just move out. Back again, it's all over now, righto back you go. So we go back to our, where we had been and then we'd just do nothing really. We just

27:00 filled in then. Then we, we had to send a mob all went to the other side of England we had to take all the guns and everything else and put 'em on board a ship. Then quite a few of us had to come back to the camp by train and then we'd come home and then we'd be right and eventually we went on another, another ship round, round America, all around the coast there and back to the Middle East.

27:30 **At this time when it was conceived that the Germans would invade England did the mood change?**

When the Germans invaded?

When it was thought that they would invade England?

Well nobody thought that they were going to invade England but the word went around that the Germans, there is an attempt to invade England and their, and these Germans were on their way

apparently, but the word went out under no

28:00 circumstances was anybody to discuss this matter with anybody. There's never to be known that they even did that. And it was never known that the Germans tried to invade England. We knew but we were not allowed to talk about it and it was never come out in the papers or anything. It was never discussed anywhere but they knocked all their, they knocked them all off, the air force, cleaned them all up. They were terrific the air force there. Oh,

28:30 gee they did a great job but that was something that was not going to be discussed. About six months later somebody mentioned it about that thing, he said of course that was right and that was that.

At what time did you leave Britain?

Well we were, gee, well we arrived in the Middle East on New Years Eve

29:00 so it was in December, early December, or no the middle of December and then we stopped halfway up, we didn't go to Cape Town, we went to the next place another place I can't think of the name of it and that's where we found these fellows that were AWL and we had to pick 'em up and take them on our boat again. We spent about 2 or 3 days there and then right near the coast and we used to go swimming and everything and have a good time

29:30 and they had nightclubs there as well and then we went off and we arrived in the Middle East on New Year's Eve.

You'd arrived in England on the Queen Mary?

We arrived on, we went on the Queen Mary to England, yes?

But when you went to the Middle East it was on a different ship?

Oh no on the Empress, oh I can't think of the name of it, Empress of Canada or some of those I can't think of the proper names. They were a different things altogether.

Can you describe the ship?

30:00 Well they were the normal ships that used to take troops everywhere. They were the troop ships and they were well known, well known ships and they were, they were, they converted them into war, you know carrying people from places, from here to there all the time. The Empress of Canada and all that sort of thing they were called and, but the Queen Mary, I don't know what happened to her anyway

30:30 but they, their idea was to take troops from here to there, and these people, all they do was take troops from here to there and back again you know. Moving troops all over the place.

Was the Empress well equipped to do that?

Oh yes, yeah, very well equipped. Pretty full all the time, you know, you didn't have much space to... Some of them were lucky, you got yourself a nice bed, you know but they were pretty good.

31:00 Had no troubles there.

What was, what were conditions like on the boat?

Well they were very good, excellent but they used to put up three tier beds everywhere you know and we used to sleep on these beds up in the first, second and they were pretty well jammed in pretty well. But anyway we the food was always good and we never had any problems. We used to enjoy the trip. We used to play two-up in the day time,

31:30 night time. There was always something to do.

Were your bunks below decks or... Were your bunks down below decks?

Oh no, some were down below. They were all over the place you know. Most of them were just above the water line. The ones I was in were just above the water line but there's a lot down below. It was pretty full everywhere. They were all jammed in everywhere with them. The idea was to move them, to get them to England, get them to the Middle East

32:00 and that was it. So that wasn't any trouble, it was quite good.

Were you seasick on a voyage like this at all?

I was, well I got seasick for a while and then I come good again. I used to get seasick on a ship, but anyway that was alright. I used to come good anyway. Then I used to be longer seasick than I thought I was. They made sure I had a bit of a spell.

32:30 They said you're seasick, yeah I'm sick. Half the time I wasn't.

What would you do during these times?

Oh there was always something to do. Go around and talk to somebody, do something, walk around have a, whip into the pool and have a swim. They used to have swimming pools in some of them. Oh yes, I

just enjoyed the company.

Was there much discipline enforced on the ship?

Well you had to be there pretty well all the time

33:00 and training you know and it was, this was this and this was that and it was all talk, talk talk, you know but what you had to do, make sure you did this and make sure you know how to do that and so on. But it was just filling in time really.

Did you know your destination?

No, all we knew was we were going to the Middle East. That's all we knew. We thought we were coming in one way but we went around the other way. We couldn't go through the other way so we had to go all the way around Cape Town way, right around there,

33:30 come back that way but it was a good trip. We enjoyed the trip. Most of the blokes used to like their grog of course but I never worried about it much. I used to have soft drinks or something but it was quite a good trip.

And you landed in Egypt?

We arrived in Egypt on New Year's Eve and then we went to, the next day we moved out, what's the place called? Ikingi Mariut

34:00 which is about 20 miles outside of there and it was all out in the desert you know. And we were sleeping in little huts in the deserts. Sleeping on the floor sort of thing in the desert. We didn't like the desert much. Pretty windy and hot and you'd go and have to go across the place to get some food or something and the damn sand would be blowing up and you'd try and

34:30 make sure you didn't get the stuff in, in your food and so on, you know. It was pretty sandy. They were pretty glad to get out of there. We used to try and get, make sure we get a trip occasionally into, into town and we used to enjoy it in there. They had nightclubs all over the place there. And then we'd get back out again and we usually, instead of getting a train back we used to get a, taxi fellows used to put the right price

35:00 and several of us would grab a taxi, and take us back to Ikingi Mariut and they'd drive us all the way back there and wouldn't cost us that much anyway. And we used to enjoy it.

Would you barter for your fare? Did you have to barter for the fare?

Yeah we used to pay the fares, pay the fare but we'd sort it out amongst ourselves and give him so much money and they were happy about it.

Was there a celebration on New Year's Eve when you arrived?

35:30 No, no. We just arrived there and there was, all I know is they all had drinks there, had plenty of booze going. Well there's a celebration, all the blokes were all drinking everything, that's all. The first time they had, what did they have there, oh you know the something they never had before. They didn't get, oh they didn't get the Engli... oh the Australian beer. The fellows got their Australian Beer there. They said it was the first time they'd had a beer, you know, since they come back. Since they left Australia.

36:00 So all the boys liked to drink, away they'd go.

It wasn't very long after arriving in Egypt that you were called on to head up to Greece?

We were there for about a couple of months I suppose and half our mob went to the front line and half were stopped behind and then we, we were in Greece in oh let me think.

36:30 We left there in April after the Battle of Greece, then I'm just trying to think what the hell what time that would be, anyway we left Greece in, in April anyway so we arrived in the Middle East so, so we weren't there that long, you know, in Greece.

Just prior to your arrival in Greece, you'd spent an awful lot of time

37:00 **both in the United Kingdom and in Egypt training, preparing, but also..**

When we were in Egypt we did a lot of training 'cause they had Training Schools there. It was quite good.

At the same time you'd done a lot of sightseeing almost enjoying yourself?

Oh yes, yes, enjoying around.. but they used to, for exercises they used to take us marching out, left, right left, right for about 10 miles in the sand and we didn't like that much so we pleased

37:30 when we went over to Egy... over to Greece.

Did you feel primed for battle when you finally left for Greece?

What's that?

Did you actually feel ready for battle?

Oh yes, we were prepared, we had our 25's we knew we were waiting, we were waiting to get into the battle. We went right to the Yugoslavic border and we were the first to fire on the Greeks, on the Germans and Yugoslavic border.

When you fired that very first shell

38:00 **was it very different to all of your training or did you...?**

No, we'd trained in England on 25's so we were used to them you know but, but then this fellow packed in and I became the layer or thing and I wasn't used to it myself, but Jack Kruger was the top man and he knew exactly where he'd been all his life, training, even before the war. So he made sure that I did it right and we were the first to blow the Germans

38:30 off the mountain. That's why old Churchill gave us a Commendation for that one there which I said before anyway.

Did you feel a pressure in battle straight away compared to training?

Ooh yes, battle was very, was just a matter of getting, getting, blokes getting the things up for you and shooting them away and when you, and you had,

39:00 when you cleaned that mob up down there, we cleaned the first mob up and we moved back about a few kilometres, about a few miles then we went onto another place and then, and then eventually we had five big actions in Greece and, and the middle one was the time when we had over a thousand things shells a gun which was oh gee

39:30 it was sort of so damn, we just had to wait for it, it was all so, they used to knock the guns around, bugged, red hot you know and had to wait a while let you go while it cools down a bit and, and that's where they blew my head, I got my head blown up there anyway but, 'cause a German knocked a bomb over, a point over the top of us and I was just firing a gun at the time and, and then a shell went off behind me and I caught me in my ear and blew me ears out. Anyway I come back on the gun again and

40:00 so a couple of days and I was right. But I had five big actions there which were very, we were the ones that cleaned the Germans up all the way through but the Germans used to come over with the bombs and you know bomb you but they never seemed to, they never seemed to, well they never bombed us but they went close but they never seemed to. Can't ever work out why they never caught us because we used to be on the road and sometimes you pull your

40:30 gun you'd pull it off the road so you couldn't see it sort of thing but and then you'd go to ground and hope for the best and then, but they never, they never, never knocked us off anyway.

Tape 6

00:34 **OK Rupert when you were talking last you mentioned you were in the midst of battle in Greece?**

Yeah.

You were fighting in an artillery unit supporting the 2/3rd Infantry retreating?

Oh in Crete, no, not in Greece we just, it was our own regiment. We were artillery and we weren't concerned with any of them. All we had to do was

01:00 fire and keep, it would be going over the mountain side and the Germans would be close behind the infantry and where all the machine-gunners and so on and our job was to clean the Germans up so they couldn't catch our, catch our fellows trying to get back, back to the Middle East. Our job was to, we had nothing to do with anybody. All we had to do was fire our guns. We had nothing to do with the people personally. Didn't even know who they were. All we knew

01:30 was they were infantry.

Australian infantry?

Or artillery, we were artillery. Our job was to make sure they, we could stop the Germans coming over the mountains and it was all mountainous and they used, suddenly all the Germans would appear with all the trucks and everything else and then we'd blow them out, up the whole thing and they couldn't and then they couldn't move. So we were very, we did a devastating job there oh it was absolutely out of this world. Couldn't believe it.

02:00 **If it was such mountainous terrain how would you get a large field cannon, like a 25 pounder**

into a position?

How would you get a what?

How would you get your gun into position on mountainous terrain?

Well you'd go right around, you got a position. One of them we went into a gully and, and then we, so that we could get a position, you know and so on, and the second last one we had was, we had to

02:30 fire much more distance than we thought we could because it was, and eventually we made it but, but it was very difficult because we had to. It was what we called the gunners the, there was another one where you had to have it fire, you had to fire the gun at a normal thing where you wouldn't fire and it'd pull the thing right back down and you'd pull it out and say to Jack,

03:00 "Jeez how are we going to do that?" and eventually we knocked these Germans off. We were about 2 or 3 miles further than we normally did and we had to, had to, I can't think of the name of the thing. It was a special thing and I'm sorry you'd pull it right down and we cleaned this mob up too and they couldn't believe it.

Was the cannon itself brought into position on the back of a truck?

No, we'd get, we'd get pulled there

03:30 and then we'd put our thing in a position and then we'd be in a position and the trucks would go away and it wouldn't come near you because you didn't want them near you and..

What was your first task when your gun was let off the back of a truck?

Well no they pulled us, we had our own wheels and everything. We just, we just dragged along and just unhooked the thing and away we're right. We just had to unhook it. We weren't on the thing.

04:00 You just unhooked them. They'd pull you along.

And what would you do immediately upon having the gun in position?

Well they'd take, they'd always, they'd always go away about a quarter of a mile from you or something you know, so they were never near your guns so, because we tried to conceal the guns so they couldn't see you. Then we'd.. a lot of those

04:30 places were not, not, knocked off in times but we managed to get right through to the last day ourselves without losing our gun. But it wasn't easy. The last day towards the finish there the Germans came down and machine-gunned the whole lot of us and we were all jammed in then and we thought oh well,

05:00 we had to go and put, had to move away from the gun and try and put your head down and try and save it. And we thought gee, I went back to the gun and thought everybody was gone but anyway eventually we, most of us survived that one but a lot of the trucks that got blown up, some of the fellows got killed in the trucks but we survived it.

You said that most of your gun unit survived?

Yeah, our guns did. We had them tucked away amongst this

05:30 grove there where trees around and so on and they, they give us the treatment but they, they didn't knock our guns off. We were very fortunate. We thought, I thought they'd be all gone when we got back but there it was the gun no problem. Off again.

So your unit, it did suffer some casualties?

Well no, we just got our guns. We didn't worry about anything. All we did was get our gun and get going again. You didn't worry about all the others, all you just worried about was your own gun and the officers would sing out

06:00 "Righto, Righto away you go." and away we'd go.

How many of you were attached to each gun?

We had about, let me see, one, two, three, we usually had about four or five. Normally about five but we, that was what it normally was.

What would happen if any one of them was injured or even killed during an action? How could they be replaced?

06:30 You couldn't replace them.

What would you do?

Well you'd just, just get going again. Somebody had to look after him. It, it would be the trucks and somebody would be able to look after them. You know, there was always somebody there that could look after the wounded but we just, we just take off. We wouldn't stop. You weren't concerned about losing

one because what your mainly,

07:00 one, two, myself and Jack. The rest were fetching ammunition up. You needed them to fetch the ammo up so if you only had four or anything you'd only have two blokes fetching ammo up instead of, but at least three or something you need about three of them fetching the ammo up.

You mentioned Jack was one of the other people working with you on the gun. This was your good mate?

Mmm?

This is your good mate, Jack.

07:30 Jack, he was the sergeant-in-charge. He was Sergeant Jack Quigg and I was Gunner Wilson and he was in charge of the gun, of our gun. We were the ranging gun for the regiment. Fortunately number 1, so I was very fortunate there.

How well did your group operate?

Oh they, the operation on Crete was extraordinary.

08:00 It was so successful. They reckoned it was one of the most successful events for us of the things that we did. They reckoned that we were outstanding the way we, what happened in Greece because that was all 25 pounders which we had to just blow them up anyway when we were finished. Otherwise the Germans would have taken them over. So we disconnected them all so and carried a lot of stuff away and buried it and so on and that was it.

In these actions in the mountains you said that your..

Five big actions we had. Five different actions in five different places. They were all coming, of course in Greece it was all mountain side, up and down mountains..

You said that your gun was blowing the Germans off the mountains or knocking them back up the mountains?

Well the Germans would come down,

09:00 see there used to be tracks coming down the mountain side and you could see, you could see all the Germans coming down with their trucks down the mountain and then the next thing the officer in charge would sing out Eh so and so and so then we turned around and he'd give us exactly where it, where it was going and we'd, we'd go and blow 'em up. We blew them off the mountain. We blew them, we blew so many off. I don't know they never ever got to us anyway.

09:30 **These were, you were very very impressed with the precision of your 25 pound guns?**

Oh yes, they're excellent.

Could you see the damage that you were inflicting on the German forces?

No, no, I, we weren't interested in that. We were only interested in blowing them off and that was it and then we'd get going again.

How could you tell that enough damage had been inflicted to be able to move away?

Well the officer in charge would advise you. Successful, yeah.

Do you know what he looked for

10:00 **to be able to say that?**

No, they just say they never know how many you knocked off or something but the next thing you know, "Right to move away." then he'd start moving again. The officer in charge would tell you to start moving again and away you go. So you didn't, all you knew you just, you got the word back that they were all blown up and half the time you couldn't see them, from your gun, you know. So you had to, given order for certain, how much you had to fire.

10:30 I can't ever remember seeing them bailed up myself. All I was interested in was getting on the gun again.

It was a different matter though when you were in Crete, the fighting?

Oh Crete was different, yes, Crete was just all old guns in the First War and those were no good and then it was hand to hand combat anyway. After a while there was no other way out of it. It was just all hand to hand. All the paratroopers flew over the top of us everywhere

11:00 and it was just hand to hand combat. We had nowhere to blow the thing. We went to blow one up one day and a bloke come over the top with a plane and the next thing his plane blew up 50 feet behind us. So and he was gone, they were dead but we just, we just about to let our gun go and suddenly this plane come right over the top and fell right behind us. So we, we never did much

11:30 good with the guns on Crete but it was more or less hand to hand combat with what was on then. We had these two officers, there was us and one was behind here and another one there and then I made sure that this other fellow and I used to go around and dig into the Germans things and make sure we got all their equipment and make sure we had plenty of guns so that they could fire, and make sure that they did a lot of firing

12:00 you know, after they got back with their guns and things. So, so I didn't have to do much firing, the main thing was to get the ammunition to them. It was always difficult because there were a lot of Australians were killed as well so they used to make sure they got any equipment there, they'd grab it too but it wasn't easy because everybody was waiting to have a go at you and you made sure you went down so you wouldn't get killed you see. You're going all over the place.

12:30 You know, that was that, anyway.

Did you ever see a close mate fall on Crete?

Well in answer to, suddenly we were moving around there and getting guns ready to fire away and suddenly they come down and shot us and then one of the boys got hit across their head.. and Quinny said, "Oh I'm hit!" so we made, so we were all

13:00 busy then getting ammunition and firing and guns and so on and I said, "For God's sake stop down and don't get up." So he never got up 'til we cleaned the Germans up around and then he got up and he, he only had a head here. He thought he was dying you know. But then a lot of people used to get killed and then we, right behind us was the another little place where we used to

13:30 bury them there. Then we lost a lot there, a lot of people, a lot of our friends.

Did you personally have to bury any friends?

Buried several of them, myself with about three of us used to bury them and of course one of the those fellows there, that bloke who was in Crete, you know, with the sheila on that boat. I buried him. He got shot too. He just,

14:00 so we used to have to make sure that they got buried you see. I used to make sure you put the name plaque on the top so they'd know who they were.

On top of a cross, a marker?

On top of yeah, I'd try and make a little cross and then put it on the top of each one of them. So we had to bury quite a few there. Then one of the officers, the infantry fellows in charge, he went running around and singing out and going on and next thing I had to bury him too,

14:30 they shot him too

Would you have to do this during an action or would you wait until afterwards?

Well, what it would be. There'd be a lot of action going on for an hour or two you know, and then suddenly it would stop. We'd clean them up. Or they'd vanish and, and then that's the time you started to get your dead out and bury them.

Did you ever see the Germans do...

A lot of people were badly wounded and you

15:00 used to have to try to get 'em down the hillside and without a, about half a mile away they had a place down there where they used to look after the people you know who were wounded. It was very difficult to get them down there.

Were you carrying both wounded and dead soldiers?

No, I never did but a lot of them used to carry them down there, yeah.

Were the Germans doing this at the same time with their injured?

I don't know what the Germans did. No, I didn't worry, I don't think, we weren't concerned about the Germans. We only worried about our own crowd. The fellow that was with me was badly wounded but I never saw him any more anyway. I got his guns and everything but I wasn't interested in him, I was too busy.

In those cases where you had to bury fellow soldiers and you would make a marker for their grave..

Yes..

What other procedures would you follow?

Well that's about all you could do. Nothing else. You just had to dig the grave and,

16:00 and we had a spot there where we could dig a grave and then we'd bury him and then we'd take his, all his badges and things off then put a little cross on the top and put it on it so that it won't get blown off

or anything so it was all down solid on the thing so, who he is. Made sure of it. That's the way it used to be.

There was never any time for any reflection

16:30 **or any sorts of service?**

No, no time for that, no. By the time you'd buried one, the next thing was on again. Oh there's another mob over there, the next thing it was on again.

What would you do with their tags, their identification marks?

Well you buried them down, and then you'd put some bricks around and everything else and put it there so it won't get blown away. You make sure it didn't go away.

17:00 Then you'd find later on, I found all these fellows, their names come out in Commemoration in another area altogether from there but the names went down you know. They took their names down and put them with all the people that had died on Crete. Quite a whole big heap of them.

17:30 We lost a lot of people on Crete. Yes.

Who was responsible for marking the sites of these people's graves? Would anybody follow up after you'd performed these..?

What?

Would anyone return to these gravesites to check identification and to mark..?

No, we never, we never did. When they were buried, then suddenly

18:00 there was activity everywhere, you were going, go, go, go, you'd never have time to go back to the grave but they were only about 20 feet away down below anyway and you, next thing you know the Germans were all over the place and you're gone yourself so you never, never went back to them anymore. You don't know what happened to them. That was it. All we know that later on their names were recorded in the place

18:30 in Crete. That was all we knew. We never saw them anymore. We buried them and that was it. Never got a chance to go back. It was hand-to-hand combat and you know, you had to watch what you were doing. You'd have to move from here, suddenly the whole lot of us would have to move from this particular spot down to another spot 50 feet away and then eventually we'd say right, move back again

19:00 and then you'd go back again to another spot and oh it wasn't easy. Lucky to live through that one. Yeah. What more can you ask me?

Would you have the chance later on perhaps to pause with your remaining mates and perhaps think on your mates that had fallen?

I went back, the first trip from Australia after the war when I went back to there but I could never see anything. There was no

19:30 records there of anything. It was all just nothing.

What about later on, the very day that you would have buried them?

Well we buried them there but then, within hours of, there's another battle on you know, go on, you did, and well you might spend a few hours there and then suddenly you gotta move, you move here, you move there and you're moving back and you never get a chance to

20:00 do anything about it. You just buried them, that's all, that's it, finished and you, you'd never go back there again, that was it. You just remembered them, that's all.

What if when they fell close by you, would you be able to recognize that someone had gone down or were you focussed on what you were doing? Fighting the Germans, were you distracted from your fighting

20:30 **by losing friends around you or seeing friends drop?**

Oh yeah, some of the fellows would be wounded or dead and there was nothing you could do about it until it all quieted down and then you'd go up and point out that so and so's injured or so and so's dead and then, then you'd have to get them and take them down and put them in the grave where put them. You'd have to carry them down there, you know, so then the wounded people, then they used to have to

21:00 try and get them fixed up but it was very difficult. All you had to do was make sure you survived. You didn't have much chance of doing much else.

Would you think of these friends for long afterwards?

Oh they're great friends, you never forget them. Never forget them. Never forget them. They are just, you know, we are....

21:30 we were friends all the way through you know and suddenly they're gone and they were, they were all, they're all well known people, you know, all pretty well known in the regiment there for being good soldiers and being good friends with them. We were all pretty personal friends you see and we knew each other personally. We had a crowd all around us

22:00 and you couldn't believe it when so and so's dead and you think oh no,, you know..

Were these mates you might have even joined up with?

Yeah, yes that's right. But you're lucky to survive yourself really, you know. It was a difficult position but but I was lucky to survive in Greece because I got my ears blown out,

22:30 if I'd been down, if I'd happened to be down a bit further they would have blown me up.

Did you ever stop to think that you were having a good run of luck?

No, I just, no I never thought about it. I never give it a thought. Just keep on going. Just keep moving and you had to, you had to keep moving and do things you know all the time and everywhere you went you just had to, you just had to

23:00 keep on going particularly, particularly, particularly there as soon as we buried all them and the next thing we're prisoners of war. And then you're in bother then you know. You just had to survive. We were lucky we were able to survive but that's why you have some good friends and three of them just carried me so far and put me on a truck. I wouldn't have been alive today only for them. Can't,

23:30 can't forget them. Oh well we used to, we were closely attached to each other. We used to think a lot of each other. But we got out no hoppers as well of course. Then we didn't worry about them. We had one fellow was a no hopper but he, he used to dog everything. He would never get involved in the battle areas like we did

24:00 and, and anyway he went to another place down there and then what happened, he was running away and he got killed because that's exactly what happens when you do that. You watch where you go. You keep your head down you know and that's it, otherwise you're gone. Well that's because he couldn't take it see. I'm sorry for him I suppose but that was what he was like. They usually get killed anytime that sort of fellow because you never, all you want to do is run

24:30 he didn't want to, didn't want to take any action. He wouldn't even go on a gun. Anyway that's the way it was.

Did you feel you had a better chance of surviving by being more active?

Yes, you're always survived because you're really go, go made sure you go all the time. And, and you have all the things that happen to you,

25:00 you've got to keep moving and when we were in jail the German place on the hill in Crete you know you used to try and work out how we were going to get a bit of tucker, you know nick a bit of food here and do something, you're always up to something you know, and then we were all short of practically no food and then I think, I wrote it in a diary anyway but this day this fellow was in our regiment and they'd all evacuated and he didn't evacuate. He used to

25:30 always like his grog. He got tiddly and he got caught and what he did, he got a donkey. He had a donkey, how he got a damn donkey I don't know but anyway he arrived in our camp with a donkey. We were on a hill and he took the donkey up the hill and I said, I said to this fellow, a friend of mine, "He's taken the damn donkey up the hill, they are going to kill it. They said they're going to eat it."

26:00 He said, "Oh rubbish. I'm going up the damn hill." I went up the hill and you know what they did to the donkey. They slaughtered the donkey and I finished up with the tail, the rest was gone. And that's what used to happen. I got the tail. I cut a bit of the tail off and I had a bit of it, that's all I got. The rest of it was gone. He didn't believe me. I said, "The donkey, they're going to kill, kill the donkey. They're going to eat it." They had it too, but they took,

26:30 all that was left was the tail when I got there. Oh that's the way it used to be. It was unbelievable but that was true you know.

The conditions on Crete and the fighting sound very very harsh very..

Very difficult.

I think as you said before kill or be killed. The conditions were almost kill or be killed?

How many killed?

No sorry

27:00 **It was either kill or be killed?**

Oh yes, well, I mean if you come up there somebody's going to have a go at you, you have to knock him

off. You have to give it a go. But when I was manoeuvring around my job was to get here to there and everywhere without killing anybody you know. The main thing was to get to manoeuvre to get the messages around. I wasn't concerned about who the hell was there. All I was concerned I had a job to do to get there and get the messages over.

27:30 And that's what I did and I was successful and that was that. But anyway I never, I only struck the one German but he was knocked about so he didn't do anything anyway.

What happened in that case?

Well I know I took all his stuff off him but I didn't and then I don't know, I never know what happened to him because we were taken prisoners the next day anyway.

Was he alive or dead at the time?

He was, I think he was going to die because he was badly shot up

28:00 and he was screaming in German you know and so on and he couldn't, I just took all his equipment and that was it. I wasn't very worried about him. I was worried about us. He was a German. You don't worry about them when they're so shot up alongside you, do you? Because you, you're likely to get shot up yourself any second and you got to keep going.

What sort of equipment would you take from

28:30 **someone like him?**

I took his binoculars, his revolver and his machine-gun. That's what he had. I took the three. I went back to my place and I gave the officer at the back end the machine-gun so he had a machine-gun with the equipment and then I kept the binoculars so I could see what was going on, didn't give those away and that was that. The equipment went back

29:00 to be used.

What about souvenirs that you've mentioned before?

Oh they used to get lots, all over the place there was always souvenirs you know, particularly when we had the Germans. We cleaned the Germans up and sitting back taking it easy. We didn't realize until later that the rest of the island had evacuated. We used to have all these damn souvenirs all over the place you know German stuff and this and that and things they had

29:30 in their.. Dropped in canisters and so on, and all sorts of things. I can't even remember what they were now but I buried mine but I couldn't find them when I went back.

Where was it that you would find most of these items?

You'd get them, they'd be all over the place you know, been dropped here, there and everywhere and you'd go, there's a revolver there, I'll pick that up you know and there's somebody's

30:00 and something else there and so on and you'd pick it up you see. And then make sure it was, you know it would be valuable equipment when you get back to Palestine there're all things from everywhere, you know, all sorts of things. Surprising what things blokes used to carry with them anyway but they used to find them all over the place. They'd be all dropped here there and everywhere

30:30 and I had quite a few but I can't think what I had myself now. That was that one anyway. Now what can you do now?

Well you said it was on Crete that you actually stopped fighting?

Yes.

You felt that your position was fairly strong one at the time?

Well we thought we had, we had all the Germans

31:00 and the, the German in charge of the paratroopers, he was, he spoke perfect English and he reckoned I spoke to him and he reckoned we'd be there next week, you know, we'll have you shortly and I didn't believe him but it was true. But we used to get around a bit and walk all over the place and there were souvenirs everywhere because we had all these German prisoners and we had all our equipment around everywhere

31:30 so I thought oh I'll keep a bit of that. That will be worth something you know. What am I going to tell you this time?

Well at the time when your forces were required to stop fighting on Crete did you feel like you could have kept fighting?

No well, when Campbell came down, the officer in charge and said the war's over

32:00 I thought well that's it, it's all over so I buried everything. So in case we'd come back and pick it up

again and then you just had to go with the crowd and whatever was going to happen. We knew we were prisoners of war. We couldn't, and he said don't try and escape so we didn't attempt to escape. Anyway we marching down and of course

32:30 we're not going too damn far and I got dysentery and then I collapsed and more or less was in a bit of a mess but anyway they looked after me so I was OK.

You said you had a few mates carry you along?

Yeah three of them carried me. Well they escorted me down. I was still walking and not too good. And we walked down so far and then there was, there's another, what they stopped at.. they had a truck stand and they put me on this truck and they sent me

33:00 down to this area where they all stopped eventually. So that was all right so at least I survived. If I hadn't of done, if I'd left on the road the Germans would shoot you, it'd be finished. That's what they did.

Did you see that happen?

No, but we knew it was happening. They said that happened if you fell down nobody can help you, you're a goner so I had to keep going. They wouldn't let me stop anyway.

33:30 I sort of threw the towel in but they wouldn't let me.

You mentioned a little earlier that you had some German prisoners during this fighting on Crete?

Yeah, we had them in an area there, quite a number of them and they, it's only not very far from where we were anyway and I just went down and spoke to this fellow and he spoke English and he was a, he was in charge of the Paratroopers

34:00 apparently but he was quite certain that they were going to win the war.

Were you still in control of them at the time..?

We were in control, in complete control, but we were just cleaning up around the mountain, around the sides and everywhere and making sure everybody was gone, that was it. Cleaned up and, but then suddenly they come from everywhere like ants and that was it, finished.

34:30 **When this officer, Campbell..?**

Campbell.

When he delivered the order to lay down Arms..?

Yes, he just said it, the war is over.

Were these German Prisoners still nearby?

Yes, he was a prisoner but he's dead now anyway but he's, he was on the top of the hill when we were down sort of the bottom, well we were on the top too but he was about 50 feet away from us and he came down and told us it was all over.

Do you know what happened with the German Prisoners

35:00 **that were being held?**

Never, never a clue but they were, that's when we were all released. That was all we knew and the next thing we had Germans coming around just making us march down towards this village. We marched down to the village. I got to the village alright but it was the next day, the next time out, the next day I had, where got crook but anyway, and the place when we were down there were dead bodies everywhere

35:30 and there's all our mob sitting down there and, and that was the war over. They just had nowhere to go. Just lie around down there. And the next day they marched us down towards this village, down further about several miles down and that's where I packed in. Anyway I survived.

Did you feel any resentment at having to stop fighting?

36:00 Well you just said it's all over, finished, that was it as far as your concerned and then and he said make no attempt to escape and whereas the other crowd tried to escape in the other sections and they didn't have the same orders as us but.. Well then I was pretty crook there for a while and there was nowhere I could go anyway so I was lucky to get down to this little village and then I was with my mob and then they

36:30 made sure we had a little bit to, pick up a bit of food somewhere and that was it. Then I come good again and that was that.

Were you angry?

No, I wasn't angry, no. I just, fortunate to survive, that's all I considered lucky I was still going and that's the way it was and then I was with our crowd and they were all in a bit of a mess and they weren't very well

- 37:00 you know and food was terrible and I tried to live on crumbs of bread and so on and you had to be careful you know but anyway we survived it all. Then we, after we left that camp we had to go, then by ship to, to Greece again so we spent several months in Greece. It wasn't good.

You spoke of

- 37:30 **how the Greek people welcomed you when you first arrived there?**

Well, the Greeks didn't seem to worry about us. You know they, they were, they hated the Greeks, the Cretes. Oh you're talking about the Germans?

No sorry, the Greek people when you were taken by ship back to Greece as a prisoner.

Oh well, they did everything for us. They'd throw bits of bread at you and everything, they did everything for you. The Greeks would do anything for you

- 38:00 but then the Germans used to assault them you know and so on, but they used to throw things in at you everywhere, you know, everywhere we went, the Greeks would have a go. Mostly food they threw at you and then you went, then when we, when we marched through, through the city there, , there was a Greek throwing bits of bread at you, bits of this, that

- 38:30 and you know and when you are marching through there one of the ladies shot up a lady alongside us you know, and then we marched on further to where the rail tracks were and there's these Greeks there with their arms up, about six of them and the Germans are standing over them but they didn't shoot them or anything and the Germans are in trucks like sausages you know.

- 39:00 You'd be in the corner there and that's how you, like that, all the way for miles and miles and miles and but that's the way it used to be and then we went from there to, oh so far and then we stopped and said you.. "You've got to march across this mountain top." so we had to walk miles across this great place and had a German there with a bayonet up my backside pushing me

- 39:30 making sure I could go and I got to a station eventually and on a train again and then away we went again and we went up another mountain side, several miles quite a long while and the next thing it stopped again and they couldn't go any further. The lines are busted up and then we marched over mountain side again and eventually got on another one and eventually ended up in Salonika.

Were you still ill during this time?

Yeah I wasn't too good, wasn't too good

- 40:00 and we wasn't, got no food much and you know, we were all, most of us were getting pretty weak you know and couldn't march too well but we managed and we used to help each other. Make sure everyone can get on his way you know and if he didn't we'd help him along so that's the way it used to be. Anyway afterwards I got a lot better then. That was that. Anything else now?

Tape 7

- 00:43 **I'd like to talk, to with you a lot more about your prisoner of war days but before we do there's just a couple more questions I'd like to ask you about your battle campaigns. For example when does a battle start?**

- 01:00 I can't remember the dates.

Not dates, that's not what I'm asking. How does a battle start, is that a better question?

Well we, we were at this place at Rethymnon [Retimo] and we were having a good time and we used to nick over to the village about several miles ago and buy some food and the Greeks were all around and it was very pleasant and nothing... We were having a good time. We thought it was pretty good

- 01:30 then suddenly these Germans come in. The paratroopers suddenly, the word went out the paratroopers were attacking Greece, Crete and they'd attacked parts of Crete and the next thing there they were all over us and, and the next thing all we could look up and there were these paratroopers coming over the top and these bodies falling, coming down and with parachute and we were watching all these

- 02:00 and the next thing we know all the machine-guns and infantry were all firing on, on the thing and all we see was bodies fallen down and none of them fell on us but they fell within oh I suppose about 30 or 40 feet from us or something but there suddenly they were all there and then the next thing we know, this went on for several days

- 02:30 and night. In the night time the Germans, they used to light fire and they used to have lights in and around the hill. And we couldn't work out what it was and then they, the Germans stuck in little spots everywhere and they used to come in and attack little areas and this hand to hand combat went on for several days before they
- 03:00 declared we'd knocked them all off down the mount down on the airstrip down on the waterfront down there they were cleaning everybody up there and there was a big factory about several miles over which we used to fire on. They cleaned them up there too and then we won the war and sitting back you know thinking everything was OK and suddenly it was all over and old Campbell came down and said it's all over.
- 03:30 But it's all hand to hand combat, but the paratroopers were all over the place. But one of the fellows came down and said, "Oh jeez, it's too early, I've knocked off six already." and then they said, "Oh God." he says, he couldn't miss 'em, coming down like that he said. So they used to just knock 'em off before they hit the ground. But a lot of them escaped of course but because there's so many of them but anyway they lost that, they particularly lost that, where we were anyway.
- 04:00 We won the battle on the hill at that time but only temporary. That was that.

In your hand to hand combat on Crete did you ever have to use your bayonet?

No never, never had one anyway. All our equipment they used to take off us when we arrived in Crete because the infantry wanted it and the only thing we got was when we got up there, stuff we nicked from the Germans around. We used to nick

- 04:30 it because that and then we finished up with equipment which we'd taken off people. So that was that.

Were there any wounds that you were frightened of getting in particular?

No, I was never frightened of it. Never worried me. I just one of those people that didn't worry about it. Main thing I was concerned was go and do my job.

Did other men talk about the wound that they feared most?

- 05:00 No, they didn't worry. Nobody mentioned anything about it. If they were wounded what we'd do is try and fix them up and yet we didn't fix them up we'd try and send them down to the, down below the hill there they had a place where they were looking after the wounded but we used to try and get them down there. That's all we'd do. That was it. We never, we didn't worry about it. But it, I wasn't wounded so it didn't worry me.

When you returned

- 05:30 **to Australia I believe you had nightmares. What did you have nightmares about?**

Oh I'm blowed if I know what it was but Heather used to wake up and talk about old days you know. Some of the things that used to happened. Used to have nightmares about them but, but that went on for a while and I eventually got over all that business but you used to wake up of the night

- 06:00 thinking about here there and everywhere you know. Things that used to happen to you but

Did you have any bad dreams that you have over and over?

Yeah I used to have some bad dreams but I can't think what the hell they were now but we used to dream about the old things that used to happen. You know some of your best friends getting killed in front of you and all this business and.. oh I remember him and I remember these days

- 06:30 and the fellows used to get shot up all over the place and all around and some of your best friends and you know, you were just lucky you didn't shot up but they were, you used to try and look after them all but, but some of the fellows that used to be wounded we'd tell them to stand up, "Stand up there, come on, come on, oh, try and have a look at you. What the hells wrong with you, what's wrong with you?" and so on and trying to get them fit again
- 07:00 you know then some couldn't and some could and, but you used to look after them, that's about all. But you used to, I think those sort of things happened after the war because you didn't realize that these things happen to people. You'd hallucinate about things but according to my wife I used to do a lot of it but apparently I can't remember most of it. She said, "Yeah

- 07:30 you used to call out, it used to worry me." but anyway got over all that. So apparently they were concerned about it more that I was.

Do you have any dreams now about the war?

No I don't have any dreams about the war, no, no. No I don't have any. I don't have any dreams, not these days. Getting too old.

- 08:00 **I'd like now to return to the end of the campaign in Crete when you were taken Prisoner of War?**

Yes.

And you were taken back to Greece.

Yes.

Can you describe more about the first camp that you went to?

In Greece?

Yes.

First camp in Greece was a camp just outside of Athens. It was a

08:30 difficult place but we had to watch the food we had. You know there wasn't a great lot of food coming in there and the Germans used to be all around you all the time but, but there was nothing much to do there. You'd just sit around, do nothing you know. Nothing to do but at that time eventually when something did happen

09:00 when these fellows, two fellows escaped. Maxwell Derbyshire who was from Wagga [Wagga Wagga], anyway he was a personal friend of mine, anyway I didn't even know he was there and he was an officer. Him and this other fellow escaped from that village, from that camp we were in and the Germans, the Greeks got him out, got him back to Australia but they ,the Germans thought that other people were trying to escape so they were going to sh.. the word went out, out

09:30 to gather and inform and the Germans were going to shoot every one, oh 1 in 10, 1 in something I'm not sure of the numbers and they were, and 1 in 10 was going to be shot or something so the, there was a bit of a stink on there because we decided that if everyone got there they should take their own turn because if these fellows were getting out say I'm in charge here and they reckoned they weren't going to get counted you see so we figured out everybody had to be counted normal

10:00 in the numbers and anyway we got through that one and the Germans never shot anybody so we all sat down and that was it. And that was, so then eventually shortly afterwards we had to march out of the place then but that's about all you wanted to know, was it?

Did you have a number?

Oh no, I didn't get a number until I got to Germany. I had an army number but that didn't worry them but when we got to

10:30 Germany they gave us a number so that was it.

Was that when you were taken too....

Crete, to

Stalag.

Stalag 7A. The French camp yeah. That's when they gave us a number, yeah.

You mentioned that you found the French camp Stalag 7A difficult?

Well

11:00 they were queer people. They were queers because apparently a lot of them were, quite a few of them wasn't and they never had much to do with us and that was, so we didn't have much to do with them people.

Was that the first time that you had come across homosexual men?

Yeah that's the first time I'd had much to, I couldn't believe it.

11:30 The place was full of these people you know. Quite a lot, quite a number of them really and I was a bit concerned. I didn't like that much. Didn't like homosexuals. That was the reason. There's quite a few of them. That was that, but anyway the food was good in that camp though, that was the main thing and suddenly the Red Cross were sending parcels into the place so we finished up with a parcel each eventually and

12:00 food was, miles of food. It was good. Good camp. We didn't stop there too long of course, went out on working parties. Anything else you want to know about that?

Is there anything about being in prison that you still feel affects you today?

No I don't, no I don't worry about it, any of those things at all, all my past

12:30 things of those days.

Were you in a confined space?

Well we were, we were put in certain, in the prison camp you mean, not in German not in, not over in

Greece you are talking about are you? No. In Munich though we were put in barracks and we had plenty of space in the barracks

- 13:00 and there was plenty of places to sleep there. That was no problem and they had toilets out the back and you used to have to go to the toilets but the Germans used to, special Alsatian dogs and they used to, and if you went out there the Alsations would attack you and so we used to go to the toilet and the Alsations would go up in the thing, in the top there so the thing couldn't get at you, and then when damn thing you'd race out and get back to your hut before, before the Alsatian
- 13:30 dog grabbed you and one of these fellows, his names Wilson too. He's Ken Wilson got his trousers ripped off by a dog but he was OK though. He's about the only one that you could ever say really got caught so we made sure we didn't get caught but they used to, the other people, what's the people they are fighting against, the
- 14:00 camp was German but the others were Russians. The Russian barracks were across, next to us. Big wire fences and they had them all filled in there and they used to give them a terrible time and they used to send all the dogs in and eventually these fellows used to kill the dogs because they had no food and I think I told you before where they used to get out they'd wash in the snow
- 14:30 because they never had much water and they give them a terrible time so it wasn't very good. But apart from that the camp was an easy camp, you couldn't believe it. We were in a luxury camp. Then we were out to working parties and there were luxuries there too.

What sort of work did you do in the camp at Munich?

Munich we were wharfies. You know wharfies when you took goods out of one truck and put 'em into

- 15:00 another one, wharfie. And that was the greatest lurk of all time. We nicked everything. We used to....whatever we wanted with the guard we used to pinch cigarettes for him. Made sure he had cigarettes when he got home so he never saw anything and we used to load everybody up. I think I told you that story before anyway and old Maxie Parker used to get drunk because he liked the champagne. Had to carry him home.
- 15:30 I've told you that one before anyway.

I might just take you back to Crete when you were first taken Prisoner again. You mentioned earlier that you were not in very good health on the way to the first prisoner of war camp?

Yeah I finished up with dysentery. No it was dysentery I think I had. I used to sort of crawl down I don't know whether it was dysentery. I can't remember and I used to suddenly you know want to go to the toilet

- 16:00 and I suddenly lost all you know, felt I couldn't go anywhere. In a mess you know couldn't walk very far and, I'd collapse or something you know and you didn't have anything to eat or anything like that but I suppose you could not eat food or anything but, but I it affected me very badly. Anyway I got through it all right.

Was that because you were eating poorly on Crete

- 16:30 **or was that because the march to the first camp was..?**

I think it was the march on the second day I think it was cause. Yeah my, I don't know whether we used to nick everything. I suppose whether we did you know we might have been given something that had affected me with, oh some of that Greek stuff would give it to you I suppose. It affected me badly. Anyway I got over it all right. It took time but

- 17:00 it was there.

What did you get to eat in the first camp?

Oh it was only bits of soup and a bit of bread, soup and bread was the main thing you got. Practically nothing else. Very rarely, but the Greeks would always throw in a bit of bread or a bit of something you know

- 17:30 but that's about what you'd survive on. That's about the main survival. That was the main food we got pretty well for ages, especially in Salonika. That's all the food we ever got in Salonika too.

How did you get from your first camp to Salonika?

Well that's the one where we marched out and went on train then we... I was telling you about it on that, today then we went from one train to another one and then marched over mountains

- 18:00 and got out of that one and marched over another mountain and so on. But the trains used to be busted and they used to put on, and then we used to have to walk so many miles and that's then we eventually got to Salonika.

Did you have any shoes?

Any what?

Shoes.. or boots

We had shoes, boots, we used to have boots yeah, yeah we had boots. Don't know where we got the boots from but we got boots. That was about all you had though.

18:30 You made sure you only had one pair of boots and that was it. I think they were old army boots were they. They would have been in those days.

Did you get sore feet?

Oh yes, yeah we used to get sore feet yeah but it, when we were in a prisoner of war camp we got some shoes there, used to slip on the road with the shoes and when you're in the winter time the shoes they gave us

19:00 the ice would come through and all your feet would go icy and you.... oh terrible and you couldn't walk on the ice with them and your main, and what your main do, as soon as you could do your chains trying to put leather on the bottom. You used to have to put some leather stuff underneath so that, so that the ice wouldn't come up into your feet and when you are walking along and your feet in the early days there,

19:30 all your feet would be frozen, terrible.

Did you get frostbite?

Yes you did in those days, yes. But what happened in the camp when we were working we made sure that we had the best shoes because we nicked them. So we made sure we had the shoes that wouldn't affect us for the, for the business. That's how we got our shoes. We were walking around, oh there's some shoes here, oh there the ones

20:00 We can walk on the ice with those. They didn't last too long because we finished up nicking shoes. They didn't give them to us. We pinched them of course.

Did you get a jumper or a coat to wear?

I don't know what we used to wear. No, they never supplied us with any clothes or anything but when I was working on that place

20:30 if we wanted any clothes we nicked them so we finished up very cosy. We had no problems, tons of food and then we were in this other camp this Pud Butterfield from Victoria, he was a real lurk man and at Christmas time he bribed the guard to give us some grog and everything and drinks and so on and there we were sitting with Pud Butterfield and we were the only ones that were drinking

21:00 and he was a real lurk man. And when he used to go along going home with the guard, he'd say to the guard, "Here's some cigarettes for you. I want to stop at that shop." and he'd get in the shop and he'd get what he wanted at the damn shop. Oh, he's the greatest lurk man I've ever struck in my life. We lived high, wide and handsome with him. Because then we had to move out of that one of course eventually, but oh you couldn't even,

21:30 it was a bit unfortunate I had to get shot out of that one wasn't I. With him you couldn't go wrong. Oh God you put on so much weight. He was Pud Butterfield.. dear oh dear. Anyway that was that one.

What's the worst memory you have of being a Prisoner of War?

Oh let me think of the worst times.

22:00 I didn't like it, I didn't like one of the camps. It was 8B camp I think. I was in the chain gang and I used to walk around and then we used to try and get timber and wood for fires and usually go over and nick all the timber here and we seemed to you know to try and survive to get our timber. And there was one thing I never told you about,

22:30 the German bloke used to come down every day and the barracks we were in, it was a bad barrack. It was for blokes like us with a sentence for various things and when we used to have a little fire in a tin and we used to try and get a bit of wood and light it, light it at the bottom so that we could cook something in it and the whole place was full of smoke you know and he used to come in the day and when he call on he'd kick it

23:00 So one day I thought I'll fix him so one day so I waited for him and watched to see him come and he got inside and I got a bucket and I put some rocks in the bottom of it, then I lit the fire which were alight and he walked in and he kicked it and he finished in the hospital for two months. He busted his leg. I never saw him anymore. That was what I used to do, silly thing. I remember that bloke, he didn't like it. He never knew who did it of course.

23:30 I didn't know who did it either. Make sure nobody saw me.

And what was the strangest thing you've ever had to do in Prisoner of War?

Oh I don't know really. Just make sure that you had the right food and you had the right place to go you know, very important. Food was important and

24:00 I used to make sure you got everything you wanted but it wasn't easy. But one of those camps and that they used to grow a lot of vegetables and things in the end camp and nobody was allowed to go in there and that sort of thing so this, I said, "Let's go down and have a look at that place." so we nicked in and used to grab the food and everything. Never told anyone where we got it. And these were all the silly things we did and then another time

24:30 at that camp they used to try and escape. They used the people used to escape. There was an English fellow they found that the Germans had managed to catch these fellows that were trying to escape and now several of them were caught they tried to escape through the place, so I listened to this fellow. I said now ah..

25:00 so this fellow I put on a real act for him and I knew who he was. I said, "Well Norm why don't we try and escape next week?" and he said, "Yes, what'll we do, we'll go down that fence down there on that side and we can clip the wire and we can get underneath and then we can go and then we'll be right." and this fellow listened to me you see. So I said, "Right, so ready to go, right Norm let's go."

25:30 I told this other fellow what we were going to do. There was the escape committee you know and so we went down and waited and the fence and everything else was just about touching the wire and everything else and the Guard there he was the bloke waiting for us. The German to catch us. We could see them in the distance you know so I said went back to the bloke in charge of this whole thing. I said to this bloke, "You want to get rid of him.

26:00 Get him out of the damn place." I said, "He's causing trouble." So what they did they shot him out of camp up to a reprisal camp somewhere else. Oh God, the things they used to do though. You wouldn't believe a bloke would do that would you. Dob on his own. He was an English fellow but I don't know whether he hated them or not but that's what he did. Anyway we caught him. That's the way we used to do things.

Have you seen the film called The Great Escape?

No, I don't think so.

26:30 **No, what about other war films?**

I have seen war films, most of them didn't.. they're nearly all to do with Changi mostly so I didn't have much to do with them. It was all different Changi to our place, completely different. The German ones were much easier than over there weren't they than Changi? At least you could, at least con yourself into getting things couldn't you,

27:00 manoeuvre around, nick a bit here, do something there except the last camp I was in. That's a bad camp. You couldn't do much there.

The last camp in Poland; do you feel that was even worse than Stalag and Salonika?

Oh Poland was yes, but it wasn't so bad but it was, it was there for that you know the blokes with records sort of thing but it's only went to the Fallingbostal camp. That was the horror camp,

27:30 Fallingbostal. That was where the 500 were carried, 500 were taken out and marched to Berlin but we didn't get there. So we, we used to pinch everything on the way and, and bribe the Guard and pinch the sheep and pigs so on and cook them.

And why was Fallingbostal so bad?

Well it was a horror camp. One of the horror camps of Germany where everybody was in,

28:00 there was air force and army and everything. The whole lot were there. It was one of the camps where they took it out on us you know if anything happened. They took all our beds out in the middle of winter. Used to sleep like that in the huts, in the you know, cattle barns and the things used to streak down, the water would come down and blokes were getting TB [tuberculosis] and everything else and practically no food and everybody was fighting over

28:30 crumbs of bread and you know, it was very very bad. Nothing you could do about it really but just that was it.

If they took your bed away where did you sleep?

Oh we used to sleep in the, we had these sort of bed type things there. They built things there and you used to sleep in them but they took all the mattresses out and everything and you used to sleep with practically nothing

29:00 and you're better sleeping on the floor really but anyway that wasn't really good. That was the worst camp in Germany. Worst camp for prisoners of war anyway but a lot of people, that's where I told you about the fellow that had a cat and a dog and he had this dog and the next thing oh somebody's nicked me dog. I said somebody had a feed. Of course somebody killed it and ate it. You eat anything.

29:30 Dogs or cats. It doesn't matter what it was. I never did, I never got one but it was difficult. Food was difficult. When they put us on the road the 500 of us, we started to get, nick food off the road you know. Every farm we went to, whatever was there the bloke would say, "Oh you can kill a sheep can't you? How about killing a sheep?" so I ended up killing a sheep. Put it in the straw so nobody could see it and chop it for everybody to make sure they got their chop so they didn't do us in

30:00 and we used to get a bit of a feed here there and everywhere. Used to pinch everything. We managed.

Did you have any clothes by this time?

Oh we only had the one set of clothes, that's all. Just, just a coat and a jacket and nothing else. Just the same old stuff. We never carried any clothes with you but you always made sure you had some clothes of some sort warmish clothes

30:30 if possible.

Did you have any underpants?

Always had underpants yes, always had underpants. Needed them. But that's the way it used to be.

What about socks?

Oh always try and keep socks. Socks are important particularly in the winter. You needed socks otherwise your feet would get frozen all the time. We used to always have socks.

31:00 Don't know where we got them from but we used to always have them.

You were telling us yesterday that one of the ways that you survived in your prisoner of war days was to trade and you'd save cigarettes and exchange cigarettes for food. Were you able to do that at your last camp. In your horror camp?

Well I had stacks, I had a lot of cigarettes on me because I didn't smoke.

31:30 Because you used to do a bargain with people you know. And sell the cigarettes to them but I run out of cigarettes after a while anyway but and that was the finish, but the cigarettes were like gold there and people you know would get a loaf, a bit of bread for a cigarette or something you know or something to eat. You only bought something to eat. So we used to, used to do that, but they'd run out of course

Did you do any trading at all

32:00 **at this last camp?**

That camp we did a bit of trading yes. That's how we used to trade. That's where you needed to trade because that's where there was practically no food and you'd try and trade a bit here and a bit there you know. But you used to get a bit of food in but not much.

What did you trade?

I trade cigarettes for bread or something or anything like that. Something I could eat. Whenever they'd have something to eat, you'd trade it for

32:30 but that didn't last long anyway. You run out shortly.

What did you do when you ran out?

Well we saved a bit at the time we got on the run. I had enough food to keep me going you know but they used to fight over it. Well we used to get so much bread, a bit of bread a day and some soup a day you see. A little bit of soup and bread everyday so at least you were always getting something

33:00 but 'til you were on the road you always pinched everything and then you were right. Still I wasn't too good when I got out of it. I was only about eight and a half stone when I got out of Germany. Anyway that was all right. Anything else?

You moved around, generally walked from camp to camp..

No from camp, when we moved from one place to another usually put you on a train.

33:30 They put you on the train. You'd go from Musberg to wherever you're going to they'd move you. You'd go by train and you'd jump out of the train and then you'd be at the place, no problem. But, except in that other one we had to march because that was difficult. That was in Greece but that was different but in Germany they always sent you by train. That was that.

34:00 Didn't have to do too much walking.

What was it like on the train?

Oh the train was quite good. Yeah, they weren't too bad. In Germany in latter parts the trains weren't too bad because some of the camps we were in, the food you see, but there's only this last place where there was no food because we used to have a bit of food and a bit of this 'til we got to that last

34:30 and that was the worst thing that ever happened to us. But anyway, all our bad records, that was the trouble.

What about water supply when you were a prisoner of war. Was it difficult getting water?

Oh no there was always water. They always had taps and they had places where you could go in and have a shower except in, there'd be a place on the end there where they'd have a shower place and you'd go up

35:00 there and when I was at Musberg for instance, you used to only have to have a shower once a week but I used to, a bit of a lurk going so I could have a shower everyday so I went and got to know the fellow.. oh you know.. I eventually conned him into letting me in everyday and then the Russians used to come in and oh everyday I always.... two or three used to die in front of me every time I went there, they'd die you know. They'd just collapse and

35:30 pass on. The Russians and the other, the next place alongside that and they were a terrible state.

In the showers, when you were having a shower. Is that what you mean?

Yeah, when they were having a shower they'd finish up dying. Yeah it was bad and that was the camp where I think that was the camp we watched the Germans, they wanted all these, they wanted them to all go out and march, work for them and they refused to work for them.

36:00 In this particular, there was a big barracks alongside where we were and there were all Russian. And anyway the Germans came down one day and took them out and bashed them, oh terrible the things they did to those people before they got them out of the camp. Oh gee they must have lost quite a few of them. They bashed them up all the way out, all in front of you. You couldn't do anything about it. Anyway

36:30 that was that one.

Did you get bashed up?

No, no I never got bashed up, no. Can't remember, don't think I ever got bashed up. I was always a bit of a lurk bloke. Always had an answer. Always managed.

How did you con your way into getting a shower every day? What excuse did you use?

Oh I'd tell the bloke something about myself

37:00 and about this and a bit of a story here and there and about so and so and he said, "Oh well you'll be OK." he said, so I used to go in every day and have a shower. I never told anybody I did it of course. I used to like having a shower.

Did you make up stories?

I used to make up stories, yes, oh yes, always telling a story. Anyway he got to the stage where it was no problem. He let me in every time. But you were only allowed in once a week

37:30 but he let me in every day. And I used to tell him lots of stories about this and about that and one thing and another and he used to be interested. "Oh you can come have a shower. You'll be right, no problem."

Like what, what sort of stories?

Oh we'd just tell him about anything, what happened in a camp before us or what happened in the war years or before what happened in, in Australia before we went there and so on and what this that and another. Always had a story. Always had no problem with him.

38:00 Once I got in once never had any trouble at all. He'd just say, "Gee ok righto." boom.

Do you think it was important to have a shower once a day?

Well I thought it was important for your health point of view so I used to always have a shower. I don't have a shower everyday now strangely enough. I used to, but not lately I, oh no, I won't have one today, I'll have one tomorrow but that's the way it goes

38:30 I suppose, but in those days I had a shower. When I was in the army I used to have a shower everyday whereas these other fellows in the army never, never bothered with showers half the time but I used to like it, always been reckoned it was good for you know. Anyway I don't know whether it was right but I always used to always have a shower every day.

Is there any luxury that you indulge in now. Like having a bath. Do you ever have a bath now?

39:00 Never have a bath. Haven't used that bath for ages. I haven't had a bath there for a couple of years and one day I went in and somebody talked about a bath and I'll try it. I haven't had a bath since. Too easy to shower, are too easy. The showers are good aren't they? Do you like a bath?

Love a bath.

Oh well, there's one there. Have a bath before you go if you like.

I think I might actually.

Well you can come back and have a bath

39:30 anytime you like while I'm here.

Thanks Rupert, I think we've come to the end of a tape.

Tape 8

00:55 **And is there any food that you ate during your time as a Prisoner of War now**

01:00 **that if you were served that food you couldn't look at it?**

Oh no I wouldn't, the food they had you wouldn't be bothered with it you know. It was just only rubbishy stuff really. It was only soup and stuff like that you know and mashed meat and that meat stuff, something like that. Don't go much on those.

01:30 I usually try and have a reasonably good meal. I think you need that to keep you fit. You don't want this rubbish do you? Plenty of that about.

And you were talking earlier about before you were a prisoner of war when the men were on leave or you'd go AWL

02:00 **and you know some blokes would get a bit tanked up with alcohol. Do you think alcohol was really important?**

Well it's only important to some people. To me, I'm not interested in alcohol but this fellow from Bondi, he loved alcohol. He couldn't go anywhere without, he got tiddly you know and he, he never changed.

02:30 **Do you think men used it as a way of coping during the war?**

Oh coping, what you'd do with the war the food from the army was reasonable. I can't say that I disliked any of it. It was always a different change all the time in the war years and the food they used to have in Ingleburn and all those places was very good.

03:00 Used to get good food and then occasionally they used to give me a job of sorting the food out, doing delivering the blokes their meals and I used to make sure I had a good meal anyway but I found the food was quite reasonable in the army. Never had any problem with me.

And how was your health when you were released from prison?

When I got into England you mean?

No the day that you were let out

03:30 **of prison, from your final camp, when you were released?**

Well, I was at the march that day. Before I marched you mean. No, out of camp we weren't doing too good and then we marched on the road that made our day because then we used to nick everything on the road you know and the farmers always had plenty of stuff in their farm and anything that was alive, it doesn't matter whether it was a pigeon or what it was they knocked it off

04:00 and then we cooked it. And the guard knew the war was coming towards an end which we didn't realize and they didn't see anything and then we used to always have some money and drachmas and we used to give it to them you know and make sure they had a bit of money so they didn't see anything. So it was a real lurk really. That's how we survived on that one. That was no problem.

How

04:30 **important has it been for you to return to Greece and Crete?**

How important?

Yeah

Well I had a lot to do with the Greeks after the war and, and I become very friendly with all the Greeks. What's that noise?

Something outside. I was asking you why

05:00 **it's been important to you to return to Greece and Crete?**

Well the reason I do that because I was very involved with the Greeks and they did a good job for us over there but in Sydney I was very involved with this Steve MacDougall, and I used to all the Greek shows we used to attend. We used to attend their ball

- 05:30 and their weddings and all sorts of things and we got to know everybody and the Archbishop of Australia was a personal friend of mine because when I was in Crete as a prisoner of war, in the war years I used to visit his mother and his father in a show which we knew and he become, he wanted to see me all the time. He's the Archbishop of Australia
- 06:00 and then all his friends and we used to go to all their functions and ol' Whitlam [Gough Whitlam, former Prime Minister of Australia], I danced with his wife one day because he used to come to the Greek shows too and we used to be at the Greek ball and I had a dance with her and so everybody knew me in those days. They don't now and I used to go to all their functions everywhere so then the first Greek one
- 06:30 there. There's another fellow came down here and he stopped with me, Marcos Poulakoudakis is his name and Marcos went and got the Order of Australia and we went down to, the where it was down in Sydn.. oh you know, the Central Australia. Anyway he got his Order down there and he was more or less a personal friend of mine Marcos,
- 07:00 and so we used to go up there and enjoy the Greek show because we used to know all the Greeks and all the Greeks come there and it was quite good. And then we had the wreath laying which you'd be normally involved in and, and then the last time I went there, was it last year was it. I go up there and I hardly
- 07:30 knew anybody but there was Marcos Poulakoudakis, he's running the whole show up there and he owns an enormous lot of properties and things so Marcos said, "Oh back?" and he says, "Oh yes so and so." but it was not as interesting the last time because a lot of them were new and not there anymore and it wasn't that exciting, you know. But anyway I think that will be the last time I go up to Greece
- 08:00 but they used to know me and we used to get involved with all sorts of things. Get our photos taken here there and everywhere, but that's the reason. Because we're very well known by the Greek people but since Heather died I don't have anything to do with the Greek people anyway. I think most of them are gone now. I do go to, to the Greek outings occasionally. I'm going to one in two weeks time actually because the 6th Division
- 08:30 want to go down, they want to go down there so I'll go with them. But I don't have much to do with them now, I sort of don't.. Although the last time I went into one of the functions in the town one of the ladies and one of the men came over and hi, hello, how are you, you know. Thank goodness, still know a couple of them. Oh yeah they like talking to me you know. But that's the reason, but not, I don't know them anymore. If you go down there don't know anybody hardly but I used to know them all in the old days.
- 09:00 All the Greek festival. Go to the Greek Ball. My wife and I used to go all over the place, yeah. But that's the reason.

What about when you were in the prisoner, as a prisoner of war you shared your cells with men from different countries. How did you get on with other nationalities?

When I was in jail,

- 09:30 that was. When I was in jail with this 5 months in this jail pending a trial there was these two Russians and the Frenchman in the camp and they were starving and had no food. Well that was an easy camp where you could get some food in you see I used to arrange to get food in for them and I fed them all and they, we got on very well with these two Russians
- 10:00 and but they, they couldn't do anyth... when they come out of the thing they'd come and see me and say oh you know finished up and you'd give them something and the Russians couldn't come over the wall anymore anyway except the last time I was there suddenly the two Russians appeared and I said, "How the hell did you get there?" They couldn't speak English of course and how they got over this big fence I don't know, but anyway eventually I'd feed them up with food and I never saw them anymore. The Frenchman I never saw
- 10:30 anymore either but he, he, his people were very wealthy people in Paris. I tried to get there but I couldn't. I think I told you when I went back to Paris I didn't speak French so I showed them my letter I received him where he reckoned that I was the greatest man that ever existed sort of thing. It was a marvellous letter and they couldn't do enough for me when I went back to Paris but I gave it, lent it to this fellow. His father was a friend of Stephen's and he never brought it back.
- 11:00 Never seen it since, gone. Pity. So I got to know them over there too. I never got to see him back anymore but, but the Russians used to think I was marvellous. But such about all I had to do with the Russians were those two. Never had much more to do with them.

Did you find language was a problem?

Oh we didn't worry about language, it was all hands,

11:30 all hands. Oh the Frenchman spoke English but the Germans, the Russians didn't. We used to all talk with the hands. Yes, you believe it, you wouldn't believe it but we did

What does that mean?

or we'd tell them what we wanted.

You just did something. I didn't know what that meant. What was that?

Well he'd say, you'd think

12:00 and I'd say to him I've got some more food you know and then I'd say something else and sort of imitate what sort of thing it was you know. I think you could eat that too and sort of thing sort of work out what it was you know and we used to work out all right. No problem.

Were there any times when you didn't understand what someone

12:30 **was saying?**

There were instances where I'd have no idea what they were talking about. It didn't worry me. They didn't know what I was talking about either and we used to manage to talk with the... that was the language.

Were there any miscommunications? Were there any miscommunications?

No.

Any mistakes that got accidentally made because..

No, no, we made sure. It was mainly to do with food anyway. But they, they were lovely people those two but

13:00 but I think I told you about the place didn't I. When I went in that jail and the last jail I went in and I found these three in that same jail and they made sure I didn't, nobody touched me and I said, "What about this food?" I used to manoeuvre food in a little thing down the drain. I got some food for them and they had no food there and I said, "What about your Russian friends over there? They've got no food. Oh give them some food."

13:30 Said they won't give you any food they're aristocrats. They won't accept anything from anybody. Anyway they wouldn't take anything from anybody and then a bloke pinched some food or something and there was a big fight on and two Russians and the Frenchman put me in the corner. "Nobody going to touch you Comrade." That's the way they used to be. They'd absolutely do anything for me. But I used to like them you know. They'd just become to me personal friends but it's a pity I never seen them anymore

14:00 it's a shame. If I've gone back to Paris which I tried to do and I couldn't get there and if I'd gone to his place I'd have probably stopped in damn Paris because they were the wealthiest people in Paris and they wouldn't let me go would they. If I'd have got there. That's the way it was.

What did you do when your spirits got low when you were prisoner of war?

What?

What did you do, when you were a prisoner of war, what did you do when your spirits

14:30 **were a bit low?**

Oh you couldn't do anything. You didn't do anything. I didn't worry, I didn't worry about things myself. I never got to that stage. If anything, if I was getting short of food I'd go and do something about it. If there was anything else that worried me I'd do something about it. I'd always have a go you know and that's the way it was. If somebody wanted to have a go at me I'd have

15:00 a go at him and fix him up or else that would be the end of that you know. Oh no, I used to always be prepared to do something all the time no matter what it was. If I had no food I'd think now how the hell am I going to get some food well if you've got nothing of this, you'd want to get some of that you'd work out how you going to get it and you'd get it. Didn't always get it, but I mean you'd always have a go anyway. Oh I was always having a go.

And how did you cope

15:30 **without the company of women?**

Oh I didn't have to cope with the company of women. It's just that I used to like going to dances and that sort of thing you know but I didn't have nothing to do with them much very personally but it's just that I friends with them you know like this crowd, Travis crowd here. All the ladies come down there well I friendly with them you know but they are just nice people.

16:00 A lot of them live around areas around here and one I went into on Anzac Day well I give them oh I don't suppose I told you did I? I put \$50 in and made sure the ladies had a drink. They didn't have to pay for it you see. That's the sort of thing I do and they I just went, talking to this fellow and I took over

talking to the, she said oh no, I was just talking about you. You're the greatest bloke we've ever met.

16:30 Because that's what I do but other people don't do these things but I do unfortunately or I don't know whether it's fortunate or not. Would you do that? The ladies I mean they make our day because we only had say ten people, and you'd have twenty ladies. Well they're making our day so surely you should something for them. But I was the only one that ever does in so I do that anyway.

17:00 I don't worry about it. That's the way it is.

When you were in the camps in Germany like Stalag and the other camps you've mentioned did you ever have any contact with the Gestapo?

No I didn't. Only when I went into jail the Gestapo Headquarters I had twice, three times there that's all. For assault and battery and bodily harm the first two called and the next one was for attempting to escape

17:30 the Gestapo Headquarters. That's the only time I had anything to do with them.

What happened when you got there?

Well the guard takes you into this place and then he investig... he comes out and then he investigates. The first time he got there he didn't have my card, my papers so he go back again he had two pages, Assault and battery and bodily harm and all I supposed to commit and so on and so on.

18:00 And he read 'em all and said so and so and I said, "No this friend of mine got bashed up so I helped him so I never laid a hand on him did I?" The last time I was there I tried to escape no problem. He said he thought he knew me but I said, "No, haven't been in trouble before." He was the Royal Prince of Bavaria anyway so he was a real gentleman, spoke perfect English but when you went into the jail there they used to call us English pigs

18:30 and the first time you're there you go [hand gestures], you really cop it you know. When you try and go to the toilet the bloke gives such a bashing never ever pressed it again you know that's the sort of thing. They used to like it. Was a German gaol not a prisoner of war gaol so they were all Germans, they were all there except us, that's the way it goes. I manage it.

Were you scared?

No it didn't worry me. Survival

19:00 that's all that worried me. Made sure I got out of the place.

Did they punish you for trying to escape?

No they only put me into jail. It was a German, English gaol too. It's just, it was like, like lying on the floor, you're lying on the floor like animals, that's about all but they never, didn't give you much to eat or anything like that but you just had to do 28 days bread and water

19:30 that was it. So after 28 days out you go so you made, made sure, 28 days. And you made sure you took a bit of food in so nobody could see it.

Do you have any regrets?

No, no regrets. I used to survive and I used to make sure I always did everything, kept going.

Were you disappointed that you didn't escape?

20:00 I was terribly disappointed because I only had a little short distance to go and if this bloke hadn't have been lighting a damn cigarette I would have got there but the German bloke on the motorbike saw a bloke smoking a cigarette like this and he looked at him and he didn't look German of course and, and he come across and I thought, "Oh God." and I looked at him and thought, "Oh God, a damn smoke, that's what it is." So I try to con him

20:30 but I said, "No I'm, you Parlez vous Francaise?" and I said, "No, no, no, I don't speak French." And I said, "Parlez vous Francaise going back to someone's place you know." but he didn't believe me. He put me back into gaol again. He didn't understand what I was talking about. I was going you know but anyway he didn't understand it. And I went to gaol again. Which was bad. Anyway that didn't worry me much.

21:00 I was used to getting into gaols.

Have I left anything out do you think?

No, no, you've got everything I think.

I'm interested to know whether you would like your family to continue walking on Anzac Day in remembrance of your time in the army? Would you like your family to continue the tradition of Anzac?

Oh yeah they do automatically.

- 21:30 They go down to Anzac Day every day, every Anzac time and then this Anzac Day they called out to me, "Hey Dad!" and they got the little boy who's only 18 months old to wave to me and then his wife's taken my photograph. Oh no they, and then there's another crowd I belong to, Probus and other people I belong to and they always want to know, they always want to know
- 22:00 where I am because they like to wave to me but I couldn't see anyone to wave to last Anzac Day except my family. But when I go back to that meeting I'll cop it. Say, "You didn't wave to us." "I didn't see you." "Why didn't you see us? We were singing out to you." They do it every time. Anyway that's the way it goes. They like to see you waving but I didn't and I wasn't on television because I was in the, big plaque was there. A mob was badly ranting in front of us.
- 22:30 Bad walkers and I was, the flag was there and I was partly in charge of the crowd and the flag was there and they couldn't see me. They'd taken photos that way and the flag was in the way so they couldn't see me. They saw the rest of my crowd but not me. I'll make sure I'm not leading it next year. I'll be one of the mob. They've taken over from me now; I'm not the President anymore.
- 23:00 **Is there anything else you would like to say about your time in the army?**
- No, no I think you've got everything really. Only a bit worried, a bit touchy about the family business that's all. That's the one I told you about because they never discuss it you know and he might and he's in the 2/4th Battalion and he has all the papers you get from all these mob all the time so it only comes out in, in to do with the
- 23:30 army mob so he'd get it, but that wouldn't probably come out in the army crowd would it? Because he goes down oh I remember seeing something on the... oh on this thing. I say oh how did they get that? Oh that's our regular monthly, our regular papers we get from the Unit. So they mentioned various things of course but that was the only thing that worried me but he.... certainly not my brother. There's only five months difference.
- 24:00 She wasn't my mother. That's for sure. But that's something I never talk about but you suddenly conned me into talking about that, the family. You know all about the family now. You can imagine coming from Melbourne wouldn't you five, what three years old and suddenly in a paddock looking at cattle, sheep. "What the hell are they?" Oh they're cattle and sheep. Then they went to Wagga and the next thing you know
- 24:30 you're on a horse and when you grow up a bit and the next thing you know you're never off a horse are you. And then you're suddenly training a racehorse and being an amateur jockey you couldn't believe it could you. Couldn't believe it... and the first bloke that gave me a horse to ride in a race, you don't get paid for it because you're an amateur jockey you see and doing him a good turn
- 25:00 So gave me this horse to ride and I'm just coming around about three furlongs and it hit it, brought it's head right up like that, straight between the, nearly fell off the horse. Anyway I didn't win. I run about fourth or something. I thought God I'll get used to that now then I used to wear the long stirrups and then I finished up with the short stirrups where you are right over the top so I used to like that. When I came back to Sydney after the war
- 25:30 and I go to Randwick and suddenly I look around and all these fellows are trainers, they're personal friends of mine and they're the top trainers in Sydney and I made a packet. They told me to back this and to back that and then I went around to this fellow one day and said... that's right I can't think of who it was right now. I said I've just been told to back him on a... he won't win Breezily.
- 26:00 He used to live alongside us in Wagga. He used to ride for the Queen and he said don't back him in the first, back him in the third. He said, he said get him in the, I reckon about 3 or 4 to 1 or 5 to 1 or something but so I went in and back him. How the hell did you pick that horse? I said oh I know a few people and then I used to go around and they used to tell me all the winners and so on and what to back and what not to back and I was used to horses. I was with this fellow one day and I didn't know anything about this racehorse
- 26:30 and suddenly he saw this horse coming and I thought this is the best looking horse here. It was slightly limping. I looked at it and he said, "Oh that one couldn't win it's got a bad leg." Said, "Oh that's one of the tricks of the trade. They always put something in and then as soon as the horse goes off it gets rid of it and there's nothing wrong with it at all. The horse will be 100 percent." I said, "I'm going to put, 10 quid on it." and they said, "You're mad." and I said, "Well I think so,
- 27:00 10 quid." I said. It'll be about 5 or 6 to 1 so I went and put my 10 quid on it and the races come and he said, "Oh it couldn't win." I said, "It won by 5 lengths." He said, "God how did you pick that oh God?" he said, "I give you up." he said, "You're too good." And the Waterhouses you know they come from our area. She used to come from Cootamundra and down that area. That, all that mob, I don't know them very well, the Waterhouses
- 27:30 but they were around in my day and I don't go there anymore but, but I used to know them all. I probably wouldn't know them now. They're probably all gone anyway. Of course my wife usen't to like it, the races, so I'd give the races away. But oh I used to go to Bondi and I used to have my wallet all full and all loaded and catch the tram and make sure nobody nicked it and I went to the woman that used to look after us that owned the house and

28:00 I said, "Here's 20 pounds. Go and buy yourself a nice dress." Those were the days when 5 pounds were a lot of money you know and she said, "Twenty pounds?" she said. "Where the hell did you get the twenty pounds from?" I said, "Oh I've been to the races you know and no problem."

28:30 Two minutes?

No. Got ten more minutes to go so we could talk about a couple more things

Go on then

While you were talking about the races then.. I was actually just thinking, are you a member of the RSL?

Yes, I'm a life member, yes.

Do you feel like the RSL have given you good support?

Oh I think they are yes. They give me good support anyway yeah.

29:00 I've been getting good support from them. I think they do a good job. No, no worries there.

Chris has just reminded me you told us earlier that you had a radio in one of your camps.

Yes.

How did you get news of the war?

That's the only way we got news of the war is this one fellow had a radio

29:30 and he was.... they wouldn't let them have radios of course and we used to get the message coming around to say so and so about we used to know about how the war is going. That's all we used to worry about. And we used to get the message. I didn't even know where his radio was, but always, he used to be able to manoeuvre it down and I think the idea was not to know where the radio was anyway because you used to have to hide it when they came

30:00 around and searching, you know, pulling everything to pieces once a month anyway.

Did you ever send any mail or any messages?

No, no. No I didn't. No.

Were you able to receive and send messages?

Only in the early days. Not in the prisoner of war, you didn't do. You didn't send any messages anywhere. I didn't worry

30:30 about it. No.

Did that make you feel lonely?

Well the last month I was in a prisoner of war camp I was... oh that's right I used to get letters. That's right, no he died anyway. I don't know how I got it. Oh that's right he used to send letters to England. I was very involved with a couple of ladies in that village I used to go to

31:00 and they, they were very nice ladies and I think she wanted to marry me actually but she's an English lady and you know all the wealthy sort of people there and she used to send me letters and I used to reply to her. That's about all the things I used to, all the letters too but that was very unusual. I only finished up with about two letters in all that time. You'd never get your letters

31:30 you know but I don't know how I got that letter from my.. I must have sent a letter to Wagga or something or somebody replied or something I'm not sure but I suddenly, over the last year I was down in a camp and found out he'd died. I don't know how I got the letter at all but I didn't write, very rarely because I had nothing much to write to anyway.

32:00 **Did other men write letters or receive...?**

Yes.

What about receiving parcels?

No, only in one of those camps they used to, 7A ... They used to, the other camps I don't think anything. Not that I can remember anyway but we used to get Red Cross parcels in the early camps but not the latter camps. Oh no, anything else?

32:30 **I'm just wondering what your strongest memory of those camp days would be?**

Strongest memory of what days??

Of the camp, of the prisoner of war camp?

Prisoner of war camp. Well you think of the bad camp well but you keep thinking about it because it was such a bad camp

33:00 but some of the other camps are really luxury camps but 8B was a luxury camp and we used to play football there for the Australians, for our crowd there and so on used to be all very sporty there but that's about all I'd say.

And when you returned to Australia you mentioned that you, that people didn't want to know you.

No when we come off the train, you know when you read about people coming from overseas

33:30 serving for the country. When we arrived with the ship in the Quay we're all come out. Nobody is there. Only this army mob. "Righto we're taking you into the barracks." So they put us in barracks and then we're there for a while and eventually they decided to let us, we can retire if we want to and that was it. Never ever knew we were in the war even. I suppose that's normal I suppose.

34:00 But you think about up in Vietnam and so and so and they're always get somebody receiving them don't they? You'd have thought they would have known the prisoners of war were coming back wouldn't you, from Germany?

Were you reconnected with your family?

No, no. I was with my brother but he eventually went up to Tamworth and he died and I went to his funeral there many years ago now. And Eddy I have, I go and see him occasionally.

34:30 He's not far away anyway but on Anzac Day he comes down and always wants to talk to me but, but I usually go out and see him about once a month just to say g'day to him. He's got a house out there and oh I can't think of the name of the suburb but anyway, up towards Parramatta way and he's always down on Anzac Day

35:00 and he said, "This is my son." and I, but we never discuss anything at all but he's got quite a lot of family. He's got a big family himself but his wife is in a home because she is not very well and she can't remember anything and she can't.. so he goes and sees her every Saturday.

Have you ever talked to your mate Jack Quigg about your prisoner

35:30 **of war days?**

Oh, I often go and visit Jack quite often but I never talk much about prisoner of war days. I got something to do with him this time because I've got a package to take back to him. That's all about golf. We used to play golf together and I used to... we haven't played golf for ages now and I got so many trophies at home where I won my golf tournaments, quite good. I just think, looking up the other day. That's that damn

36:00 tournament I won then, this was another tournament I won there and I used to do all right at golf, but anyway they got to the stage where the numbers were running out and they decided they wouldn't play anymore and that was that. Haven't played golf for ages but Jack and I are very good friends. And I was the best man at their wedding. And I'm almost like part of the family as far as they're concerned. I've got a packet to take back to him.

36:30 Oh well I'll do that. Not today though. It's a bit dark in here isn't it?

Thank you very, very much for talking with us today.

INTERVIEW ENDS